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Labor Market Trajectories of Black Women in the United States, 1980 to 2010

Danielle Jackson

Graduate Center, City University of New York

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LABOR MARKET TRAJECTORIES OF BLACK WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES, 
1980 TO 2010

by

DANIELLE M. JACKSON

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the Dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Juan Battle

Date

Chair of Examining Committee

Philip Kasinitz

Date

Executive Officer

Sharon Zukin

Paul Attewell

Pamela Stone

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

LABOR MARKET TRAJECTORIES OF BLACK WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES, 1980 TO 2010

by

Danielle M. Jackson

Advisor: Professor Juan Battle

In light of several trends among Black women in the U.S., including rising levels of college degree attainment, immigration, and household headship, scholars have begun to more thoroughly explore the factors impacting Black women’s labor market outcomes (e.g., employment status, earnings, and occupational prestige). Focusing on the 30-year period of 1980 to 2010, this dissertation applies theories of social and cultural capital, intersectionality, and social mobility to the examination of Black women’s labor market trajectories according to their nativity (U.S.- vs. foreign-born status) and level of educational attainment (college-educated vs. non-college-educated). Additionally, this dissertation examines recent national data to determine which independent variables predict earnings for full-time Black women workers.

Using data from the Minnesota Population Center’s Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) of the United States Census Bureau’s 1980, 1990, and 2000 Census, and 2010-2012 American Community Survey (ACS), this study employs synthetic cohort analysis and multiple regression analyses to identify factors impacting labor market outcomes for Black women in the United States.

The findings of this research confirm the positive impact of several variables on labor market outcomes for Black women across time, including college education, foreign-born status, and employment in the public sector. Implications and policy recommendations are discussed.
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Many thanks are due to the brilliant & generous scholars in my cohort who helped me get this journey off to an amazing start. Thanks is also due to the many supportive people I've had the pleasure of working with at the following: OEODP, IRADAC, ASG, and MHC.

To the anonymous women whose life experiences serve as the inspiration and basis for this research, and to the sister-friends and family who have supported me on both coasts: THANK YOU!!
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Nearly fifty years after the passage of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, economic inequality in the United States continues to be inextricably linked to both race and gender. Contemporary research on labor market outcomes often highlights the disparities between men and women (the “gender wage gap”) and between men and women of different racial groups (the “racial wage gap”). For example, research shows that African American and Hispanic workers have consistently earned less than White and Asian workers (65 cents and 61 cents for every dollar paid to their White and Asian counterparts, respectively), while American women who work full-time year-round are paid roughly 77 cents for every dollar paid to their male counterparts (U.S. Census, 2011). In 2012, Black women earned just 68% of what White men earned (American Association of University Women, 2013; Institute for Women’s Policy Research, 2013). These last findings highlight how race and gender intersect in the labor market to shape outcomes for different groups of workers.

Black women have a long history of labor force involvement in the United States, yet they have tended to be overrepresented in the lowest paying jobs and continue to earn less than Black men and White women who are similarly educated (Alon & Haberfield, 2011; Collins, 1990; Misra, 1999). At the same time, Black women are heading households at rates higher than women of other racial groups, outpace Black men in college degree attainment, and are increasingly represented among the middle class (Marsh et al 2007; McDaniel et al 2011;

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1 The term Black will be used to refer to people of the African Diaspora, and to such populations that reside within the United States. Therefore the term “black” will be capitalized to distinguish the racial category and related identity from color. Similarly, the word “white” will be capitalized when referring to the racial category.
Newsome & Dodoo, 2002; Pattillo-McCoy, 2007). In addition, increased immigration from Africa and the Caribbean has raised new questions about the role of nativity in predicting labor market outcomes for Blacks in America (Corra and Kimuna, 2009).

For decades scholars have also debated the extent to which Blacks in the United States have been able to advance economically and achieve the American Dream, citing advances in areas such as earnings, occupational mobility, and housing, while also documenting ongoing discrimination and disadvantages faced by Blacks and other people of color (Pattillo-McCoy 1999; Robinson, 2010; Wilson, 1978). The status of Black women is particularly noteworthy due to their position at the intersection of subordinated race and gender hierarchies (Collins, 1990). Scholars also highlight the fact that there are distinct and divergent socioeconomic experiences and trajectories within race and gender groups, such that it is misleading to speak of “the” Black woman’s experience. For example, there are some Black women who are able to overcome structural disadvantage and enjoy relatively high earnings and occupational mobility, while others seem to be trapped in poor neighborhoods and low-wage jobs with few opportunities for educational or occupational advancement (James, 1999). For these reasons, it is important to track the experiences of various groups of Black women over time to assess the extent to which social mobility is a reality for different members of this race-gender group.

