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# Black Immigrants and Black Natives Attending Selective Colleges and Universities in the United States

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This analysis uses data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen (NLSF) to study black immigrants and natives attending selective colleges and universities in the United States. In the NLSF, 747 black students were of native origin, and 281 were of immigrant origin, yielding an overall immigrant percentage of 27 percent. The overrepresentation of immigrants was higher in private than in public institutions and within more selective rather than less selective schools. We found few differences in the social origins of black students from immigrant and native backgrounds. The fact that most indicators of socioeconomic status, social preparation, psychological readiness, and academic preparation are identical for immigrants and natives suggests that immigrant origins per se are not favored in the admissions process but that children from immigrant families exhibit traits and characteristics valued by admissions committees.

Prior to the civil rights era, Americans of African origin were largely excluded from selective colleges and universities in the United States through a combination of de facto and de jure mechanisms. Once discrimination in education was definitively banned by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, however, things began to change. During the late 1960s, elite schools throughout the country began to undertake various “affirmative actions” to increase black enrollment. As outlined in the celebrated speech made by President Lyndon B. Johnson at Howard University, the initial justification for this policy was restitution for past wrongs:

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You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying: Now you are free to go where you want, and do as you desire, and choose the leaders you please. You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, "you are free to compete with all the others," and still justly believe that you have been completely fair. Thus it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates. This is the next and the more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity. We seek not just legal equity but human ability, not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result. (Johnson 1965)

According to this rationale, the deliberate recruitment of African Americans into America's top colleges and universities was justified to make up for generations of past exclusion. Soon, however, Latinos, Asians, women, and the disabled took note of the success of the civil rights movement and appropriated the tactics and rhetoric of African Americans to make their own demands for inclusion (Skrentny 2002). This broadening of the scope of civil rights coincided with a remarkable upsurge in immigration from Asia and Latin America, and over time the moral justification for affirmative action shifted subtly from restitution for a legacy of racism to the representation of diversity for its own sake (Graham 2002).

The emphasis on diversity rather than restitution naturally worked to the

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benefit of second-generation immigrants from Asia and Latin America, who came to comprise a large and growing share of Asian and Latino minority students on campus (Kao and Thompson 2003). In a way that was at first unappreciated, however, the new emphasis on diversity also benefited blacks of immigrant origin and similarly led to a sharp increase in their representation among African Americans at elite institutions. Whereas the presence of second-generation Latinos and Asians on college campuses to a large extent reflected the demographic composition of their respective populations, black immigrants were overrepresented relative to their share in the African American population.

Thus, 13 percent of all African Americans aged 18–19 were first- or second-generation immigrants, according to the March 1999 Current Population Survey (CPS); among black freshmen entering 28 selective colleges and universities that same year, 27 percent were first- or second-generation immigrants, according to data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen (NLSF). In other words, the representation of immigrant-origin blacks at selective institutions of higher education was roughly double their share in the population. Although first- and second-generation Asians and Latinos were also heavily represented in the NLSF data, their respective shares of 97 percent and 73 percent among freshmen in 1999 closely matched their proportions in the population of 18–19-year-old Asians and Latinos, which stood at 91 percent and 66 percent, respectively, in the March 1999 CPS.

To date, studies of black immigrants have been for the most part disconnected from studies of minority achievement and linked instead to the immigration literature. Studies examining educational outcomes among the children of immigrants generally find that they achieve greater socioeconomic success than co-ethnic students of native-born parents, whether Asian, Latino, or black (Portes and Rumbaut 1990, 2001). Researchers who have considered this pattern argue that the emphasis on respect for authority and family solidarity characteristic of immigrant families, along with their status as voluntary minorities, encourages a positive outlook toward education and social mobility (see Kao and Thompson 2003; Roscigno 2000; Zhou 1997; Zhou and Bankston 1998).

In addition to unobserved traits such as ambition and achievement motivation, immigrants are also self-selected with respect to observable human capital characteristics, such as education and occupational status (see Massey et al. 1998). The loosening of immigration restrictions after 1965 thus carried important ramifications for the ethnic diversity of black students at selective colleges and universities. The number of black immigrants has more than doubled over the past decade, and Afro-Caribbeans (persons from non-Spanish-speaking islands in the West Indies, such as Jamaica and Trinidad) now comprise around 70 percent of a foreign-born black population of 2.1 million,

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with most of the rest coming from the continent of Africa (Logan and Deane 2003).

Jamaican emigration, in particular, is among the most class selective of all immigrant streams, and second-generation Jamaican immigrants perform very favorably compared with black natives across a range of social and economic outcomes in the United States (Butcher 1994). Those migrants who leave Jamaica for a better life in the United States are far from a cross section of Jamaican society (Beine et al. 2001). Rather, Jamaican emigrants tend to be members of the skilled middle class whose mobility aspirations have been frustrated at home, thus prompting them to look abroad for expanded opportunities. Jamaicans constitute the largest Afro-Caribbean migration stream, followed by Haitians. The majority of Afro-Caribbean migrants take up residence along the Atlantic Seaboard in major metropolitan centers such as New York; Washington, DC; Miami; and Fort Lauderdale, FL, where jobs are plentiful and there is a critical mass of co-ethnics.

On socioeconomic indicators such as education, income, and residential segregation, black immigrants generally fare better than African Americans. The percentage of all foreign-born blacks over 25 years old with a bachelor's degree is 25 percent, compared with 16 percent of native-born blacks (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2004). Africans are the most educated immigrant group, with many originally coming to the United States to pursue a college or professional degree. Their educational attainment at 14 years even exceeds that of whites and Asians at 12.9 and 13.1 years, respectively. The median income for Africans is over \$45,000, compared with \$41,000 for Afro-Caribbeans and just under \$36,000 for native-born African Americans. Africans also live in more racially integrated neighborhoods than native blacks, typically locating in areas where nearly 50 percent of residents are white. The residential environments of Afro-Caribbeans and native-born African Americans are similar, with both experiencing much higher levels of segregation (Logan and Deane 2003). The former British colonies of Ghana and Nigeria contribute the greatest number of African émigrés.

Despite sound theoretical reasons for expecting an overrepresentation of immigrants among African American college students, the degree of overrepresentation surprised many observers and has become quite controversial. The controversy erupted in 2004, when two prominent African American intellectuals—Henry Louis Gates and Lani Guinier—pointed out to a reunion of black Harvard alumni that a majority of those present were of West Indian or African origin, not the descendants of African American slaves. They argued that children from black families in the country for generations were being left behind in the competition for elite education. According to Gates, “I just want people to be honest enough to talk about it” (see Rimer and Arenson 2004).

