

Chapter One

OVERVIEW

BY THE END OF the 1970s the U.S. civil rights revolution had reached full flower. The Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) overturned the “separate but equal” doctrine enshrined in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and put a constitutional end to forced school segregation based on race. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 etched the *Brown* decision into law and ended legalized racial discrimination in government, employment, and public accommodation. A surge in black voter registration was prompted by the Voting Rights Act of 1965, aided in large measure by federal monitoring efforts built into the law. The Fair Housing Act of 1968 banned racial discrimination in the sale or rental of housing, together with discriminatory practices in lending and insurance. These provisions were supplemented by additional safeguards during the 1970s. Chief among them was the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977, which prohibited “redlining”—the practice of denying mortgages based on the racial composition of the neighborhood. The sweeping changes that *Brown* ushered in took nearly twenty-five years to accomplish, but they effectively put an end to legalized discrimination based on race (Massey, 2007).

Civil and political equality did not guarantee immediate equality in other areas. The effect of the civil rights legislation was to push some discriminatory practices and attitudes underground, making them more subtle, less overt, and harder to detect—what Massey (2007: 110) has described as “discrimination with a smile.” In addition, the historical legacy of racial discrimination cannot be eliminated overnight. Some blacks who attended segregated elementary schools prior to the 1954 *Brown* decision are still in the labor force. As a consequence, breaking down legal barriers separating black and white society has not translated either instantaneously or spontaneously into complete equality.

Deep racial divisions in social and economic outcomes remain. Whites and Asians typically exhibit the “best” outcomes, and blacks and Hispanics the poorest. More than 30 percent of white and nearly 50 percent of Asian adults over the age of twenty-five have earned at least a baccalaureate degree, as compared with 18 percent of blacks and just 12 percent of Hispanics. Two-thirds of whites and Asians report they are in excellent or very good health, in contrast to one-half of blacks and Hispanics.

Median household income for whites and Asians is about two-thirds higher than that among black and Hispanic households. Moreover, median household wealth for whites exceeds that for blacks by a factor of ten to one (Wolff, 2007). Poverty and incarceration rates are significantly higher for blacks and Hispanics than for whites and Asians (Western, 2006). Racial patterns of residential segregation suggest that blacks are more spatially isolated from whites than either Asians or Hispanics are, although the degree of segregation of blacks from whites across metropolitan areas has been declining since at least 1980 (Iceland, Weinberg, and Steinmetz, 2002).¹

QUESTIONS ASKED

Many solutions have been proposed for healing these divisions, but education—and especially higher education—has traditionally been believed by most Americans to be an effective strategy.² In this book we address the role of elite higher education in confronting issues of inequality on U.S. college campuses. Specifically, our aim is to draw back the curtain on the selective college experience and take a close look at how race and social class are intimately intertwined with the admission process and with the academic and nonacademic sides of campus life. We ask three central questions. First, to what extent is American elite higher education involved in promoting social mobility? We know, for instance, that the economic return to a college degree is increasing and that the return to a selective college or university education is rising even faster. Therefore, mobility chances in the population are deeply affected by exactly who is profiting from the kind of education selective colleges offer.

¹Unless otherwise noted, data in this paragraph come from *Racial and Ethnic Diversity: Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Whites*, compiled by New Strategist Editors (2006). This source also contains racial comparisons for homeownership rates, median values of owner-occupied housing units, percent of the population lacking health insurance, unemployment rates, percent of the employed population in white-collar jobs, and the living arrangements of children, among other indicators. Each of these tends to substantiate the general finding that the average social and economic status of whites and Asians out-ranks that of blacks and Hispanics. Other examples can be found in Massey (2007).

²In summarizing results from the Brookings Institution's Economic Mobility Project, Sawhill (2008: 6–7) has noted, "There is a widely held belief in America that education is the great leveler, and there is strong evidence that education contributes substantially to earnings and that it can boost the mobility of children from poor and low-income families." For example, 19 percent of adult children with a college degree who were born to parents in the bottom fifth of the income distribution end up in the top fifth of the income distribution. There is a 62 percent chance they will be middle class or higher as adults (Haskins, 2008).