**Research Questions**

This research has two main objectives. The first objective, addressed in Part I of this study, is to identify how employment status, earnings, and occupational prestige vary based on the intersection of age, education, and nativity for different age cohorts of Black women in the United States from 1980 to 2010. This analysis can reveal the particular decades or life stages
where the labor market outcomes for these groups converge or diverge. What is the median income for different groups of Black women, and how does this change over time? Are there tangible differences in employment levels and occupational prestige for the various cohorts under investigation during these time periods? Are different groups of Black women experiencing progress, stagnation, or decline? It is hypothesized that foreign-born Black women will experience a more positive trajectory than U.S.-born Black women, although the Great Recession could have the effect of reversing the gains made by one or both of these groups. It is also hypothesized that college-educated women will experience a significantly more positive trajectory than non-college-educated Black women; one possibility is that this will be rooted in the rise of college-educated women over time, while another possibility is that the gap will be rooted in the declining outcomes of non-college-educated women in response to economic restructuring and the Great Recession. Comparing groups over time can reveal the points in the last three decades or in the work life cycle when immigrant status and investments in higher education resulted in greater or lesser payoffs.

The second objective of this research, addressed in Part II of this study, is to further explore the findings in Part I and identify additional factors that currently impact earnings for full-time Black women workers in the United States. Multiple regression analyses will be employed to determine which independent variables have the greatest impact on predicting earnings for Black women. What is the impact of immigrant group origin (e.g. Africa, the Caribbean) on Black women’s earnings? What is the impact of education on Black women’s earnings? How do other factors such as industry, region of residence, and marital status impact Black women’s earnings? The results of these analyses can help to shed light on the factors that currently predict Black women’s labor market outcomes.
Contribution to the Field

Few studies compare the labor market outcomes of diverse groups of Black women. This dissertation seeks to fill that void. The goal of this dissertation is to test ideas about the labor market experiences of different groups of Black women in the United States by analyzing the three most recent decades of census data and comparing these groups over time. The questions addressed by this study are: What are the labor market outcomes (i.e. employment status, earnings, and occupational prestige) of Black women in the United States according to age, nativity (U.S. vs. foreign-born status), and level of educational attainment (college educated vs. non-college-educated)? How do these labor market outcomes change throughout the life course, for different age cohorts, over a period of several decades? Do the labor market experiences of Black women over the past 30 years reflect expansion and progress or stagnation and decline? Considering the most recent national data, what factors predict earnings for Black women who are employed full-time?

The answers to the questions posed in this dissertation may shape the ways that we understand social mobility and the intersection of race, gender, education, nativity and other social identifiers in the United States. This study also seeks to provide valuable information to organizations, educators, and policy makers who want to better understand macro-level labor market trends and develop programs and policies that support the economic development of Black women and families in the United States.
Background

The following section provides an introduction to the theories that guide this dissertation, including work on intersectionality, the “immigrant advantage,” and the forms of capital that impact Black women’s labor market outcomes. This section also provides an overview of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, the methodology discussed in Chapter 3, and the organization of the dissertation.

Theoretical Framework

Several theories guide this dissertation, including work on intersectionality, the “immigrant advantage,” and the economic benefits of accruing social, cultural, and human capital, particularly as they relate to educational attainment. Gary Becker (1964) posited that human capital investments, or investments in education or training, could be made for the purpose of deriving future economic benefits. In *The Forms of Capital* (1986), Pierre Bourdieu elaborates on three distinct types of capital: economic, cultural and social. Social capital is resources based on relationships, group membership, and networks of influence and support, while cultural capital refers to non-financial social assets that promote social mobility beyond economic means, such as cultural knowledge and education. In support of these theories, scholars have documented the increased lifetime earnings advantage and occupational mobility of college degree holders over those with fewer years of formal education (McCall, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Researchers have also found that Black immigrants have an earnings attainment advantage over native-born Blacks (Corra & Kimuna, 2009; Dodoo, 1997). Three explanations predominate: ‘selectivity’, ‘demand-side’, and ‘cultural’ explanations. *Selectivity arguments*
ascribe immigrant success to the notion that immigrants generally constitute a highly selective

group with a greater likelihood for economic success in competitive labor markets. *Demand-side
arguments* suggest that Black immigrants are more favorably perceived by Whites and

employers than native-born Blacks. *Cultural arguments* posit that immigrants bring with them

group-specific attributes such as greater motivation and work ethic than native-born Blacks.

While this research does not aim to affirm or reject any of these explanations, it does aim to
determine if, when, and for what age cohorts there appears to be an ‘immigrant advantage’
among Black women workers, and to establish a foundation for further research by comparing
the labor market outcomes of native-born Black women and foreign-born Black women over a
period of three decades.

In addition, many mainstream discussions of labor market outcomes focused on “the
gender wage gap” or “the racial wage gap” continue to report findings ‘as if all females are

White and all Blacks are men’. Black women, as members of groups marginalized on the basis

of both race and gender, are positioned at the intersection of two powerful systems of oppression.
Kimberle Crenshaw first highlighted intersectionality in 1989 to conceptualize the legal system’s
gender and racial discrimination. Leslie McCall (2005) describes it as a methodology of

studying "the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationships and

subject formations" (p. 1771). The theory is currently applied to examine how interlocking

systems of oppression shape the opportunities for subjects in various social locations. In the

labor market, Black women’s collective position at or near the bottom of race- and gender-based

hierarchies of earnings and occupational prestige have led to a call for more research on the

experiences of this particular race-gender group (Collins, 1990; Amott & Matthaei, 1991;

Each of these perspectives on earnings attainment and social mobility guide this research on the labor market outcomes of Black women in the United States.