True to his wish, an extended media debate ensued, as many observers questioned the moral claims of immigrant-origin blacks on affirmative action programs originally intended as restitution for the descendants of American slaves (Johnson 2005; Page 2004). One side argued that the disproportionate benefit bestowed upon immigrant blacks was inappropriate and contrary to the spirit of affirmative action, whereas the other side argued that there was nothing illegitimate about rewarding people of African ancestry who were motivated, worked hard, and achieved high academic distinction, whatever their origins.

This debate cannot be settled empirically, of course, because ultimately it involves a contest between two different moral visions—the moral imperative to right past wrongs versus the ethical need to represent the diversity of contemporary society as it now stands. Nonetheless, reliable data can and should inform the debate, though to date most of the discussion has occurred in the absence of solid information about the relative numbers and characteristics of black immigrants in the African American student population. In this article we draw upon the NLSF to develop a profile of native- and immigrant-origin blacks attending selective colleges and universities in the United States. We describe the social origins of these two populations and estimate statistical models to learn whether basic determinants of academic success, as gleaned from prior research, function differently for African Americans, depending on native versus foreign origins.

### Black Immigrants and Natives at Selective Schools

The National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen is a nationwide survey of students who entered 28 selective colleges and universities as freshmen in the fall of 1999. As described by Massey et al. (2003), the baseline sample had a response rate of 86 percent and yielded detailed interviews with 1,051 blacks, 959 whites, 998 Asians, and 916 Latinos. The students were followed for four years and reinterviewed during the spring terms of 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2003. Overall response rates in the follow-up surveys were 95 percent, 89 percent, 84 percent, and 80 percent, respectively. Our profile draws on data from the baseline survey to compare the social and economic origins of immigrant- versus native-origin African American students, using white freshmen as a point of reference. We then estimate regression models to consider the socioeconomic determinants of academic achievement in the two groups, focusing on the cumulative grade point average (GPA) earned by students through the end of the sophomore year.

A fundamental question concerns the relative number of black immigrants versus natives in the NLSF. Although the NLSF is not representative of college

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TABLE 1

*Composition of Black Population by Immigrant and Native Origins in the NLSF*

Kind of School	% Native Origin	% Immigrant Origin
All public	76.9	23.1
All private	71.2	28.8
Private universities	71.3	28.7
Private colleges	70.7	29.3
10 most selective	64.4	35.6
10 least selective	76.2	23.8
Ivy League	59.4	40.6
All institutions	73.3	26.7

NOTE.—NLSF = National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen.

students nationwide, it does provide a good portrait of students entering the most elite segment of American higher education. Although we cannot describe the sample in detail here, Massey et al. (2003) offer a complete list of the 28 institutions that participated in the NLSF and their characteristics. In brief, the sample includes public as well as private institutions and research universities along with liberal arts colleges. Although all the schools are selective in the sense that only a subset of those who apply are accepted for admission, the degree of selectivity varies across institutions. The most selective school, Princeton University, accepted just 11 percent of its applicants in 1999. The least selective of the 28 institutions was Miami University of Ohio, which accepted 79 percent of its applicants. Average combined math and verbal Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores ranged from 1105 at Howard University to 1450 at Princeton University.

We defined black students who reported having at least one parent born abroad as being of immigrant origin, and all others were considered natives. Thus, many of the students we define as “native” could very well have one or more immigrant grandparents. For convenience we refer to these two groups as “immigrant blacks” and “native blacks,” though we realize many of the former may have been born in the United States. Nevertheless, their parents were born abroad, and in this sense they grew up in immigrant households. Using our criteria, of the black students in the NLSF, 747 were of native origin, and 281 were of immigrant origin, yielding an overall figure of 27 percent for the share of black immigrants, a substantial overrepresentation by any reasonable criterion.

This percentage systematically varies, however, according to several institutional characteristics. Table 1 shows the share of black immigrants and natives in different segments of higher education: public versus private schools, teaching colleges versus research universities, and more versus less selective

institutions. As can be seen, although immigrant blacks are overrepresented throughout elite academia, the degree of overrepresentation is greatest in the private sector. Whereas 23 percent of African American freshmen entering public institutions were of immigrant origin, the figure was 29 percent for those in private schools. Within the private sector, there were few differences between teaching colleges and research universities, with immigrants making up 29.3 percent of the former and 28.7 percent of the latter, a trivial difference.

The discrepancy in the representation of immigrants versus natives is greatest when the schools are broken down by selectivity. Among the 10 most selective schools in the sample (those with the highest average SAT scores), immigrants made up 36 percent of all black students. Among the 10 least selective institutions (those with the lowest average SAT scores), immigrants made up just 24 percent, a differential of 12 percentage points that is highly statistically significant. Not only are black immigrants overrepresented at elite academic institutions, but the overrepresentation is greatest in the most exclusive stratum. Among African Americans attending Ivy League schools (represented in the NLSF by Columbia, Princeton, Penn, and Yale), for example, 41 percent were of immigrant origin, 18 points greater than in the NLSF's state institutions.

In thinking about reducing inequality in the United States, access to prestige is inevitably important. These data suggest that native blacks are still at a disadvantage in the Ivy League and other privileged sectors of higher education and that now they have an added set of competitors with whom to concern themselves. Although such a zero-sum logic may not be appropriate in conceptualizing black access to higher education, judging from the recent debate, this is the way that many native-origin blacks are thinking about the issue.

### Who Are the Black Immigrants Attending Selective Schools?

Perhaps the most basic question is where black students of immigrant origins come from or, more precisely, where their parents were born. Figure 1 presents a pie chart showing the fraction of parents hailing from different world regions. As might be expected for reasons of proximity, the largest fraction of immigrant-origin blacks come from the Caribbean, comprising 43 percent of the total. However, a sizable fraction (29 percent) of parents are from the continent of Africa. Although the data are uncertain because of relatively small numbers, immigrants from African nations are probably even more self-selected than Jamaicans (see Beine et al. 2001; Butcher 1994; Portes and Rumbaut 1990). The only other clearly defined region of origin is Latin America, which accounts for another 7 percent. The remaining fifth are scattered throughout North America, Europe, Asia, the Pacific, and the Middle East.

