# Head Starts

**The High-Status Track.** Studies of Elite Schools and Stratification. PAUL WILLIAM KINGSTON and LIONEL S. LEWIS, Eds. State University of New York Press, Albany, 1990. xxxiv, 261 pp., illus. $54.50; paper, $17.95. SUNY Series, Frontiers in Education.

Does it matter where one goes to college? There is no question that going to college is a necessary step in the process of getting ahead in our society, but the public's attention to *U.S. News and World Report*'s annual survey of U.S. colleges and universities (consistently one of the best-selling issues) indicates a perception that where one goes also matters. Yet this perception—that which college one attends strongly affects one's life chances for high income and status— is rather at odds, the editors of *The High-Status Track* point out, with many research findings. Whereas some commentators have noticed repeatedly that societal elites disproportionately come from elite colleges, sociologists analyzing national-level data have found relatively minor effects across the entire U.S. population.

This discrepancy between views can be traced to reliance on different data sources. As the contributions in this volume amply demonstrate, a relatively weak relationship between college rank and labor market outcomes can mask a quite strong association within the small elite sector. To address the dynamics of this sector one needs more refined data. Here Kingston and Lewis have brought together a group of academics who have focused centrally on the issue of elite schools and their graduates' social destinations. The contributors have formulated questions specifically addressing the issue and (despite a focus on the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant elite) bring to bear a diversity of theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches, and data in addressing them. The data sources used include compilations from *Who's Who*, the *Social Register*, and admissions records of elite schools; original interviews with business managers, a survey of law school students, and a survey of recruiters at an elite business school; ethnographic and survey data from preparatory schools; and even national data sets, with proper adaptations for the authors' specific interest. The conclusions all suggest that there is indeed a "high-status track" of elite institutions disproportionately attended by the already advantaged and disproportionately enhancing the opportunities for success of those most highly socially endowed.

The ten essays in the collection—two on elite preparatory schools, six on elite undergraduate institutions, and two on professional schools—together constitute the single best compilation of research on these issues.

In the introduction, the editors place the elite institutions in comparative perspective and lay out the empirical and theoretical issues involved in studying them. Noting the general connection between academic and social elitism in these institutions, Kingston and Lewis raise questions about the connections among elite preparatory, undergraduate, and professional schools in terms of personnel and student transfer; the differential access of graduates of elite schools to the upper end of the occupational hierarchy; the roles of standardized tests and of family background in access to elite schools; and, insofar as these schools improve the life chances of their graduates, the precise means by which they do so.

In one of the outstanding chapters in the book Persell and Cookson, drawing on the data from their comprehensive study of boarding schools (*Preparing for Power*, Basic Books, 1985), focus on the specific mechanisms by which elite boarding schools are able to pass along to their graduates advantages that are unavailable to others. This process of "chartering," Persell and Cookson argue, is accomplished, in part, through a well-developed set of organizational and personal connections among elite institutions and their representatives. Their empirical findings, including the systematic "bartering" between elite boarding schools and elite college admission offices, show how class privilege is transmitted through ostensibly meritocratic processes.

James Hearn, relying on one of those nationally representative data sets (in this case, High School and Beyond, focusing on 1980 high school seniors) that heretofore have yielded relatively little information about elite colleges, provides us with some very useful information about what attributes of individuals appear to matter most in gaining access to selective colleges. His most important finding is that, even among those of exceptional ability, family income plays a large role. Aside from his specific findings and his clear presentation of quantitative results, Hearn's contribution lies in his success in focusing a large data set on the specific questions he wishes to address, drawing suitable conclusions from his data, and suggesting key avenues for further research that go beyond his data.

Useem and Karabel draw on a unique compilation of information about senior managers and directors of large U.S. companies to analyze whether and how much attendance at top colleges or top M.B.A. programs affects ascendance within the business world. Specifically, they examine how these factors affect the probability that a manager will become a chief executive officer, gain multiple directorships, or become a business association leader. Interestingly, even among this already successful group, having an educational credential from an elite school enhances the likelihood of career advancement as measured by each of the three criteria. They also show that an upper-status family origin significantly improves the likelihood of gaining access to directorships and leadership positions in business associations—over and above the effects of the elite educational credentials.

The three chapters that attempt to locate the elite institutions in their historical context are less successful. Christopher Armstrong, in "On the making of good men: character-building in the New England boarding schools," argues that the schools have changed because they were unable "to sustain their cloistered isolation in the electronic age of automated information." It seems that the previous emphasis on control, denial, and sacrifice has slackened and a wider curriculum has evolved, yet the schools' traditional focus on sports as well as their insistence on student integrity, courtesy, and respect have remained. There is no discussion, however, of how the "electronic age" effected specific changes and why certain legacies remained.

In his two contributions, Richard Farnum presents new evidence on the historical relationship between the upper class and Ivy League institutions within particular cities. His conclusions—that the relationship between the upper class and elite institutions has weakened over time and that in cases in which the institutions lost their ties to the upper class early in the century, as at Penn and Columbia, their prestige has fallen—are not new, however. His chapter on Penn and

Columbia's loss of prestige is useful—especially for the telling anecdotes he provides—but his account of patterns of upper-class education in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore between 1875 and 1975 is only descriptive, without attempting any kind of systematic explanation for the observed patterns within each city.