*Literature Review*

Since the passing of civil rights legislation in the 1960s banning discrimination on the basis of race, researchers have debated the extent to which Blacks and other minorities in the United States have been able to advance economically and achieve the American Dream. Historically, Black women have had higher rates of labor force participation than women of other races, yet research shows that they were often relegated to the lowest paying, least prestigious, and most difficult jobs (Wallace et al, 1980; Pettit & Ewert, 2009; Branch, 2011). In the U.S, Blacks are the only racial or ethnic group for whom women represent a larger share of the employed than do men - more than half (53.8 percent) of employed Blacks in 2011 were women, compared to 46 percent among employed Whites. Nonetheless, employed Black women earned roughly 91 cents to every dollar earned by Black men (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012).

Despite the persistent labor market disadvantages experienced by Black women, research shows that many Black women experienced substantial gains in earnings and occupational mobility immediately after the passing of civil rights legislation, when many left domestic work to take on jobs in the public sector (King, 1995; Newsome & Dodoo, 2002). Much of the recent literature on the socioeconomic condition of Blacks in the United States has emphasized bifurcation, or a growing chasm between the college-educated Black middle class on the one hand and an increasingly disadvantaged group of poorer, less-educated Blacks on the other (Lacy, 2007; Landry, 1987; Misra, 1999; Wilson, 1978). Several studies have identified differential labor market outcomes for Black women workers based on factors such as education,
region, and industry (e.g. James, 1999; Leicht, 2008; Newsome & Dodoo, 2002). More recent studies (e.g. Corra & Kimuna, 2012; Model, 2008) also consider the role of nativity in predicting Black women’s employment, earnings, and occupational prestige.

Ultimately this research aims to build upon existing literature in several important ways. Existing literature tends to examine only one outcome (such as earnings) and does not compare age cohorts. This research will track multiple labor market outcomes for Black women in the United States over a period of three decades. There are also very few nationally representative studies focusing on Black women, thus this research will address that gap and identify potential conduits & barriers to Black women’s labor market success.

Methodology

Much of the prior research on labor market outcomes focuses on predicting employment status, earnings, or occupational prestige. Employment status and earnings are important objective indicators of labor market success and personal well-being (Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993), while occupational prestige, a subjective measure, has important implications for workers’ social and material rewards (Ortiz & Roscigno, 2009; Xu & Leffler, 1992). Given the importance of these outcomes for workers’ well-being and life chances, each will be assessed in this study.

Data employed in this dissertation is drawn from the Minnesota Population Center’s Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) of the United States Census Bureau’s 1980, 1990, and 2000 Census, and the 2010-2012 American Community Survey (ACS). This study uses synthetic cohort analysis and multiple regression analyses to test and apply theories of social and cultural capital, intersectionality, and social mobility to the population of Black women over time. These data were chosen because of their large sample size, which allow for
robust statistical analyses. These surveys also include the variables necessary to successfully investigate the questions posed in this dissertation. This study includes only those female respondents between the ages of 25-64 who were in the labor force and were not enrolled in school. As in prior studies of workers (e.g. Newsome & Dodoo, 2002; Xu & Leffler, 1992), the analyses for income will be restricted to individuals who worked full-time to minimize the effects of unemployment and underemployment on earnings comparisons.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation seeks to explore how employment status, earnings, and occupational prestige vary based on the intersection of age, educational attainment, and nativity for different age cohorts of Black women in the United States from 1980 to 2010, and to assess which factors currently have the greatest impact on earnings for Black women in the United States. Chapter 2 includes a review of the growing body of literature related to the micro- and macro-level factors that impact labor market outcomes for Black women. This includes literature on determinants of employment and earnings for Blacks and women in general and for Black women specifically. This chapter also explores Becker’s theory of human capital, Bourdieu’s theories of social and cultural capital, theories of immigrant advantage, and the work of Collins and other feminist theorists of intersectionality.

Chapter 3 details the methodology employed for this dissertation. It includes the analytic strategy and a detailed description of the independent and dependent variables utilized in this study and operational definitions for each variable.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the analyses detailed in Chapter 3. It includes a discussion of the demographic variables that impact Black women’s employment status,
earnings, and occupational prestige from 1980 to 2010. It also includes a discussion of the factors that currently predict earnings for full-time Black women workers.

Chapter 5 includes an analysis of the results presented in Chapter 4 and discusses the results in light of the theoretical perspectives presented in Chapter 2.

Chapter 6 is the final chapter. This chapter revisits the purpose of the study and provides an overview of the practical and theoretical importance of the research findings and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter 1, Introduction, opened with a discussion of contemporary labor market trends impacting Black women in America. It also included a summary of the various elements of this dissertation. This chapter will review the growing body of literature related to labor market outcomes for Black women. This includes discussion of the historic and ongoing impacts of discrimination, education, and immigration on Black women’s labor market experiences. This chapter will also explore Becker’s theory of human capital and Bourdieu’s theories of social and cultural capital, theories of immigrant advantage, and the work of Collins and other feminist theorists of intersectionality.