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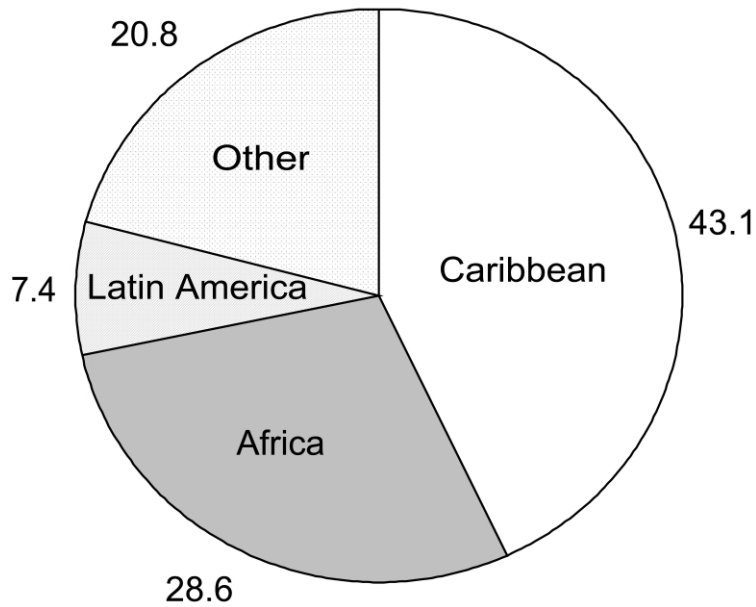


FIG. 1.—Regional origins of black immigrants attending selective colleges and universities

Figure 2 shows the proportion of parents hailing from specific countries. Consistent with the above regional distributions, the leading countries of origin are Jamaica at 21 percent and Nigeria at 17 percent; both are former British colonies where the educated classes speak English. Three other countries also contribute significant numbers to the pool of immigrant-origin blacks at selective schools—two Caribbean and one African. The African nation is Ghana (another British colony with an anglophone elite), which comprises 6 percent of the total. The two Caribbean nations are Trinidad at 7 percent and Haiti at 9 percent. The latter country, of course, is the only origin nation where English is not widely spoken. In Haiti, the educated classes generally speak French and the masses a French-African patois known as Creole. The predominance of ex-colonials from the former British empire among black students at elite American schools is readily apparent.

### Thinking about Student Selection

There are three ways that black immigrants might come to be overrepresented in selective schools. First, admissions officers could deliberately favor blacks of immigrant origin over the descendants of American slaves. This scenario

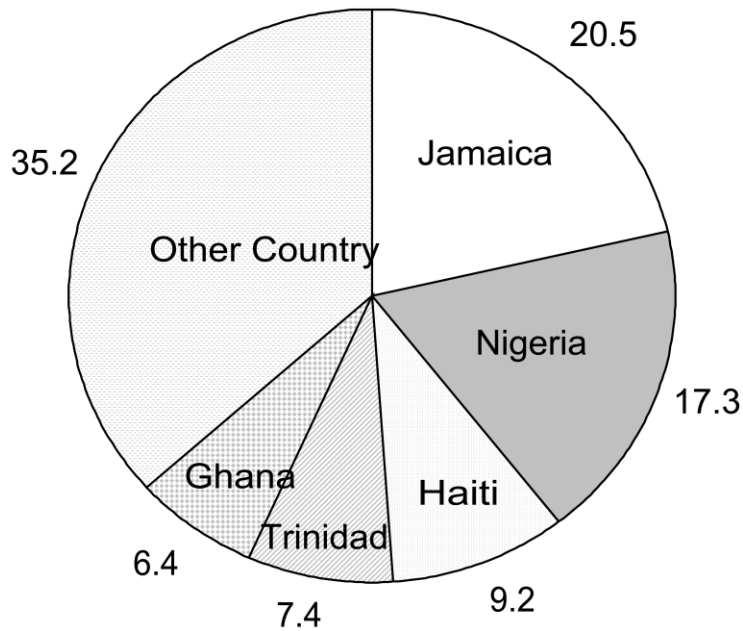


FIG. 2.—National origins of immigrant-origin blacks at selective colleges and universities

requires college personnel to be able to observe the birthplace of parents and self-consciously seek out black students of foreign origin. This scenario represents an example of “statistical discrimination,” in which admissions officers have nothing against native blacks per se but nonetheless use foreign origin as a proxy for other characteristics they find attractive (Blank et al. 2004). Knowing that immigrants are self-selected with respect to ambition, for example, admissions officers might very well target them for recruitment because, on average, they understand that these students will be more motivated, driven, and prone to success than others.

A second possible explanation is that admissions officers do not seek out immigrant-origin blacks per se but nonetheless admit them with greater frequency because they possess objective characteristics—higher grades or better test scores—that make them more attractive as potential students, on average, than native-origin blacks. Although superior standing on objective indicators may very well stem from the selectivity of the migration of the student’s parents, college personnel do not observe or are indifferent to where the parents were born or how they got here. They do not care about why a student came to have high grades and test scores; they simply focus on the fact that the students are black (and thus satisfy the criteria for affirmative action) and that they

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have outstanding academic records (and thus satisfy the criteria for competitive admission).

A final possible explanation is that the selection in favor of black immigrants is neither on the basis of foreign origins nor objective academic indicators but with respect to subjective, less observable factors that are correlated with immigrant status. In postindustrial societies “soft skills” related to sociability, empathy, and emotionality can often be as important in determining success as “hard skills” measured by grades earned, subjects taken, advance placement credit received, and theses written (Duncan and Dunifon 1998; Dunifon and Duncan 1998; Goleman 1995; Moss and Tilly 1995). Researchers who have studied the adaptation and integration of black immigrants have universally mentioned the greater comfort level experienced by whites who interact with black immigrants compared with black natives (Foner 2001; Foner and Fredrickson 2004; Waters 2001). To white observers, black immigrants seem more polite, less hostile, more solicitous, and “easier to get along with.” Native blacks are perceived in precisely the opposite fashion. Such subjective evaluations are likely to reflect unconscious stereotyping as well as actual differences in behavior. Whatever the source of subjective impressions, if admissions personnel perceive immigrant blacks to be more “likable,” it is again likely that they will favor them over native blacks in the admissions sweepstakes.

Using the NLSF data, of course, we cannot observe the selection process to test these scenarios directly; even if we had access to information on the entire applicant pool, it is quite likely that the resulting data set would contain little information on “soft skills.” The NLSF only allows us to observe the results of the selection process after the fact. Nonetheless, we can make inferences about the sorts of native and immigrant student populations that might result from the foregoing selection mechanisms.