All in all, this volume represents a significant contribution to our knowledge about who goes to elite institutions, how they get there, and what effects attendance has on one's life chances. Kingston and Lewis have assembled a fine body of research on consequential but rarely observed processes within educational institutions. With this book, scholarly research and public perceptions are finally in tune.

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## The Two-Year Colleges

**The Diverted Dream.** Community Colleges and the Promise of Educational Opportunity in America, 1900–1985. STEVEN BRINT and JEROME KARABEL. Oxford University Press, New York, 1989. xii, 312 pp. $24.95.

For decades, their partisans viewed junior or (in more recent terminology) community colleges as offering a solution to some of America's thorniest dilemmas about higher education. Such colleges, it was argued, had historically accorded opportunities to students otherwise barred from higher education by ethnicity, race, or religion and would provide a "safe" environment and the possibility of social and economic mobility for students who otherwise faced economic and geographic barriers to higher education. Community colleges could, furthermore, respond to local educational and economic needs better than faraway universities. The most successful community college students could transfer to four-year colleges. Other students would be prepared for entry-level positions in local industries and businesses.

The response to these claims was positive. The resemblance between the comprehensive community college and the comprehensive high school—the modal American secondary school by the 1960s—facilitated their acceptance. Local businesses applauded the job training offered by community colleges, and governments found them relatively inexpensive. In the early 1970s, several community colleges opened each week. Today, over 1200 community colleges enroll nearly 5 million students. Community colleges provide public postsecondary education that has appeared to conform to two American ideals: localism and egalitarianism.

In *The Diverted Dream*, Brint and Karabel argue that there is a gap between the egalitarian claims and the actuality. The title of the work refers to twin transformations. Community colleges, Brint and Karabel contend, effectively divert an upwardly aspirant student population from four-year colleges that promise status and economic security and have themselves become transformed from predominantly liberal arts institutions into predominantly vocational colleges.

Brint and Karabel present their argument through a historical analysis. In the creation of junior colleges beginning around 1900, they note, town boosterism, local economic conditions, religion, and the desire for educational expansion all played a role. University presidents wishing to divest their own institutions of the first two undergraduate years in favor of advanced education and research supported the first junior colleges. Having completed the two-year "junior" course, students could then enroll in the university, or perhaps directly in a professional school, most of which did not yet require four years of undergraduate study for admittance.

After World War I, education professors and leaders of the newly formed American Association of Junior Colleges recognized, according to Brint and Karabel, that junior colleges would remain in the shadow of four-year colleges as long as transfer remained their raison d'être. These educators argued that liberal arts programs offered false promises. Only so many professional jobs were available, and those usually went to students who enrolled in four-year colleges from the outset. Other students should set their sights on "semi-professional" jobs that were within their reach. By offering training for these jobs, two-year colleges would attain status as the capstone of the American vocational education system, then mainly located in the high schools. But students consistently preferred liberal arts transfer programs, and most community colleges remained transfer-oriented even after the educational expansion bracketed by the influxes of GIs after World War II and baby boomers in the 1960s.

The long-advocated transformation to vocationalism finally began in the late 1960s as national and state panels called for community college expansion. In the early 1970s, community colleges rapidly opened while flagship public colleges limited their undergraduate enrollments and raised their entrance requirements. Today nearly half of all community college students pursue vocational programs, some of which are designed to the specifications of prospective employers. Lost in this growth and transformation, Brint and Karabel conclude, is the possibility of significant upward mobility for most community college students.

*The Diverted Dream* argues that it was initiatives of educational leaders that have been responsible for determining the primary mission of the community college. Without advocates at the helm of universities, community colleges might not have come into existence. Without education professors and AAJC (American Association of Community and Junior Colleges since 1972) leaders, the shift to vocationalism might not have occurred.

The authors consider two other explanations for this shift. An instrumentalist explanation would assume that economic conditions and business interests drive most educational change. A student consumerism explanation would assume that educational innovations follow, rather than lead, student demand. Brint and Karabel conclude that for many years business representatives and students had little interest in community college vocational programs. (Curiously, they do not see longstanding student preference for liberal arts as evidence of student consumerism.) Neither did the federal government, which excluded community colleges from vocational education legislation until the 1960s. Educators, however, following a strategy of "anticipatory subordination" that was "inherent in their structural location," created programs that business and the governments that financed the colleges would eventually find acceptable. Thus, "the community colleges would use vocationalization to bring a stable flow of resources linked to a distinctive function, a unique identity, and, above all, a secure—indeed expanding—market niche" (p. 17).

Brint and Karabel include a case study of the Massachusetts community colleges. The dominance of private colleges inhibited the growth of public community colleges in Massachusetts, as elsewhere in the East. But, once created in the 1950s and 1960s, Massachusetts two-year colleges evolved from transfer-oriented to vocational institutions. Educators used many mechanisms to bring this change about: administrative appointments, elaborate guidance systems, enrollment ceilings in four-year colleges, structural barriers to transfer, public relations, and exchange relationships with employers. Finally, in the recession-dominated late 1970s and early 1980s, a conservative governor appointed business-oriented regents. These regents, as instrumentalists would have predicted, approved new programs only in vocational areas. And as student consumerists