Theoretical Framework

Several theoretical frameworks guide this analysis of Black women in the labor market. Black women, as members of groups marginalized on the basis of both race and gender, are positioned at the intersection of two powerful systems of oppression. While Black women’s labor market experiences are shaped by their position at the bottom of race and gender hierarchies in the United States, they are also informed by a host of other identifiers that bear upon their social location (e.g. class, nativity, region). The following discussion of forms of capital, the “immigrant advantage” and intersectionality provides a framework for interpreting the labor market outcomes of this increasingly diverse group.
According to Gary Becker (1964), human capital investments, or investments in education or training, could be made for the purpose of deriving future economic benefits. Becker sought to estimate the money rate of return to college and high-school education in the United States (p. 29). He noted that students’ “selectivity” (e.g., innate ability, ambition, health, or parental means) did play a role in shaping their educational outcomes but was not more significant than the time that they invested in their education (p. 7). Becker also noted that returns to education differed by group: they were higher on college education for urban White males than for Black or rural males, and higher for Black women than for White women (p. 9). These findings highlight the need to assess and compare outcomes for different race-gender groups in various contexts.

In *The Forms of Capital* (1986), Pierre Bourdieu elaborates on three distinct types of capital: economic, cultural and social. Bourdieu specifies that while economic capital is “immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights” (pg. 47), social capital is resources based on relationships, group membership, and networks of influence and support. Cultural capital refers to non-financial social assets that promote social mobility beyond economic means, such as cultural knowledge, mannerisms, style of dress, or credentials. Cultural capital may be embodied (disposition of the mind and body), objectified (in the form of cultural goods), or institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications. Bourdieu critiques human capital theories as only taking into account economic investments in education when calculating their payoff.
But their measurement of the yield from scholastic investment takes account only of *monetary* investments and profits, or those directly convertible into money, such as the costs of schooling and the cash equivalent of time devoted to study; they are unable to explain the different proportions of their resources which different agents or different social classes allocate to economic investment and cultural investment because they fail to take systemic account of the structure of the differential chances of profit which the various markets offer these agents or classes as a function of the volume and the composition of their assets (see esp. Becker 1964b) (p. 48).

For Bourdieu, although all forms of capital shape individuals’ life chances, cultural capital is particularly determinant of educational investments and outcomes. He also notes that social capital can be used to increase the economic yield of the educational qualification (p. 48). These theories emphasize the impact of several distinct yet interconnected forms of capital on the reproduction of social class.

In support of these theories, scholars have documented the earnings advantage and increased occupational mobility of college degree holders over those with fewer years of formal education (Day & Newburger, 2002). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) note that the impact of college education on students in the 1990s was profound: having a bachelor’s degree was associated with a 34% advantage in occupational prestige and a 20-40% advantage in earnings (p. 447, 449). On the additional benefits of a college degree, they note that the jobs filled by college graduates make them “less sensitive to employment fluctuations that occur with changing economic conditions,” and that college appears to impart “cognitive skills, values, attitudes, and
behavioral patterns that make individuals more productive in complex technical, professional, and managerial occupations and therefore more highly paid” (p. 448). Interestingly, it is having a college degree, and not simply years of schooling, that had the most significant impact on students’ labor market outcomes. The authors suggest that this ‘credentialing effect’ may make college graduates more attractive to potential employers.

**Nativity and the “Immigrant Advantage”**

In addition to theories highlighting the relationship between education and labor market outcomes, scholars have debated the extent to which Black immigrants have an earnings advantage over native Blacks. Although early immigration researchers suspected that Black immigrants to the United States might face a ‘double disadvantage’ by being both Black and foreign-born, studies comparing Black immigrants to native Blacks tend to reveal an immigrant advantage on various socioeconomic outcomes. Three explanations predominate: cultural, selectivity, and demand-side explanations.

Cultural arguments posit that immigrants bring with them group-specific attributes such as greater motivation and work ethic than the native-born, leading to greater success in the labor market. Sowell (1978) sparked considerable debate and numerous scholarly responses to his essay “Three Black Histories” when he argued that the success of Caribbean immigrants relative to African Americans could be attributed to the positive “cultural” attributes of the former, such as a greater capacity for thrift, deferred gratification, and self-reliance. African Americans were portrayed as lacking these positive attributes and were therefore primarily responsible for their poor social position.
An alternate explanation for immigrant success focuses on immigrant selectivity. *Selectivity arguments* ascribe immigrant success to the notion that migrants generally constitute a highly selective group with a greater likelihood for economic success in competitive labor markets. This perspective argues that immigrants arrive with favorable attributes, such as high levels of human, social, and economic capital, ultimately enabling them to surpass the native-born. Everett S. Lee (1966) put forth a theory of migration in which all acts of migration involve migrants’ considerations of the various “push” and “pull” factors at both origin and destination, as well as the “intervening set of obstacles” along the way (p. 49). *Positive selection*, or the selection of migrants with favorable qualities and personality traits, is most likely when there are considerable “pull” factors at the destination (as opposed to “push” factors at the origin). Lee notes that under these circumstances migrants with favorable attributes are drawn to new locations where they can seize opportunities for social advancement.

It has also been suggested that relative to earlier migrant flows, more recent immigrants to the United States and other parts of the developing world bring with them fewer of those characteristics that accounted for the success of earlier cohorts. This has been attributed to the 1965 changes in immigration laws that facilitated refugee and family-based migrations (Borjas, 1991). Therefore, studies regarding the relationship between immigration and labor market outcomes among various groups are ongoing.