If black students of immigrant origin were being favored deliberately on the basis of their foreign origins, then we would expect to observe systematic differences between the traits of immigrant and native African Americans. Favoritism toward immigrants on the basis of objective characteristics would be indicated if measures of socioeconomic status and prior educational achievement for blacks of immigrant origin compared less favorably, on average, with those of natives. Favoritism toward immigrants on the basis of subjective characteristics might likewise be indicated if African Americans of foreign origin compared less favorably, on average, to natives with respect to traits that are more difficult to measure and observe on college applications, such as respondent-reported comfort with whites, self-esteem, and self-efficacy.

In contrast, if we find few differences between native and immigrant African American students with respect to either objective or subjective indicators, then it is likely (though hardly proven) that immigrants are not overrepresented through some process of favoritism but simply because they display, on average

and for whatever reason, traits and characteristics that admissions officers find attractive. If there are no differences in readily measurable and observable characteristics, but differences in subjective characteristics do emerge, we might conclude that the selection in favor of black immigrants is unconscious, having to do with the greater comfort experienced by predominantly white admissions officers with respect to immigrant as opposed to native blacks.

### Demographic Background

In table 2 we present information on the demographic and family backgrounds of black immigrants and natives, with corresponding data for whites included as a point of reference. The NLSF sampled black and white freshmen using registrars' lists classified by race. Presumably students had checked a box indicating their race at some point during the application process. Rather than taking these data at face value, we asked students to describe in some detail their racial-ethnic origins, and their responses are arrayed in the top panel of table 2. In this and all subsequent tables, whenever figures for black immigrants and black natives are significantly different at  $p < .05$ , they are highlighted with an asterisk.

As can be seen, although both groups may be black, there are nonetheless differences in ethnic identification between them. The vast majority of natives described themselves as black non-Hispanics by saying they were black, African American, or Negro. Roughly 82 percent of black natives placed themselves into this category, and most of the remaining natives, 16 percent, said they were of mixed race, most commonly as a result of having one white and one black parent. In contrast, only 63 percent of black immigrants said they were non-Hispanic blacks. Significantly larger shares identified themselves as Hispanic (6 percent compared with 0.5 percent among natives) and other (10 percent compared with 1.5 percent among natives). The latter category includes many of those who identified as Haitian. A slightly larger share of immigrants (19 percent compared with 16 percent) identified themselves as being of mixed race, but the difference was not statistically significant.

Thus, immigrant- and native-origin blacks appear to hold somewhat different ethnic identities, with a larger share of immigrants expressing an identity other than just black, Negro, or African American. These differences, however, do not find expression in terms of different skin complexions. After the end of each interview, survey personnel were instructed to rate each respondent's skin color on a 0–10 scale from lightness to darkness, where zero was an albino and 10 was the darkest skin color they could imagine. These ratings are shown in the second panel of the table. Although black immigrants display a slightly higher rating on this continuum (5.4 compared with 4.8), the

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TABLE 2

*Family and Demographic Background of Whites Compared with Black Respondents of Immigrant and Native Origins*

CHARACTERISTIC	WHITES	BLACKS	
		Native Origin	Immigrant Origin
Race-ethnicity (%):			
White non-Hispanic	95.7	.4	.4
Black non-Hispanic	.2	81.7*	63.3*
Mixed race	1.4	15.7	18.5
Hispanic	.4	.5*	6.1*
Asian	1.1	.1	1.1
Other	.8	1.5*	9.6*
Skin color (1–10 darkness scale)	1.68	4.79	5.44
Gender (male; %)	47.6	34.7	36.3
Family composition (%):			
Two parents	81.0	51.4*	56.9*
Father present	84.1	55.6*	61.2*
Mother present	95.7	92.0	93.2
Parental involvement (%):			
Human capital cultivation	45.9	43.4	41.8
Social capital cultivation	11.4	10.2	9.3
Cultural capital cultivation	14.8	11.5	12.6
Intellectual independence	41.2	34.2	32.5
Child-rearing style (%):			
Severity of discipline	12.4	17.0	18.5
Reliance on shame and guilt	8.2	7.5	9.5
Religious background (%):			
Catholic	30.9	13.1*	30.2*
Protestant	41.2	75.2*	56.5*
Other	27.9	11.7	13.3
Religious intensity:			
Religiosity	5.1	6.4	6.2
Observance	5.1	6.4	5.9
Attendance	2.6	3.0	2.8

\* Figures for black immigrants and black natives significantly different at  $p < .05$ .

difference is not close to being statistically significant. In general, then, both groups were rated at a value of 5, compared with the much lower score of 1.7 for whites.

One notable feature of the black student population documented by Massey et al. (2003) was its remarkably imbalanced sex ratio. Whereas white freshmen were about equally divided between men and women, the number of black freshmen was substantially skewed in favor of females, who outnumbered men

by around 2 to 1. The third panel (gender) of the table shows that whatever processes are operating to produce skewed sex ratios among African American students at selective colleges and universities, they function similarly for black immigrants and natives, both of whom approximate the 2 to 1 ratio observed in the population as a whole.

The survey also ascertained whether freshmen lived with both biological parents during their senior year in high school, and this percentage is shown in the fourth panel of the table (family composition). Although the difference is not great in substantive terms, immigrant blacks were significantly more likely to come from intact two-parent households, though such households were not nearly as common as among white students. As would be expected, differences between groups stemmed from the absence of the father rather than the mother.

In their original study, Massey et al. (2003) developed indices based on a detailed battery of questions about different facets of child rearing that respondents had experienced while growing up. The next panel considers parental involvement in the cultivation of different kinds of skills and abilities. The index of parental involvement in the cultivation of human capital was measured from responses to questions about the frequency with which parents read to the respondent, participated in parent-teacher organizations, helped with homework, pushed to get good grades, took the respondent to the library, and sent him or her to various educational camps, enrichment programs, and summer courses. Parental involvement in the cultivation of cultural capital was measured from responses to questions about being taken to museums, plays, concerts, science centers, and so forth, and yielded a highly reliable scale with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83. Likewise, to assess parental involvement in monitoring social capital, respondents were asked whether their parents talked to their friends and knew who they were, yielding a scale with an alpha of 0.78. Finally, a measure of encouragement for intellectual independence assessed the degree to which parents thought respondents should give in during arguments, not argue with adults, and think independently, and the degree to which parents explained decisions and thought they were always right, yielding an index with an alpha of 0.72 (the scales are all described in detail in appendix B of Massey et al. 2003).