One view is that selective institutions are in the best position to create opportunity for students from traditionally marginalized groups because these schools have wide latitude in choosing whom to recruit, admit, enroll, and graduate. Elite institutions, it is argued, have sufficient numbers of well-qualified applicants as well as the endowments to accomplish the three objectives of greatest concern to admission officers: (1) meeting bottom-line financial targets, (2) enrolling a freshman class capable of doing the academic work, and (3) crafting a first-year class with ample amounts of diversity along racial and other dimensions (Duffy and Goldberg, 1998). Opportunity in higher education has been expanding for racial minorities. In the Ivy League, for instance, black enrollment increased from an estimated 2.3 percent of all students in 1967 (Karen, 1991a) to 5.7 percent by 2006 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007d). Corresponding proportions of black students at four-year, private institutions rose from 8.2 to 13.4 percent between 1976 and 2005 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006).

An alternative view is that selective colleges and universities are under great pressure from financial aid officers, trustees, and alumni to enroll the kinds of students who will make minimal demands on their institutions' financial aid budgets and help ensure their alma maters' longevity through continued monetary contributions long after they graduate. In this view, students who are most likely to be admitted, enroll, and graduate are those whose families occupy the more privileged positions in society. By sending their offspring to a selective college or university, parents are hoping to ensure the future success—material and otherwise—of their children. Selective schools are believed by parents to be “reproduction insurance companies” that issue diplomas critical to the future life chances of their children (Stevens, 2007: 255). If this scenario best characterizes the behavior of elite institutions, sociologists would say these colleges are playing a pivotal role in the intergenerational transmission of inequality. Parents who are well-off in their own generation produce children who are as, or even more, successful when they become adults.³

The role played by selective institutions in creating opportunity or, alternatively, reinforcing existing inequalities takes on added significance today. Beginning with the Great Depression of the 1930s and continuing to the early 1970s, incomes in the United States were being distributed more equally. But this situation has reversed, and the past three decades have been marked by rising income inequality. The income distribution today is as unequal as it has been since the early decades of the twentieth

³A forceful exposition of these opposing depictions of selective colleges and universities has been provided by Bowen, Kurzweil, and Tobin (2005). Their concern is whether elite schools are “engines of opportunity” or “bastions of privilege.”

century (Piketty and Saez, 2003). The United States is now the most unequal nation in the developed world (Massey, 2007: 27). If there were no income inequality at all and each family had the same resources, it would matter little whether selective colleges and universities were creating opportunity. Put differently, if the mechanism that distributes social rewards is such that these rewards are widely dispersed, then somewhat less significance attaches to the question of mobility chances. But today, when income is highly concentrated at the top of the income distribution, it matters a great deal who in society has the opportunity to receive these rewards. Americans seem quite willing to tolerate a substantial amount of inequality in power, prestige, and other resources provided the chances of securing these rewards are equally distributed across all individuals (Grusky, 2001: 23).

A second set of questions revolves around the use of affirmative action by selective institutions. Most adults, whether or not they have children in college, have heard about affirmative action in higher education. And most of these adults associate affirmative action with admission preferences for members of underrepresented minority groups. But what exactly does “affirmative action” mean? What is the rationale, legal or otherwise, for race-based preferences? How critical is its use in the creation of racially diverse campuses that are so highly prized by college officials and students alike?⁴ How extensively is it practiced? Who are the beneficiaries? How much do they benefit? What role do racial preferences play in creating opportunity and upward mobility chances for students to whom the doors of selective colleges and universities might otherwise be shut? Does race-based affirmative action actually harm its intended beneficiaries? This could happen if underrepresented minority students are boosted into more competitive academic environments than their academic achievements warrant, and where they are surrounded by exceptionally talented white and Asian students.