A third explanation of immigrant success emphasizes demand-side factors, or extrinsic factors related to the particular labor market contexts that immigrants enter. *Demand-side arguments* suggest that Black immigrants may be more favorably perceived by (primarily White) employers than native-born Blacks. Roy Bryce-Laporte (1972) noted that some immigrants “emphasize their distinctiveness by use of exotic apparel, display of heavy accents, and
avoidance of contact and association with Black Americans” (p. 40). Mary Waters (1999) found that some White gatekeepers view West Indians as superior to African Americans and affirmed Bryce-Laporte’s observation that West Indians’ awareness of this perception compels them to deliberately distinguish themselves from native Blacks. Employer favoritism for immigrant Blacks over native Blacks may also be based on employers’ perception that immigrants are more compliant, willing to accept poorer working conditions, and/or less likely to perceive or call out racist treatment.

While this research does not aim to affirm or reject any of these explanations, it does aim to determine if, when, and for what age cohorts there appears to be an ‘immigrant advantage’ among Black women workers, and to establish a foundation for further research by comparing the labor market outcomes of native-born Black women and foreign-born Black women over a period of three decades.

Collins, Crenshaw, and Intersectionality

Since at least the 1800s, Black women such as Ida B. Wells Barnett and Anna Julia Cooper have called for acknowledgement of how race, class, and gender shape the experiences of Black women in ways that make them quite distinct from those of Black men and White women. Black feminists, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s, continued this work by arguing that the oppressive structures of race, class, and gender were inextricably bound together and intersected to constrain opportunities for Black women in a “matrix of domination” (Collins, 2000). Rose M. Brewer (1999) notes that “the conceptual anchor of recent Black feminist thought is the understanding of race, class, and gender as simultaneous forces” (p. 32).
Kimberle Crenshaw first highlighted ‘intersectionality’ in 1989 to conceptualize the legal system’s gender and racial discrimination. In her article *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*, Crenshaw explains that the law is never race neutral because it is shaped, like the rest of society, by hegemonic racism. The experiences of women of color, she argues, are frequently “the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism” (pg. 1243). An exclusively ‘feminist’ or ‘antiracist’ approach to understanding the experiences of women of color is insufficient, as the experiences of women of color are marginalized within both.

In Patricia Hill Collins’ *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (1990) Collins notes that “racial and gender oppression result in needs and problems distinct from White women and Black men” (pg. 404). Collins goes on to discuss the interlocking nature of gender, race, and class oppression, noting that each of these forces act simultaneously to shape peoples’ lived experience. This manifests in the sphere of work as Black women’s historical relegation to the dirtiest and most demanding forms of labor (the “mules” of the market), yet it also informs Black women’s resilience and organized resistance to unjust treatment. Given this conceptualization of Black women’s unique social position, Collins called for analyses of the differential impacts of current economic trends on working-class and middle-class Black women.

Building upon this work, Leslie McCall (2005) described intersectionality as "the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationships and subject formations" (p. 1771). This emphasizes that individuals simultaneously occupy multiple social locations that inform their life experiences. This holds for all members of a society, not just women of color. While race and gender have an important role in shaping labor market
outcomes, so to do other factors such as education and nativity. In the labor market, Black women’s historic and persistent collective position at or near the bottom of race- and gender-based hierarchies of earnings and occupational prestige have led to a call for more research on the experiences of this group (e.g. Amott & Matthaei, 1991; Browne & Misra, 2003; Collins, 2009; Newsome & Dodoo, 2002).

Each of these perspectives on earnings attainment and social mobility guide this research on the ways in which educational attainment, nativity, and other factors impact the labor market outcomes for different groups of Black women in the United States.

**Figure 1. Theoretical Framework.** Situating Labor Market Outcomes of Black Women in the United States.
**Literature Review**

Since the passing of civil rights legislation in the 1960s banning discrimination on the basis of race (and other social identifiers), researchers have debated the extent to which Blacks and other minorities in the United States have been able to advance economically and achieve the American Dream. Scholars cite advances in earnings, occupational mobility, and rates of home ownership for some (e.g. Lacy, 2007), while also documenting persistent disadvantage and discrimination faced by Blacks of all class backgrounds (Landry, 1987). Mary Pattillo’s *Black Pickett Fences* (2000) documents the experiences of middle class Blacks in a neighborhood on Chicago’s South Side in the early 1990s. She highlights the perilous position of the neighborhood’s middle-class Black residents, who despite standing on the “doorstep of privilege” remain vulnerable to economic fluctuations and the drug-dealing and violence present in adjacent poor neighborhoods. She identifies a continuing need for affirmative action to address persistent racial inequality and the ongoing vulnerability of the Black middle class relative to their White counterparts.