Although earlier work has documented a variety of differences between whites, blacks, Asians, and Latinos with respect to child-rearing practices, there are no significant differences among African Americans on the basis of native versus foreign origins. Although black parents were less encouraging of intellectual independence and less involved in the cultivation of human and social capital when compared with whites, the behaviors of immigrant parents were essentially the same as those of natives. The same pattern is observed with respect to the severity of discipline, which was assessed by an

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index based on questions about the frequency of being punished for bad grades, being told they could not do things they wanted to do as punishment, and being punished for disobedience. Once again, although black parents were more likely than white parents to employ discipline in child rearing, native and immigrant black parents were equally likely to do so.

The final facet of family background we consider is religion, and here we find significant native-immigrant differences with respect to denomination. In general, immigrant blacks are more likely to be Catholic and less likely to be Protestant, which is not surprising, given that a larger fraction of immigrant blacks identify themselves as Hispanic, and many of those who identify as “other” are Haitian. Despite the denominational differences, however, immigrant- and native-origin blacks displayed about the same level of religious intensity, which we measured using a series of Likert-type rating scales. In terms of both religiosity and religious observance, and to a lesser degree attendance, immigrant and native black freshmen were both more religious than whites but little different from each other.

### Socioeconomic Background

So far, the only differences we have been able to detect between black students of immigrant and native origin are ethnic. Immigrant-origin black students are more likely to identify themselves as Hispanic and other, and consistent with this identification they are more likely to report themselves as Catholic than Protestant. Apart from this contrast, the only other significant difference is a very slight tendency for black immigrants to come from two-parent families, but the small gap between immigrants and natives pales in comparison to the chasm that generally prevails between both groups and whites.

Table 3 continues the analysis of social origins by documenting differences in socioeconomic status using a variety of indicators, including parental employment and education, as well as financial indicators such as income, home ownership, home value, financial aid, and welfare usage. With the exception of parental education, none of the measures of socioeconomic background differ by immigrant status. Figures on employment rates, income, and wealth (assessed by home ownership and value) are nearly identical. Corresponding to what we know about the selectivity of immigration, however, immigrant fathers are significantly more educated than native fathers (though, interestingly, there is no difference between mothers). Among black freshmen of immigrant origins, 70 percent of the fathers were college graduates, and 44 percent held advanced degrees, compared with figures of just 55 percent and 25 percent among natives. Thus, the fathers of foreign-origin blacks possessed considerably more human capital than the fathers of black students of native origin.

TABLE 3

*Socioeconomic Background of Whites Compared with Black Respondents of Immigrant and Native Origins (%)*

CHARACTERISTIC	WHITES	BLACKS	
		Native Origin	Immigrant Origin
Parental employment:			
Father working	94.7	91.7	91.1
Mother working	77.0	88.0	87.6
Parental education:			
Father college graduate	85.7	55.2*	70.0*
Father advanced degree	56.7	25.3*	43.6*
Mother college graduate	79.5	57.0	54.5
Mother advanced degree	38.7	25.9	28.0
Siblings college graduates	1.5	.9	1.3
Family financial status:			
Family ever on welfare	5.3	19.5	15.7
Receiving financial aid	62.3	89.5	90.7
Family owns home	93.8	73.7	71.4
Value of owned home (\$000)	327.4	193.2	220.6
Income over \$100,000	52.9	25.5	23.8

\* Figures for black immigrants and black natives significantly different at  $p < .05$ .

### Neighborhood Background

A pervasive feature of life in contemporary American society is the residential segregation of people on the basis of race. In metropolitan areas containing large African American populations, levels of black-white segregation continue to be remarkably high (Charles 2003; Iceland et al. 2003), and half of all urban African Americans live in metropolitan areas characterized by a regime of intense isolation known as hypersegregation (Massey 2004; Wilkes and Iceland 2004). Using data from the NLSF, researchers have documented the long-term effects and continuing negative effects of segregation for African American students (Charles et al. 2004; Massey and Fischer 2006).

Given the pervasiveness of racial segregation in the United States, it is perhaps not surprising that a substantial share of black respondents to the NLSF reported growing up in minority neighborhoods. The data in table 4 are an average of neighborhood compositions reported by respondents at ages 6, 13, and 18, where "neighborhood" is defined as a three-block radius around the home. To assess the validity of these self reports, Massey and Fischer (2006) matched students' home addresses with geocoded tract data from the 2000

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TABLE 4

*Childhood Neighborhood Environment Experienced by Whites Compared with That Experienced by Black Respondents of Immigrant and Native Origins*

CHARACTERISTIC	WHITES	BLACKS	
		Native Origin	Immigrant Origin
Neighborhood composition (%):			
Proportion white	85.1	42.0	41.3
Proportion Asian	4.9	3.2	4.8
Proportion black	4.9	47.5*	40.1*
Proportion Hispanic	3.4	5.5	8.8
Neighborhood segregation (%):			
Predominantly white	94.0	35.5	38.4
Mixed	5.4	26.8	28.5
Predominantly minority	2.9	40.4*	34.9*
Neighborhood environment:			
Exposure to disorder	5.4	16.0	16.0
Exposure to violence	12.0	52.0*	47.4*

\* Figures for black immigrants and black natives significantly different at  $p < .05$ .

census and correlated census figures with racial compositions reported on the survey. The correlation between the census black percentage and that reported by respondents during their senior year was .83. Thus, self-reported neighborhood composition accounts for around 64 percent of the variance in tract composition, indicating that our data correspond closely to ecological reality. Given that census tracts are much larger spatial units than those we employed (a three-block radius around the respondent's home), we would not expect the correlation to be perfect.

According to self reports, the typical white freshman grew up in a neighborhood that was 85 percent white and just 5 percent black, whereas the average black respondent grew up in a setting that was more than 40 percent black. We classified neighborhoods that were 0–30 percent minority as predominantly white, those that were 30–70 percent minority as mixed, and those that were 70 percent minority or higher as predominantly minority. Using the foregoing definitions, at least a third of black students grew up in a segregated, predominantly minority neighborhood. There were, however, significant differences between black immigrants and natives.

As table 4 shows, black students of immigrant origin generally grew up under less segregated circumstances. The average percentage of blacks within their neighborhoods was 40 percent, compared with 48 percent among natives; the share growing up in predominantly minority neighborhoods was 35 percent

rather than the 40 percent observed among natives. Although these differences are not marked, they are nonetheless statistically significant and translate into significantly different exposures to violence while growing up (see also Crowder and Tedrow 2001). Massey et al. (2003) developed severity-weighted indices of exposure to social disorder and violence within neighborhoods (both with an alpha of 0.78) and found that black freshmen experienced far higher exposures than members of other racial and ethnic groups and this exposure was determined primarily by segregation. In contrast, those coming of age under integrated circumstances had the same exposure to disorder and violence as whites.