If race-based affirmative action is the primary tool selective institutions rely on to create racial and economic diversity on their campuses, what will happen if the “protective mantle of affirmative action” is withdrawn?⁵ What impact would the elimination of affirmative action have on the racial makeup of undergraduate student bodies at selective schools?

⁴Mitchell Stevens (2007: 181) mentions three reasons why selective college admission deans care about racial diversity: (1) race-based preferences constitute a moral imperative; (2) an institution’s national prestige depends on the extent of its racial diversity; and (3) recruiting non-minority students is easier if a campus can portray itself as racially diverse.

⁵This phrase is adapted from Peter Morrison (1979: 9). Morrison shows that interregional migration to the American South and West accentuated regional differentials in population growth when overall U.S. population growth slowed in the 1970s and the “protective mantle of natural increase” was withdrawn.

For example, following the passage of Proposition 209 by California voters in 1996, public institutions of higher education were prohibited from considering an applicant's race, ethnicity, or sex in admission. As a consequence, the percentage of underrepresented minority students (African American, Chicano/Latino, and American Indian) in the entering freshman class at UCLA declined from 24.4 in the fall of 1997 to 17.5 in the fall of 1998 (Cardenas, 1998). The number of black students in the first-year class in the fall of 2006 stood at just 100 out of an entering freshman class of about 4,800. This was less than half the number of black students who enrolled in 1997 and the lowest figure in thirty years (Office of Analysis and Information Management, 2007).⁶

Is the UCLA example an isolated instance, or might we expect similar impacts elsewhere if affirmative action were eliminated? Should we believe that other forms of affirmative action that might be more acceptable to a general public—for example, class-based affirmative action—could effectively substitute for racial preferences? Race-based preferences experienced a narrow escape in 2003 when the U.S. Supreme Court approved by the smallest of margins a continuation of race-based affirmative action under tightly drawn conditions (*Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003) at the University of Michigan Law School. But can we confidently expect that racial affirmative action will be legally permissible forever? Voters in Washington State, Michigan, and Nebraska have prohibited racial affirmative action, other states are considering similar bans, and affirmative action was set aside by gubernatorial action in Florida. There was a possibility that, following the November 2008 elections, more than 30 percent of Americans would live in states where racial preferences in public higher education had been outlawed (Schmidt, 2007d). Conservative appointments to the U.S. Supreme Court since *Grutter* may also suggest that race-based preferences have a limited life expectancy. What are states going to do to maintain racial diversity if they lose the policy tool of affirmative action? What long-term solutions exist to the gradual asphyxiation of racial preferences?

A third issue we address relates to campus life itself. Sometimes lost between a preoccupation with admission practices on the one hand and graduation rates on the other is a concern for students themselves—who

⁶In November 2006, voters in Michigan overwhelmingly approved Proposition 2—an amendment to the state constitution whose wording and intent are very similar to those of Proposition 209 in California. The new measure took effect in January 2007 when a portion of the incoming freshman class for the fall of 2007 had already been admitted. Nevertheless, the proportion of minority students (black, Hispanic, and Native American) in the entering freshman class declined from 12.7 percent to 11.4 percent between the fall of 2006 and the fall of 2007. The full effect of Proposition 2 will not be felt until the fall of 2008 (University of Michigan News Service, 2007).

they are, what they learn both inside and outside the classroom, and generally what happens to them while they are in college. We know one thing for certain. Every selective college and university values diversity in all its many forms and has taken deliberate steps to enroll a diverse freshman class. Unlike the broader adult society, diverse racial groups of students are in close contact on campus. Students from different backgrounds sleep in the same dorms; they eat in the same dining halls; they mainly wear the same clothing styles and carry the same backpacks; and they go to class together. College officials have seen to it that racial groups are no longer separate. But does this mean they are equal? There are different ways to anticipate an answer.