Eugene Robinson (2010) writes in *Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America* that there is no longer one Black America, but four: a mainstream middle class able to successfully navigate American society, a large “abandoned” minority struggling to overcome generational poverty, a small group of wealthy Black elites, and a newly emergent group of Black immigrants and people of mixed-race heritage who problematize traditional understandings of racial categories in the U.S. This metaphorical splintering of the Black population highlights the need for ongoing assessment of the social opportunities and outcomes experienced by members of this increasingly diverse group.
While it is important to understand the conditions experienced by Black people as a racial group, it is also important to assess the social mobility of Black women due to their position at the intersection of subordinated race and gender hierarchies (Collins, 1990). With regard to employment, Black women have a long history of labor force involvement in the United States, yet they have tended to be overrepresented in the lowest paying jobs and face a greater risk of poverty than Black men and Whites who are similarly educated (Alon & Haberfield, 2011; Collins, 1990; Misra, 1999). At the same time, Black women lead their male counterparts in college enrollment and degree attainment and are increasingly represented among the middle class (Browne, 1999; Marsh et al 2007; McDaniel et al 2011; Pattillo-McCoy, 2007). In addition, Black women head households at rates higher than women of other racial groups (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013), underscoring the critical importance of their access to gainful employment.

In light of these trends, this dissertation aims to assess the impact of nativity, education, and other demographic factors on the labor market outcomes of different groups of Black women over time, and to explore when and to what extent labor market outcomes for these Black women converge or diverge. The following review of literature on Black women’s labor market outcomes focuses on three key themes: race- and gender-based discrimination, education-based bifurcation, and (more recently) intraracial ethnic differentiation. While these themes are discussed separately here, they are not mutually exclusive.

Research on discrimination highlights the historic and ongoing roles of race- and gender-based discrimination in shaping the experiences of Black women in all areas of life, including the labor market. This literature also highlights occupational segregation and the role of stereotypes in shaping Black women’s labor market opportunities.
Research on bifurcation highlights the distinct trajectories of women with different levels of human capital in the post-Civil Rights, post-industrial era. This research emphasizes both the challenges faced by non-college-educated women in the labor market and the inroads into white-collar occupations made primarily by college-educated women during the late 1960s and 1970s. This literature also documents the limited returns to Black women’s human capital investments vis-à-vis similarly educated Black men and White women.

A third area of relevant literature on Black women’s labor market outcomes highlights recent immigration and the post-1965 demographic shifts that sparked assessment of socioeconomic outcomes for Black workers by nativity. More specifically, this research examines the purported labor market advantages of immigrant Blacks over native-born Blacks.

*Race, Gender, and Labor Market Outcomes*

Scholars of women’s labor history note that the decline of domesticity, expansion of service occupations and clerical work, opening up of labor opportunities during the First and Second World Wars and multiple recessions led to dramatic increases in women’s labor force participation rates throughout the 20th century (Amott & Matthaei, 2002). A corresponding increase in the number of dual-earner families was also accompanied by declining birth and fertility rates among women from all racial groups, with dramatic decreases occurring between 1960 and 1980 (Sutton, 2011). While each of these sociohistorical events led to the inclusion of many new women in the labor force, especially married women and middle-class White women, Black women with and without children had long worked outside of the home as both enslaved laborers and as freedwomen whose income was needed to support their families and supplement the depressed incomes of Black men (Amott & Matthaei, 2002; Branch 2011; King, 1995;
Post-slavery, Black women were often relegated to the lowest paying, least prestigious and most difficult jobs (Amott & Matthaei, 1991; Branch, 2011; Brewer, 1999; Cunningham & Zalokar, 1992; Reskin & Roos, 1990; Shaw 1996; Wallace et al, 1980; Xu & Leffler, 1992).

Many scholars argue that present-day labor market outcomes cannot be understood without reference to historic and ongoing gendered racism shaping opportunities for Black women in the labor force. Tracing the particular labor history of Black women in the United States from slavery to the post-Civil Rights era, Jacqueline Jones’ Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, from Slavery to the Present (1985) details the history of Black women’s unpaid work as enslaved laborers and their eventual entry into the low-wage labor force as domestic workers, seamstresses, factory workers, and clerical workers. In Race, Gender & Work: A Multicultural Economic History of Women in the United States (2011), Teresa Amott & Julie Matthaei note that at the beginning of the 20th century African-Americans, concentrated in the South, were barred from most wage labor other than domestic service for Whites. This accounted for over 40 percent of gainful employment of Black women in 1940 (p. 296).

Enobong Branch’s Opportunity Denied: Limiting Black Women to Devalued Work (2011) traces Black women’s labor force participation from emancipation to the Civil Rights Era and finds that Black women’s current labor market vulnerability is intricately connected to their decades-long relegation to (and thus overrepresentation in) the least prestigious & lowest paying jobs, including farm labor, domestic work, and marginal factory jobs (p. 129). Using census data and other primary and secondary sources, Branch documents the discrimination suffered by Black women on the basis of both their race and gender. She writes that “Black codes” passed in
the Southern states in the period immediately following the Civil War severely restricted the labor mobility of emancipated Blacks by fining them for working outside of agriculture or domestic service. Coercion, abuse, and brutal working conditions were commonplace in both spheres. Racism ensured that Black women did not have the paternalistic protections of White women and could therefore do “men’s work,” while sexism ensured that they could also be relegated to the bottom of the pay hierarchy.