This pattern is evident in the bottom panel of table 4 (neighborhood environment), where black students are shown to experience many times the exposure to disorder and violence reported by white students. Although the disorder indices do not differ between native- and immigrant-origin blacks, in keeping with their lower rate of residential segregation, black immigrants display a slightly but nonetheless significantly lower degree of exposure to violence, with an index value of 47 compared with 52 for natives. Despite this difference, however, both immigrant and native blacks are far more exposed to violence than whites, whose index value stands at just 12.

### School Background

Although school segregation is highly associated with residential segregation, Massey et al. (2003) documented a tendency for black parents to purchase integrated schooling by sending their children to private schools. The data in table 5 suggest that this tendency is more pronounced among immigrant than native parents. Whereas 72 percent of black natives attended a public high school, only 58 percent of black immigrants did so. Instead, 26 percent of those of immigrant origin attended a parochial school (compared with 16 percent among natives), and 16 percent went to a private, nonsectarian institution (compared with 11 percent of natives).

Despite the larger share of black immigrants in private schools, we observe no differences between immigrant- and native-origin blacks with respect to school quality. Indeed, ratings of the quality of teaching and advising ( $\nu = 0.70$ ), school reputation (measured using a simple Likert rating scale), and facilities ( $\nu = 0.76$ ) are virtually identical, and, as a result, both groups report themselves equally well prepared for college. Both groups also report similar high school grade point averages and similar numbers of advanced placement courses taken. The one thing that private education seems to have brought immigrants is lower exposure to violence within school. Whereas the weighted index of exposure to violence stood at 55 for black freshmen of immigrant origin, it was 63 for natives ( $\nu = 0.80$ ). By entering the private sector, there-

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TABLE 5

*School Environment Experienced by Whites Compared with That Experienced by Black Respondents of Immigrant and Native Origins*

CHARACTERISTIC	WHITES	BLACKS	
		Native Origin	Immigrant Origin
Kind of school (%):			
Public	71.9	72.3*	58.0*
Private religious	15.2	16.1*	26.0*
Private nonreligious	12.5	11.2*	15.7*
School composition (%):			
Proportion white	73.7	46.3	43.5
Proportion Asian	7.6	6.0	7.9
Proportion black	10.3	38.1	33.4
Proportion Hispanic	6.5	7.3	9.3
School segregation (%):			
Predominantly white	84.0	36.9	41.6
Mixed	16.0	41.2	37.4
Predominantly minority	3.8	26.2	24.6
School environment:			
Exposure to disorder	33.0	37.0	35.9
Exposure to violence	47.0	63.1*	55.3*
Quality of school:			
Teaching and advising	9.9	9.6	9.7
Facilities	10.1	10.0	10.2
Self-rated preparation	3.4	3.2	3.2
Self-rated reputation	3.5	3.4	3.4
Academic preparation:			
High school GPA	3.78	3.54	3.59
AP courses taken	4.46	3.37	3.60
SAT score	1361	1193*	1250*

NOTE.—GPA = grade point average; AP = advanced placement; SAT = Scholastic Aptitude Test.

\* Figures for black immigrants and black natives significantly different at  $p < .05$ .

fore, immigrant parents appear to have purchased a safer learning environment with a level of exposure to violence closer to that experienced by whites.

Among indicators of academic preparation, there are no significant differences between black immigrants and natives with respect to grade point or advance placement courses taken, though both lag significantly behind whites. However, we do observe a significant difference between immigrant- and native-origin African Americans with respect to SAT scores, an indicator of cognitive skills (see Jencks and Phillips 1998). Blacks of immigrant origin earn a significantly higher score on the SAT (1250) compared with their native

TABLE 6

*Characteristics of the Social Environment within Schools Attended by Whites Compared with Those Attended by Black Respondents of Immigrant and Native Origins*

CHARACTERISTIC	WHITES	BLACKS	
		Native Origin	Immigrant Origin
Distribution of 10 closest friends:			
White	7.9	2.6	2.7
Black	.5	5.9*	4.7*
Latino	.4	.5	.9
Asian	1.0	.6	1.0
Social preparation:			
Social distance from whites	8.6	15.1	14.8
Susceptibility to peers	10.2	19.7*	10.7*
Self-esteem	32.0	34.0	33.3
Self-efficacy	18.9	19.1	19.0
Legacy student (%)	12.3	5.2	5.2
High school peer group:			
Support for academic effort	27.0	27.1	27.2
Support for delinquency	6.1	4.8	4.8
Support for independence	11.9	12.5	12.3

\* Figures for black immigrants and black natives significantly different at  $p < .05$ .

counterparts (1193), though both are well below the score for whites (1361). The differential between immigrants and natives might reflect the selectivity of parental immigration or possibly differential exposure to school violence. Exposure to violence may raise the allostatic load of natives relative to immigrants by repeated triggering of the human stress response, and allostatic load has been shown to have a variety of negative cognitive effects (see Massey 2004).

Table 6 continues the assessment of the school setting by considering the social environment of schools attended by black immigrants and natives. The top panel shows the distribution of respondents' 10 closest friends by race and ethnicity. Given the white racial homogeneity of white students' schools and neighborhoods, it is not surprising that white students report overwhelmingly white friends. Of their 10 closest friends in high school, eight were white, and one was Asian. In contrast, black students of both immigrant and native origins reported a more heterogeneous friendship network. While both groups reported about the same number of white friends (2.6–2.7, on average), black immigrants had fewer black friends, an average of around 4.7 compared with 5.9 among natives, with the difference stemming from a greater tendency toward friendship with Asians and Latinos.

For the most part, however, this modest difference in the racial composition

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of friendship networks was not associated with differences in the overall peer environment. At least according to the indices developed by Massey et al. (2003—again, see their appendix B), peer groups for immigrant- and native-origin blacks offered the same level of support for academic effort and intellectual independence and the same lack of support (compared with whites) for delinquency. Thus, they emerged from school socialization with the same levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Massey et al. 2003 used standard indices derived from Rosenberg 1965) and the same perceived social distance from whites. Although both native- and immigrant-origin blacks are less likely than whites to have a parent who attended the academic institution before them (making them a “legacy” student), there was no difference between the two groups of black students themselves. The frequency of legacy students stood at 5.2 percent for both groups, compared with 12.3 percent among whites.

The one difference between black students of immigrant and native origin occurs with respect to susceptibility to peer influence. The NLSF questionnaire asked students the degree to which they thought and acted like others, valued the same thing as others, felt comfortable with others, worried about what others thought, worried about being called a “nerd” or a “braniac,” and whether they did things so that others would like them. Responses were coded on a Likert-type agree-disagree continuum and assembled to create a scale assessing the degree to which respondents were sensitive to the influence of peers. As can be seen, black immigrants are significantly less susceptible to the influence of peers than black natives. Their index of 10.7 roughly equals that of whites (10.2) and is far less than that of native-origin black students (19.7).