There are good reasons to expect that the kinds of student bodies that emerge from highly competitive admission processes at selective institutions are ones in which the outlines of social and economic inequality, so evident in U.S. society, have largely been expunged or at least masked. First, the academic bar for admission is set very high. Only those relatively few students who are judged capable of handling the academic workload are accepted. Second, elite schools tend to want the very best students in all senses of that concept. Students, in other words, are chosen from the upper tail of whatever distribution they belong to (Klitgaard, 1985). Third, all elite institutions have endowments that put them in the top ranks of the college wealth distribution. This institutional munificence is not only a source of generous financial aid. It also subsidizes field trips and other learning initiatives, emergency spending accounts, and other little-noticed interventions that help smooth over latent social class differences. Fourth, students cheer for the same teams, wear the same robes and receive the same diplomas at graduation (Stevens, 2007), and are united in their proud claim to be a “son” or “daughter” of “Ivy U.” Students may arrive on campus with some of the rougher edges of inequality still visible. But the socializing experiences they encounter during their college careers are likely to have a homogenizing influence that smoothes out many of the remaining contours of inequality.

On the other hand, a different perspective suggests that, despite the prevalence of these unifying forces, campus life is better characterized as a microcosm of the wider society. If so, the privilege or disadvantage associated with race and social class might not be so easily erased.⁷ One

⁷For example, as Massey (2007: 52) has observed, “History aside, there are also good social scientific reasons to expect that categorical mechanisms of racial stratification will prove resistant to change. We know, for example, that once learned, cognitive structures do not simply disappear. Racial schemas honed over generations tend to persist in the minds of adults and get passed on to children in conscious and unconscious ways. Likewise, institutions and practices that have evolved over centuries do not just cease to exist when laws change.”

area of concern, reinforced by the durability of racial stereotypes, focuses on campus patterns of student interaction across racial and ethnic group boundaries. Admission officers might be doing an excellent job of building a diverse freshman class, only to have smaller and relatively homogeneous subgroups of students break off into their own “silos” once school begins. Moreover, it appears as though the majority of race, ethnic, and gender studies courses are populated disproportionately by members of the groups being studied. If these outcomes are a common occurrence, what do they suggest about the presumed educational and other benefits of attending a diverse campus? The existence at some colleges of “theme dorms” oriented to particular racial or ethnic groups, stories about “all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria,”⁸ and unfortunate racial incidents serve to highlight issues of self-segregation among undergraduate students.⁹

Students from lower-income groups who attend elite institutions may also have a hard time fitting in. Despite the growing generosity of financial aid packages that Harvard, Princeton, Yale, and others among the nation’s wealthiest institutions can afford to offer, most needy students are still expected to contribute a modest portion of their support through work-study jobs on campus (Tilghman, 2007). If these positions are highly visible to other students (for example, working at the front desk in the library or helping in the kitchen), they are ostensible reminders of social class distinctions. Other obvious markers include spending large amounts of time in the computer lab because one lacks a personal laptop, declining invitations to eat off campus because free meals are available in the campus dining hall, and not knowing where the Hamptons are (Schweitzer, 2006). Speaking about Yale University, one student who participates in a support group for low-income students called Class Matters said, “I mean I am glad to be part of this club, this very elite, very private club. I just wish someone had given me some clue about what it was beforehand” (Schweitzer, 2006).

If indeed college life reflects the inequality embedded in broader U.S. society, what does it mean? What are its implications, for example, for academic performance in the classroom? Does it suggest that minority students might be having a difficult time holding their own against more

⁸“*Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*” is the title of a book about racial identity development by Beverly Daniel Tatum (1997), president of Spelman College.