The covert and institutional nature of discrimination today makes it hard to identify in many workplaces (Bonilla-Silva, 1999), but race and gender continue to shape labor market experiences nonetheless. With regard to intraracial gender dynamics, Blacks in the U.S. are the only racial group for whom women represent a larger share of the employed than do men (53.6% of employed Blacks in 2011 were women, compared to 46% among employed Whites), yet in 2011 employed Black women earned roughly 91 cents to every dollar earned by Black men (U.S. Department of Labor, 2011). Occupational segregation by both race and gender limits labor market opportunities for many workers and accounts for a significant portion of race and gender wage gaps. A review of research from the 1990s indicated that the representation of women and minorities in work establishments was negatively related to their own earnings and sometimes to those of men (Reskin et al., 1999). Tomaskovic-Devey (1993) also found that job-level segregation by sex and race was a fundamentally important source of White-Black and male-female inequalities in employment. Collins (1989) interviewed Black workers who entered managerial and executive jobs in Chicago during the 1960s and 1970s and found that a majority of these workers filled affirmative action, community relations, minority affairs, or public relations positions that responded to civil rights demands but provided little social mobility
relative to the managerial and executive jobs filled by Whites (as cited in Bonilla-Silva, 1999, p. 81).

Regarding gender segregation, many studies find that as the share of women in a particular job increases, the less well-paid and generally less prestigious it tends to become (Boraas & Rodgers, 2003; England et al., 2000; Reskin & Bielby, 2005). Levanon, England, and Allison (2009) assessed causal dynamics of occupational feminization and pay from 1950-2000 and found evidence to support the view that jobs with large or growing numbers of female workers were devalued. Even at the level of the metropolitan labor market, higher levels of occupational segregation were associated with significantly increased tendency to devalue women’s work roles (Cohen & Huffman, 2003). Occupational gender segregation may also contribute to Black women’s higher rates of exit from full-time work relative to White women because Black women are more likely to work in occupations that involve poor working conditions and low pay (Reid, 2002).

While some studies argue that men and women choose different educational fields and have a preference for particular occupations, workers’ sense of opportunity, awareness of discrimination, and school tracking influence their choices and preferences (Reskin et al., 1999, p. 338). Some employers engage in discriminatory practices, whether consciously or subconsciously, that keep women, and particularly women of color, out of the most desirable positions and occupations (Tomaskovic-Devey & Skaggs, 2002). Statistical discrimination, or discrimination against an individual based on broad assessments of a social group to which they are perceived to belong, particularly impacts women and minorities who are more likely than White men to be viewed as less skilled, less committed to work, and generally less productive (Browne & Kennelly, 1999; Neckerman & Kirschenman, 1991). Black women are vulnerable to
stereotypes applied to Blacks as a racialized group and women as a gendered group, as well as to stereotypes specific to them as Black women (Crenshaw, 1989). Browne & Kennelly (1999) conducted interviews with White employers of Black and White men and women in low skill jobs in the Atlanta metropolitan area and found that Black women were regularly stereotyped as single mothers, a characterization which led them to be viewed by their employers as either less reliable or more desperate than other workers.

In a study that analyzed verified cases of workplace race and sex discrimination against African-American and White women from 1988 to 2003, Ortiz & Roscigno (2009) found that both groups of women experienced high levels of discriminatory firing, but Black women faced higher instances of race-based promotional discrimination. They also found that for both Black and White women, those with high occupational prestige filed fewer discrimination cases, suggesting that women in positions of lower prestige are particularly vulnerable to discriminatory treatment.

Each of these studies highlights the continuing significance of race and gender in the workplace and add important context to the interpretation of Black women’s labor market outcomes.

**Education and Labor Market Outcomes**

Much of the recent literature on labor market outcomes has emphasized bifurcation within race or gender groups, or a growing chasm between the “haves” and the “have nots” primarily on the basis of educational attainment (Leicht, 2008). In the post-industrial era, higher levels of educational attainment are associated with significantly better labor market outcomes, including better employment rates, higher earnings, and increased occupational prestige (Julian
& Kominski, 2011). Individuals with no more than a high school education are particularly susceptible to experiencing poverty and unemployment throughout the life course (Branch & Hanley, 2013).

Analyzing sources of *within-gender* wage gaps, McCall (2000) utilized data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 1990 Public Use Microdata Series and independent county data to analyze sources of wage gaps in hundreds of labor markets across the United States. McCall found that flexible and insecure employment conditions (e.g., joblessness, casualization, and immigration) were important factors fostering high wage gaps among women. These conditions are associated with increased competition and lower wages among less educated workers, thus fostering the “new inequality” of wage gaps based primarily on education as opposed to race or gender. Leicht (2008) also reviewed several studies of earnings in the United States between 1980 and the early 2000s and found that a key theme was the increasing inequality within ascriptive race and gender groups as opposed to between them. Browne & Askew (2005) also note that earnings inequality continued to grow in the 1990s between workers with a high school degree or less and workers with a college degree or more.

Regarding Blacks in the U.S., discussions of bifurcation have focused on the growing chasm between the college-educated Black middle class and an increasingly disadvantaged group of poorer, less-educated Blacks. The latter group has been found to experience higher rates of unemployment, poverty, and incarceration (Misra, 1999; Wilson, 1978). In *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions* (1978), William Julius Wilson argued that in the post-Civil Rights era it is predominantly class and not race that determine the life chances for African Americans. He argued that the decline in manufacturing employment and the rise of new jobs in the service sector left those with minimal education
outside of the formal labor market, while at the same time better-educated minorities were able to advance in the new economy and secure middle-class lifestyles. Thus greater occupational access for more privileged Blacks in the post–Civil Rights era coincided with near universal decline in the opportunities available to less-educated workers.

