



This test measures your ability to comprehend written materials.

EXAM CODE: PP-220526

**TIME:** 70 minutes

**DIRECTIONS:**

Read the passage carefully and, for each question, choose the one best answer (A, B, C or D) based on what is stated in the passage or on what can be inferred from the passage. Then mark the letter on your answer sheet that matches the letter of the answer that you have selected. (5 points each correct answer)

## Black Progress: How Far We've Come, and How Far we Have to Go

By Abigail Thernstrom and Stephan Thernstrom

1. Progress in race relations over the past half-century is substantial but often underreported. Today, more than 40 percent of African Americans identify as middle class, 42 percent own homes, rising to 75 percent among married couples, and nearly a third live in suburbs. Black two-parent families earn only about 13 percent less than white counterparts. Yet public perception remains **shaped** by stereotypes of widespread urban poverty. Surveys show that both whites and blacks overestimate the proportion of African Americans living in inner-city deprivation, even though middle-class blacks far outnumber those below the poverty line.
2. Historically, **these perceptions** had some basis. In the mid-20th century, most African Americans lived in the rural South under severe economic hardship. **(D)** In 1944, the majority were agricultural laborers or sharecroppers, with few owning lands. Employment opportunities were limited, only about 5 percent of black men held white-collar jobs, and many women worked long hours as domestic servants. Segregation restricted access to markets, leaving only a small number of black-owned businesses serving segregated communities.
3. Change began in the 1940s through economic shifts and evolving racial attitudes. Mechanization of agriculture and declining demand for cotton displaced black workers, while wartime labor shortages in northern industries created new opportunities. This triggered the Great Migration, as millions moved north in search of better wages. By the 1950s, black family incomes in the North were nearly double those in the South, and employment stability improved living standards. **(C)**
4. By 1960, occupational mobility had advanced significantly. Only one in seven black men remained in agriculture, while nearly a quarter held white-collar or skilled jobs, and many others secured stable factory employment. Domestic service among women declined sharply. These accelerated over the next decade. Between 1940 and 1970, the income gap between black and white men narrowed considerably, black women made strong economic gains, and improvements occurred in life expectancy, homeownership, and college enrollment.
5. After 1970, progress continued but slowed. Middle-class growth became more gradual, and although representation in professions such as medicine and law increased, overall economic gains were less dramatic. This slowdown coincided with the introduction of affirmative action, prompting debate about its impact. While these policies expanded access to higher education and professional careers, their broader economic effects are less certain. **(B)**
6. Evidence suggests that many **gains** predated affirmative action and were driven by economic growth and civil rights legislation, especially the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The most significant wage gains occurred between 1965 and 1975, particularly in the South, where anti-discrimination enforcement was strongest. Outside the South, wage convergence was limited.
7. Affirmative action did increase representation in elite professions. Between 1970 and 1990, the number of black professors, physicians, engineers, and lawyers rose sharply, partly due to more inclusive admissions policies. However, **these** professionals form a small share of the black population, and historical trends suggest their numbers would likely have grown even without such policies.

8. Programs such as minority business set-asides have produced mixed outcomes. While they directed resources to targeted groups, their long-term effectiveness is uncertain. Evidence points to inefficiencies, fraud, and limited benefits for low-income communities, raising doubts about their ability to reduce systemic inequality.
9. Despite progress, disparities remain. Poverty rates among African Americans have changed little, and unemployment remains about twice that of whites. Although years of schooling have largely equalized, differences in cognitive skills persist. National assessments show black students lag behind white students in reading, math, and science by several years.
10. Research indicates these skill gaps strongly influence earnings. When cognitive ability is considered, wage disparities shrink or even reverse, suggesting that differences in skills, rather than discrimination alone, play a major role in income inequality. As the economy increasingly rewards higher-level skills, these gaps have become more significant.
11. The causes of persistent educational disparities are complex. Gains in test scores during the 1970s and 1980s stalled and reversed in later years. Factors such as family structure, poverty, and school integration do not fully explain these shifts, as their timing does not consistently align with changes in outcomes.
12. (A) Overall, the trajectory of African American progress since the mid-20th century shows major gains alongside ongoing challenges. Economic mobility, education, and professional representation have improved substantially, yet inequality persists, increasingly shaped by skill gaps and structural factors rather than solely by overt discrimination.

Adapted from <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/black-progress-how-far-weve-come-and-how-far-we-have-to-go/>

1. The word “*shaped*” is closest in meaning to  
A) formed                      B) hidden                      C) weakened                      D) divided
2. What can be inferred in paragraph 1 about public perception of African American life?  
A) It closely reflects current demographic realities across regions and income levels.  
B) It is influenced by outdated and exaggerated assumptions about poverty patterns.  
C) It accurately distinguishes between income groups in different geographic areas.  
D) It is based mainly on recent government reports and official statistics.
3. The phrase “*these perceptions*” refers to  
A) employment restrictions                      C) survey results  
B) economic conditions                      D) historical assumptions
4. According to paragraph 3, why does the author discuss conditions in 1944?  
A) To argue that discrimination no longer exists in any form.  
B) To highlight the severity of past economic limitations.  
C) To explain why migration patterns were unnecessary.  
D) To suggest that rural life offered economic stability.
5. In paragraph 3, what was a major cause of the Great Migration?  
A) Government programs encouraging urban relocation.  
B) Declining wages in northern manufacturing jobs.  
C) Increased opportunities in southern agriculture.  
D) Labor shortages in northern industrial sectors.
6. Which option best restates the sentence about 1960 occupational changes in paragraph 4?  
A) By 1960, most African Americans still depended mainly on agricultural labor.  
B) By 1960, employment opportunities had narrowed largely to factory work.  
C) By 1960, many African Americans had moved into more stable jobs.  
D) By 1960, economic mobility was limited to a small elite group.
7. According to paragraph 4, why does the author include statistics about income and employment in the 1960s?  
A) To emphasize the rapid pace of socioeconomic advancement during that period.  
B) To question the accuracy and reliability of census data collection methods.  
C) To demonstrate the failure of industrial policies in addressing inequality.  
D) To compare urban and rural living standards across different regions.