⁹A series of racially polarizing events, incivility on campus, racial slurs on message boards, and black students being stopped at the campus library and asked to show ID are just some of the examples that prompted one black Trinity College student to say, “There are times when I want to feel good about Trinity, and then. . . I’m reminded of the underlying disgust that we have here for each other” (Hu, 2006). See also Schmidt (2008).

affluent and perhaps better-prepared white students? What about paying for college and the burden of college loans and accumulated debt? Who bears this debt? How does it constrain post-graduation options? What about satisfaction with college when students look back? How do graduates of selective colleges and universities evaluate their overall undergraduate experience? Are they satisfied with their academic experience? Do they rate positively their social experiences on campus? We might expect to see differences by race and by social class in average group levels of satisfaction. If we do, what are the implications? Finally, what do prospective students and parents who are contemplating sending their children to elite colleges need to know about these institutions ahead of time?

RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER

We focus quite intentionally on race and social class, two of the three meat-and-potatoes dimensions of inequality (along with gender) in the stratification literature. It is commonly agreed by social scientists that the concept of race is socially constructed. Whatever physical or genetic differences may exist are largely inconsequential (Brest and Oshige, 1995). But “race” nevertheless has social meaning.¹⁰ Whenever similarly situated blacks and whites are treated differently in housing and lending markets—whether in locating suitable housing, being steered toward particular neighborhoods, or applying for and receiving mortgage loans (Massey, 2007: 76–84)—then race matters. When blacks without a criminal record are called back for job interviews at lower rates than otherwise comparable whites who have a conviction for a nonviolent drug offense (Pager, 2003), then race matters. And when racial profiling is used to stop, question, and search blacks more often than whites, or when peremptory challenges are used to exclude potential black jurors more frequently than whites (Kennedy, 2001), then race matters.¹¹

¹⁰As noted in the introduction to the National Research Council’s two-volume study on racial trends and their consequences in the United States, “The concepts of race and ethnicity are social realities because they are deeply rooted in the consciousness of individuals and groups, and because they are firmly fixed in our society’s institutional life” (Smelser, Wilson, and Mitchell, 2001: 3). Analyses in this book are conducted using four primary race/ethnic groupings, including white, black, Hispanic, and Asian. Even though the Hispanic category is not usually considered a “race,” and indeed a separate question about Hispanic ethnicity is asked on the U.S. decennial census form, we will frequently employ the shorthand term “race” when we mean a combination of race and ethnicity as these terms are typically understood.

¹¹*Race Matters* is the title of an often frank, yet surprisingly healing, discussion by Cornel West (2001) of race relations in the United States.

Social class also matters. As David Grusky (2001: 25) has observed, “Class background affects a wide range of individual outcomes,” including consumption patterns, values and attitudes, religious affiliation, and voting behavior.¹² Social class influences parenting styles and child-rearing behaviors. Many middle- and upper-middle-class parents are engaged in a process of “concerted cultivation,” in contrast to lower- and working-class families whose children are reared using the “accomplishment of natural growth,” characterized by a *laissez-faire* approach (Lareau, 2003). Individuals from upper social classes not only live longer than those from lower social strata, but they are treated differently by doctors, nurses, and hospitals when they become ill (Scott, 2005). Students from poorer and working-class families are more reluctant than their middle-class peers to take risks in the curriculum. The tendency is to avoid courses that sound interesting but in which students fear they might not do well (Alves, 2006). In addition, students from poorer backgrounds are less likely to graduate from high school, enroll in college, and earn a college degree (Kahlenberg, 2004).

We also consider gender, but we do not give it the same attention as race or social class. We have, of course, collected data about and from both men and women. More important, all of our statistical work includes gender as one of the explanatory categories. But we have not emphasized this dimension in our work. To do so would expand the length of our study beyond useful limits. Moreover, gender explains a declining share of variance in both personal and family income, while the explanatory power of class is rising (Massey, 2007: 252–57). Finally, discussions of gender stratification typically focus on discrimination against women, but female students outnumber their male counterparts in two-year and four-year colleges (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2007). In short, we have chosen to emphasize the aspects of inequality in higher education that are arguably the most controversial and receiving the most attention today.