This pattern is consistent with data reported by Portes and Rumbaut (2001), who find, paradoxically, that second-generation minority immigrants who maintain an immigrant identity do better in school and achieve higher levels of education than those who adopt a native identity. Maintaining such an identity would logically involve insulating oneself psychologically and socially from youth encountered in schools and on the streets, thus explaining the relatively low degree of sensitivity to the thoughts and perceptions of others among the children of black immigrants.

### The Process of Academic Achievement

In general, the differences we have detected between black freshmen of immigrant and native origins have been few and relatively modest. Yet the question remains of how the many variables we have examined influence the process of academic achievement. In table 7 we replicate Massey et al.’s (2003) analysis to disentangle the effects of the various background characteristics in determining college grades to assess whether, after controlling for

background differences, black immigrants perform the same as black natives and to determine whether the addition of extensive controls eliminates the performance gap between white and black students generally. Specifically, we regress GPA earned by white and black students through the end of the sophomore year on all of the variables considered in tables 2–6 while adding dummy variables to distinguish between immigrant- and native-origin blacks and using white students as the reference category. We also added controls for the selectivity of the institution by including a dummy variable for private versus public and the average SAT score of entering students. We assume that private schools and those with higher average SAT scores are generally more selective than public schools and those with lower test scores.

Although not shown in this table, the mean GPA for students in the NLSF was 3.22, with a standard deviation of 0.44. As can be seen, college grades are very strongly determined by indicators of academic preparation (high school GPA, SAT scores, and self-rated preparation) as well as by parental education. As the number and level of degrees held by parents rises, the academic performance of their children monotonically increases. Students coming from a family where both parents hold advanced degrees earned a cumulative GPA that was 0.15 points higher than students coming from a family where neither parent had graduated from college. A reliance on discipline in child rearing is associated with lower grades. Susceptibility to peer influence has a positive impact on grades. Apparently in elite academic settings, at least, a desire to emulate one's fellow students is a good thing, a finding that contradicts the hypothesis of oppositional culture put forth by Ogbu (1974, 2003) but that reaffirms earlier results reported by Massey et al. (2003).

Holding all of these background variables constant, however, does not eliminate the racial gap in grade performance. Both black immigrants and black natives earn significantly lower grade points (by 0.11 points) than whites, and the coefficients for immigrants and natives are virtually identical (0.105 vs. 0.113, respectively). Whatever the unmeasured factors are that depress grade achievement among black students, they appear to operate on immigrants and natives alike.

At the institutional level, higher average SAT scores depress grades significantly, lowering the GPA by 0.06 points for every 100 points on the SAT. Other things being equal, institutions that select students with more cognitive skills appear to be somewhat harder than those selecting students with lower SAT values. Holding constant the level of difficulty, however, students at private institutions tend to earn significantly higher grades than those at public institutions. Private institutions are generally smaller so they can focus more attention on individual students, and they generally devote more resources to student advising and support, thus counterbalancing their higher degree of difficulty (see Alon and Tienda 2004; Bowen and Bok 1998).

TABLE 7

*Determinants of College GPA Earned by Whites and Blacks in 28 Selective Colleges and Universities*

Independent Variable	Unstandardized Regression Coefficient	SE
Family social background:		
Race-ethnicity:		
White	. . . .	. . . .
Black native	-.113**	.034
Black immigrant	-.105*	.040
Gender (male)	-.081***	.016
Family structure (two-parent household)	.037	.021
Parental involvement:		
Human capital cultivation	-.001	.001
Social capital cultivation	-.001	.002
Cultural capital cultivation	.000	.001
Intellectual independence	.000	.001
Child-rearing style:		
Severity of discipline	-.006***	.001
Use of shame and guilt	-.001	.001
Religion:		
Protestant	. . . .	. . . .
Catholic	-.038**	.019
Other	.039	.020
Religiosity	.001	.003
Socioeconomic background:		
Parents' highest degrees:		
Neither parent college graduate	. . . .	. . . .
One parent college graduate	.069*	.027
Two parents college graduates	.072**	.021
One parent advanced degree	.096***	.018
Both parents advanced degrees	.148***	.028
Financial status:		
Parents own home	.022	.021
Income over \$100,000	-.002	.017
Receiving financial assistance	-.036	.020
Neighborhood circumstances:		
Average minority percentage	.000	.001
Exposure to disorder	.002	.001
Exposure to violence	-.001	.001
High school background:		
Kind of school:		
Public	. . . .	. . . .
Private religious	.003	.017
Private nonreligious	.013	.025
Level of segregation:		
Predominantly white	. . . .	. . . .

TABLE 7 (Continued)

Independent Variable	Unstandardized Regression Coefficient	SE
Mixed	-.027	.020
Predominantly minority	-.034	.039
Academic preparation:		
AP courses taken	.009	.005
High school GPA	.382***	.033
Self-rated preparation	.022***	.003
SAT score (00)	.069***	.009
Peer environment:		
Support for academic effort	.001	.002
Support for delinquency	-.002	.002
Support for independence	.001	.003
Social preparation:		
Susceptibility to peer influence	.007***	.002
Social distance from whites	.002	.002
Number of white friends	.001	.004
Psychological preparation:		
Self-esteem	.003	.002
Self-efficacy	-.002	.004
Selectivity of school:		
Mean institutional SAT (00)	-.060***	.016
Private institution	.066*	.029
Intercept	1.408***	.179
$R^2$	.381***	
$N$	2,229	

NOTE.—GPA = grade point average; AP = advanced placement; SAT = Scholastic Aptitude Test.

