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In recent years, the earnings of young blacks have risen substantially relative to those of young whites, but their rates of joblessness have also risen to crisis levels. The papers in this volume, drawing on the results of a groundbreaking survey conducted by the National Bureau of Economic Research, analyze the history, causes, and features of this crisis. The findings they report and conclusions they reach revise accepted explanations of black youth unemployment. The contributors identify primary determinants on both the demand and supply sides of the market and provide new information on important aspects of the problem, such as drug use, crime, economic incentives, and attitudes among the unemployed. Their studies reveal that, contrary to popular assumptions, no single factor is the predominant cause of black youth employment problems. They show, among other significant factors, that where female employment is high, black youth employment is low; that even in areas where there are many jobs, black youths get relatively few of them; that the perceived risks and rewards of crime affect decisions to work or to engage in illegal activity; and that churchgoing and aspirations affect the success of black youths in finding employment. Altogether, these papers illuminate a broad range of economic and social factors which must be understood by policymakers before the black youth employment crisis can be successfully addressed.

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