DATA FOR THIS STUDY

This study focuses on the selective college experience. We concentrate on schools in this range not because we believe they are representative of all

¹²Grusky (2001: 4) defines social classes or strata as discrete groups “whose members are endowed with similar levels or types of assets.” Massey describes social strata using the metaphor of layers of sedimentary rock. He notes, “In an analogous manner, societies may be conceptualized as having social strata, different layers that are distinctive in composition and characterized by more or less access to material, symbolic, and emotional resources. Stratification systems order people vertically in a social structure characterized by a distinct top and bottom” (2007: 2).

of American higher education. Clearly, they are not. But we believe that elite higher education is well positioned to assume a leadership role, as recent initiatives in financial aid so amply illustrate. What makes selective institutions worth studying is that they are often in the vanguard of innovative change in higher education.

Our National Study of College Experience (NSCE) is based on an analysis of new data collected from eight academic institutions that are part of the College and Beyond database assembled by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. These NSCE schools include public and private research universities in addition to small liberal arts colleges, and they have geographic spread encompassing all parts of the country. The schools in our sample are representative of the most highly rated universities in the United States.¹³

The participating institutions supplied individual student data on all applicants for admission in the fall of 1983, 1993, and 1997. Altogether, there are more than 245,000 records in our administrative database. Administrative data are supplemented by a student survey that was completed by almost 9,100 respondents. Finally, information from existing sources was added to students' records. This includes data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the National Center for Education Statistics, The College Board, the Educational Testing Service, and the U.S. Department of Education. Additional information about the NSCE database is contained in appendix A.¹⁴ Detailed descriptions of how methodological issues are handled can be found in appendix B.

PLAN OF THE BOOK

We take a chronological approach to the process of college application, admission, enrollment, and graduation. Chapter 2 examines characteris-

¹³When we compare the characteristics of our eight NSCE institutions against the top 50 universities as rated by *U.S. News & World Report*, we find no statistically meaningful differences between the average characteristics of either group. For example, when the NSCE average is given first, the results are: the 2004 acceptance rate (35% v. 38%); total enrollment in fall 2004 (18,000 v. 18,800); 2004 graduation rate (88% v. 87%); percent of classes with fewer than 20 students (61 v. 57); student/faculty ratio in 2004 (10 v. 11); percent of full-time faculty (93 v. 92); SAT score of entering freshmen (1360 v. 1350); percent of freshmen in the top 10 percent of their high school class (79 v. 79); and average alumni giving rate (32% v. 28%). Data on total enrollment come from the U.S. Department of Education's IPEDS database. The remaining figures are drawn from *U.S. News & World Report* (2005).

¹⁴Data were originally collected from ten participating NSCE institutions. A decision was subsequently made to refocus the analysis on just eight of these schools. See appendix A for details.

tics of applicants to selective institutions. We consider students' academic qualifications, their demographic and socioeconomic background, and how prominent immigrant and second-generation students are in the applicant pool. We explore strategies students and their parents use to position applicants for admission to the nation's top schools. We ask to what extent these approaches emphasize academic excellence versus extracurricular activities, and how the strategies vary by race and by social class.

Chapter 3 explores the admission process. Here institutional gatekeepers come into the picture. We investigate factors that are most important in determining which candidates are offered a seat in the freshman class. Our analysis provides answers to how strong race-based preferences are and which students benefit the most. Critics of elite college admission policies argue that low-income students receive no extra consideration in admission. We are interested in whether this charge has merit at the most selective institutions. Among all of the strategies students pursue to give themselves an edge in admission, we study what makes a difference and what does not. Finally, we give a preliminary answer to the question of whether, in deciding whom to admit, selective colleges are providing opportunity for underrepresented groups—both in terms of race and class—or are administering an admission process that favors applicants from upper social class categories.

Chapter 4 moves on to consider the characteristics of admitted students who subsequently enroll at selective institutions. We highlight the profiles of matriculants using high school academic performance indicators; demographic, immigrant-, and national-origin background factors; and alternative measures of social class. High school and neighborhood characteristics of enrolled students, and how these vary by race and social class, are featured in the comparisons.