- \*  $p < .05$ .
- \*\*  $p < .01$ .
- \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 8 concludes the analysis by comparing black natives and black immigrants directly to determine whether the process by which grades are determined by measured factors differs between groups. By focusing only on blacks and dividing them according to immigrant versus native origins, we dramatically decrease the sample size for analysis. In order to conserve degrees of freedom, therefore, we only included those variables that were significant in table 7 in the regression used to compare black immigrants and natives. The two equations generally look similar and explain roughly the same proportion of variance in the outcome measure. In both groups, coming from a family that employed strict discipline is associated with a lower GPA; in both cases, the higher the GPA earned in high school, the greater the SAT score,

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TABLE 8

*Determinants of College GPA Earned by Black Natives and Black Immigrants Attending 28 Selective Colleges and Universities*

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE	BLACK NATIVES		BLACK IMMIGRANTS	
	Unstandardized Regression Coefficient	SE	Unstandardized Regression Coefficient	SE
Family social background:				
Gender (male)	-.097**	.035	.004	.047
Child-rearing style (severity of discipline)	-.005*	.002	-.012**	.004
Socioeconomic background:				
Parents' highest degrees:				
Neither parent college graduate	. . .	. . .	. . .	. . .
One parent college graduate	.018	.053	.037	.093
Two parents college graduates	.066	.046	.135	.106
One parent advanced degree	.062	.059	.037	.089
Both parents advanced degrees	.104**	.038	.072	.078
High school background:				
Academic preparation:				
High school GPA	.336***	.057	.357**	.123
Self-rated preparation	.020*	.009	.027**	.008
SAT score (00)	.081***	.017	.079**	.024
Social preparation (susceptibility to peer influence)	.007*	.003	.027**	.008
Selectivity of school:				
Mean institutional SAT (00)	-.029	.027	-.145**	.047
Private institution	.098	.052	.250**	.078
Intercept	1.009**	.321	2.474***	.498
$R^2$	.327		.325	
$N$	522		181	

NOTE.—GPA = grade point average; SAT = Scholastic Aptitude Test.

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

\*\*\*  $p < .0013$ .

and the better one's self-rated academic preparation, the greater the GPA earned in college; the magnitudes of these effects do not vary significantly by immigrant status.

Although the small number of cases for black immigrants limits our statistical ability to detect differences between the groups, there are several noteworthy contrasts in the process of grade determination between immigrants and natives. First, only native males earned lower GPAs, not immigrant males. Second, immigrant African Americans but not their native counterparts earned

lower grades at more selective schools (those with higher average SAT scores), but immigrant blacks received a significant bonus for attending private institutions, whereas native blacks did not. Third, the effect of parental education on GPA is limited to natives, and even among them the regular monotonic effect of increasing degrees and levels of education is replaced by a significant jump in grade performance for black students only when both parents have advanced degrees. Although immigrant parents are better educated than native parents, this fact does not seem to help immigrant students that much because they are less able than their native counterparts to translate parental education into academic advantage. Finally, being susceptible to peer influence affects the grades earned by both native and immigrant blacks, but the effect is significantly stronger for the latter.

## Conclusion

In recent years, observers have increasingly recognized the overrepresentation of the children of immigrants among African Americans attending selective colleges and universities in the United States, and this fact has become the focus of a vigorous debate about the purposes of affirmative action in higher education and whether blacks of immigrant origins are appropriate beneficiaries. The debate so far, however, has transpired largely in the absence of information about the phenomenon, and in this article we have drawn upon data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen to provide an empirical foundation for future discussions.

The NLSF surveyed the cohort of freshmen entering 28 selective colleges and universities in the fall of 1999, and using these data we are able to shed light on the extent to which immigrant-origin blacks are overrepresented as students in different segments of American academia. In general, we found the overrepresentation of immigrants to be greater in private than in public institutions and within more rather than less selective schools. Thus, black immigrants constituted 29 percent of freshmen entering private institutions but only 23 percent of those enrolling in public schools. Within the private sector there was no difference in the representation of immigrant origins among blacks attending research universities versus liberal arts colleges, but differences were observed by institutional selectivity. Immigrants constituted 35 percent of black students in the 10 most selective institutions in the NLSF sample but just 24 percent in the 10 least selective schools. Within the Ivy League, perhaps the most exclusive segment of American higher education, students of immigrant origin made up 41 percent of entering black freshmen.

Given that first- and second-generation immigrants make up just 13 percent of the African American population, the overrepresentation of immigrant

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origins is substantial within all segments of elite academia. Nonetheless, data from the NLSF suggest relatively few and generally modest differences in the social origins between black students of immigrant and native origins. In terms of most indicators—income, wealth, parental employment, parental child-rearing practices, peer support, perceptions of social distance, academic preparation, and academic achievement—the two groups are virtually identical. Demographically, students of immigrant origin are more likely to say they are of Hispanic, mixed, or other origins than are natives, and they are more likely to report being Catholic. They are also somewhat more likely to come from two-parent families.

Perhaps the most critical difference, however, is that black immigrant fathers were far more likely to have graduated from college and to hold advanced degrees than native fathers. Possibly as a result of this difference, immigrant children were more likely to attend private school, and in this setting they experienced a lower exposure to violence than the children of native blacks and modestly more exposure to members of other groups. Black immigrant students were more likely to have grown up within integrated neighborhoods and thus to have more nonblack friends and to have emerged from high school with a low susceptibility to peer influence. In the end, however, for black students placed in elite schools, susceptibility to peer influence turned out to be a good thing.

Although the NLSF data do not permit a direct assessment of the mechanism by which immigrant-origin students came to be overrepresented at elite colleges and universities, the fact that most indicators of socioeconomic status, social preparation, psychological readiness, and especially academic preparation are identical for immigrants and natives suggests that immigrant origins per se are not favored in the admissions process but, for whatever reason, children from immigrant families have come to exhibit the set of traits and characteristics valued by admissions committees, both those that are readily observable (grade point average, quality of high school, and advanced placement courses taken) and those that are more difficult to observe directly (self-esteem, self-efficacy, and social distance from whites).

The fact that immigrant parents are much better educated than native parents is consistent with an immigrant population that is highly selected for human capital and the drive to attain it, traits that are passed on to children to put them into a superior position for admission to a selective college or university. Once on campus, however, immigrant- and native-origin African Americans perform roughly at the same academic level, earning comparable grades and displaying a similar performance gap relative to whites. Evidence of the high motivation and determination of immigrant-origin black students is that the process of college grade achievement appears to be considerably more arduous for them relative to their native counterparts. Once on campus,

the advantages of high parental education appear to be erased, as immigrant blacks are less able than natives to translate parental education into high grades and are less able to convert advance placement courses and self-confidence into academic achievement.

Ultimately, the data we have presented cannot answer the question of whether the children of black immigrants are worthy beneficiaries of affirmative action, for the answer rests largely on a moral judgment about whether the policy is a form of restitution for past racial injustice or a mechanism to ensure that selective schools continue to reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of a nation that is being transformed by immigration. All we can say is that, with several notable exceptions, black immigrants and natives display similar traits and characteristics and, more important, evince equal levels of academic preparation. Whatever processes are operating on college campuses to depress black academic performance below that of whites with similar characteristics, they function for immigrants as well as natives.

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