8. There are four locations in the passage marked (A), (B), (C), and (D). Where would the following sentence best fit?  
*“These developments, however, did not eliminate all disparities.”*
9. Why does the author mention the 1964 Civil Rights Act in paragraph 6?  
A) To criticize government involvement in labor markets and employment systems.  
B) To explain regional differences in access to education and schooling quality.  
C) To suggest that policy played a role in improving wages and opportunities.  
D) To argue that legal reforms replaced the role of economic growth entirely.
10. The word “gains” is closest in meaning to  
A) losses                                      B) steps                                      C) risks                                      D) increases
11. According to paragraphs 5 to 7, what can be inferred about affirmative action policies?  
A) They were solely responsible for early economic gains.  
B) They eliminated disparities in professional fields.  
C) Their overall economic impact remains debated.  
D) They primarily benefited rural populations.
12. The word “these” in paragraph 7 refers to  
A) professional groups                                      C) economic trends  
B) policy changes                                      D) admission standards
13. Which option best restates the idea about set-aside programs found in paragraph 8?  
A) They consistently reduced poverty across all income groups nationwide.  
B) They eliminated inefficiencies in public spending and resource allocation.  
C) They produced mixed outcomes with uncertain effects on broader inequality.  
D) They achieved long-term success within competitive free-market conditions.
14. According to paragraph 8, why does the author question the effectiveness of set-aside programs?  
A) To argue they were never implemented properly.  
B) To show they increased overall economic growth.  
C) To suggest they benefited only rural communities.  
D) To highlight concerns about their long-term value.
15. Why does the author include data from national assessments in paragraph 9?  
A) To demonstrate persistent gaps in measurable skills.  
B) To compare different educational systems globally.  
C) To show that schools have improved uniformly.  
D) To argue that testing methods are unreliable.
16. In paragraph 10, which option best simplifies the idea about cognitive skills and earnings?  
A) School attendance guarantees equal pay outcomes.  
B) Strong skills play a key role in determining earnings.  
C) Income differences are mainly unrelated to education.  
D) Employers ignore skill differences in hiring decisions.
17. According to paragraph 11, what happened to the racial gap in educational performance after the 1980s?  
A) It continued to narrow steadily across all tested academic subjects.  
B) It disappeared completely in reading, math, and writing skills.  
C) It stabilized and showed no significant change over time.  
D) It widened again after a period of earlier improvement.
18. What is the main idea of the passage?  
A) Economic progress has occurred alongside persistent disparities in key areas.  
B) Government policies fully resolved historical inequalities across generations.  
C) Racial inequality has remained unchanged over time in most areas of society.  
D) Educational reforms eliminated most skill-based differences in the workforce.

- 19.** Which statement best reflects the author's overall tone?
- A) Dismissive of the role of past discrimination in shaping outcomes.
  - B) Strongly critical of all public policies related to economic change.
  - C) Balanced, noting both progress made and limits that still remain.
  - D) Entirely optimistic about the future of racial equality in society.
- 20.** How is the passage primarily structured?
- A) A problem-solution framework focusing on policy.
  - B) A comparison between two opposing theories.
  - C) A descriptive analysis of regional differences.
  - D) A chronological account of change over time.

END OF EXAM

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**Black Progress: How far we've come, and how far we have to go**

**Answer Key**

Q	Ans	Loc	Explanation
1	A	P1	“Shaped” refers to how perception is formed or influenced by stereotypes.
2	B	P1	The text states perceptions are based on stereotypes and exaggerations, not reality.
3	D	P2	“These perceptions” refers back to earlier beliefs about widespread poverty.
4	B	P2	1944 conditions illustrate severe historical economic hardship.
5	D	P3	The text explicitly states labor shortages in the North triggered migration.
6	C	P4	The paragraph explains movement into stable and skilled jobs by 1960.
7	A	P4	Statistics are used to highlight rapid improvement in socioeconomic status.
8	B	P4–5	The sentence fits after progress is described, before limitations are introduced.
9	C	P6	The Civil Rights Act is linked to improved wages and opportunities.
10	D	P6	“Gains” clearly means increases or improvements.
11	C	P5–7	The text presents mixed and debated effects of affirmative action.
12	A	P8	“These” refers to policies like set-aside programs mentioned earlier.
13	C	P8	The text explicitly states these programs had mixed and uncertain results.
14	D	P8	The author questions long-term effectiveness, not implementation alone.
15	A	P9	National assessments are used to show persistent skill gaps.
16	B	P10	The text states cognitive skills strongly affect earnings.
17	D	P11	The gap widened again after earlier improvements.
18	A	WT	The central idea balances progress with continuing inequality.
19	C	WT	Tone is analytical, recognizing both gains and limitations.
20	D	WT	The passage follows a timeline from past to present developments.