We consider in chapter 5 the extent to which students at selective colleges engage with diversity. We first examine students' participation in ethnic studies courses and ethnically oriented extracurricular activities, and how these tendencies vary by race. From there we focus on patterns of social interaction among students across racial and ethnic categories. Data on the extent of general socializing on campus with members of different racial and ethnic groups, on students' roommates and their ethnic origins, on best-friend networks, and on dating patterns in college permit an examination of social integration or, alternatively, self-segregation. We are especially interested in how the extent of social integration versus racial isolation differs by racial group affiliation.

The topic of academic performance in college is studied in chapter 6. Here we examine graduation rates, choice of college major, and class rank at graduation and how these vary by race and social class. We consider the effects of college selectivity and examine the claim that race-based

affirmative action harms its intended beneficiaries by boosting students into exceptionally competitive academic environments. The extent to which academic “underperformance” is prevalent, and whether it persists once other potential explanatory factors are introduced, is also explored.

Elite college tuition has been steadily rising. How students and their families pay for college is studied in chapter 7. We examine tuition levels before and after financial aid is taken into account. We study how net college costs vary by race, by social class, and by type of institution attended (whether private or public and, in the latter case, whether one is an in-state or out-of-state student). Loans figure prominently in whether some students can afford to attend a selective institution. How accumulated loan debt is distributed across different categories of students is assessed. We are especially interested in the financial burden of an elite college education relative to a family’s household income and net worth, and how this burden varies by race and social class. These results help us determine how level the financial playing field is among graduates from selective institutions.

Chapter 8 considers a series of broader perspectives on the selective college experience. We take up first the often controversial issue of race-based affirmative action, examining the various justifications for racial preferences and how the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled on these rationales. Next, we explore how much students feel they learned during college from students with different racial or ethnic backgrounds. We examine in particular the connection between learning from difference and having the kinds of experiences in college that put students in close touch with peers from other-race groups. A third topic focuses on students’ satisfaction with their college academic and social experiences. We examine how student satisfaction varies by race and by social class. Finally, we continue our exploration of whether selective colleges are engines of opportunity or bastions of privilege. We focus particular attention on how the proportion of enrolled students from upper-middle- and upper-class backgrounds changes across successive entering freshman cohorts. We also examine in one cohort how the proportion of students from high social class backgrounds expands or contracts as one moves from the applicant pool to the set of admitted students, to those who enroll, and finally to those who graduate.

Chapter 9 takes a single issue and studies it from a variety of vantage points. The question is whether there is any realistic alternative to race-based affirmative action that has the capacity to produce the same proportion of underrepresented minority students among the group of admitted students. We examine first the effects of eliminating racial preferences, then of substituting class-based affirmative action for race-based preferences, of combining racial and class-based preferences, of admitting

students on the basis of a high class rank in secondary school or SAT scores alone, and of downplaying to varying degrees the importance of an applicant's academic qualifications. Finally, we consider the efficacy of a non-admission strategy. Specifically, we explore the impact on the racial composition of admitted students of closing the racial achievement gap. Our concern is whether closing this gap could preserve shares of under-represented minority students if racial preferences were eliminated.

Chapter 10 examines the implications of our previous findings. In doing so it fleshes out three remaining challenges confronting selective higher education and, more generally, society at large. One of these challenges is the need for an even stronger commitment on the part of selective institutions to provide opportunity to a broad cross-section of undergraduate students. A second challenge focuses on attempts to combat racial balkanization on selective campuses. Colleges and universities must work harder to provide constructive opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds to come together frequently and productively over the course of their collegiate careers to make the most of campus diversity. Finally, we issue a challenge to all Americans to address the racial achievement gap—a gap that higher education acting alone is incapable of fixing. This performance gap affects selective colleges and universities. It also contributes significantly to adult levels of social and economic inequality; it influences the economy's ability to compete in a global marketplace; and it limits opportunities to open up pathways to leadership for all racial and social class groups.