In support of this argument, Morris & Western (1999) reviewed the literature on earnings inequality from 1950-2000 and found increasing earnings inequality among all race-gender groups, including Black women. They noted that “the “rise” in the college premium was almost entirely driven by the collapse in the earnings of high-school graduates and dropouts,” explaining that from 1979-1994 the real weekly earnings of college graduates rose by 5% while the earnings of high-school graduates fell by 20% (p. 633).

Branch and Hanley (2013) investigated labor market outcomes for low-wage Black and White women workers from 1970-2000 and found that in spite of a narrowing wage gap between these groups, the proliferation of the service sector and decline of manufacturing have significantly altered, if not erased, the path for semi- and unskilled workers to exit poverty. Newsome & Dodoo (2002) analyzed census data from 1980 and 1990 and found that while an increasing share of African American women were represented in managerial and professional jobs, most Black women remained concentrated in service work and at the low end of the earnings scale.

While changing labor market structures and Black women’s educational gains have undoubtedly facilitated the movement of many Black women into better paying and higher prestige jobs (King, 1995), research shows that race and gender gaps persist in returns to payoffs for college education. Black women college graduates are more susceptible to unemployment,
occupational stagnation, and diminished economic returns than are similarly educated Black men and White women (Newsome & Dodoo, 2002; Strayhorn, 2008).

Bound and Dresser (1999) analyzed Current Population Survey data from 1973-1991 and found that although young Black women had reached parity in earnings with White women by 1979, these gains subsequently eroded as the Black-White gap in young women’s wages steadily widened throughout the 1980s. They found that Black women without college education faced particularly large wage declines, especially in the Midwest, and that Black women both with and without college educations were concentrated in low-wage industries (clerical occupations for the former, manufacturing for the latter).

Dozier (2012) found that during the economic downturns of the early 1980s and early 1990s, young Black women faced disproportionate unemployment spells relative to White women, particularly degree holders. During the 1990s, college-educated Black women again experienced gains in earnings and access to professional and managerial jobs, yet these gains did not keep pace with those of White women (Dozier, 2010a; Branch & Hanley, 2013).

Regarding Black women’s diminished returns to college education when compared to Black men, Terrell Strayhorn (2008) analyzed data from the 1993 and 1997 Baccalaureate and Beyond studies and found that even after controlling for numerous background and pre-college variables including educational aspirations, college major, and college selectivity, Black women college graduates had lower earnings than Black men with college degrees, though gender did not have a statistically significant impact on occupational prestige. Kim (2011) also analyzed data from the U.S. Department of Labor, Baccalaureate and Beyond, and CIRP to compare earnings among graduates of both historically Black and historically White colleges and found that in both settings African American women earned less than their male counterparts.
Nativity and Labor Market Outcomes

While the earlier cited studies highlight the role of race, gender, and education in shaping labor market opportunities for Black women, other studies have investigated the role of nativity and ethnicity in shaping labor market outcomes since the 1960s. Changes in immigration laws in 1965 shifted the main source region of immigrants from primarily Europe to Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Afro-Caribbean and African immigration to the United States has grown dramatically during this period, with the number of Black Americans born in sub-Saharan Africa nearly tripling during the 1990s (Logan, 2007). The foreign-born constituted less than 1% of the Black American population in the mid-1960s, but today account for nearly 12% (Mason, 2010). Black immigrant women, along with other immigrant women, have begun to fill many jobs in the service industry (Higginbotham, 1994; Vernez, 1999).

These demographic trends have spurred research aimed at assessing whether or not Black immigrants face advantages or disadvantages in the U.S. labor market, but results have been mixed based on the specific groups or time periods under study (Shaw-Taylor & Tuch, 2007). Early work by Thomas Sowell (1978) explained West Indians’ relatively high rates of educational attainment, income, and occupational prestige as stemming from the cultural traits that they developed under ‘favorable’ conditions of slavery compared to Blacks in the U.S.; later studies disputed this and tend to suggest different explanations such as selectivity and employer preferences for foreign-born Blacks.

Farley & Allen (1987) analyzed 1980 Census data and found that U.S.-born Black men consistently out earned foreign-born Black men among college-educated professionals and technical workers, yet among administrative support workers, foreign-born Blacks out-earned
U.S.-born Blacks (as cited in Shaw-Taylor & Tuch, 2007). Kristin Butcher (1994) also analyzed 1980 Census data and found that Caribbeans had a higher likelihood of employment than similarly educated native-born Blacks, but did not earn more than native-born Blacks. Among those with higher levels of education (ten to sixteen-plus years) native Blacks had an earnings and employment advantage, but among the less educated Caribbean immigrant Blacks had an earnings and employment advantage. Kalmijn (1996) assessed the socioeconomic assimilation of Caribbean immigrant men and found that English-speaking British Caribbeans had an earnings advantage over African Americans and those from the Spanish- and French-speaking Caribbean.

More recent studies including African immigrants have found that West Indians tend to have an earnings advantage over both African immigrants and native-born Blacks. For example, Mason (2010) analyzed data from the Current Population Survey from 1994-2007 and found that British Caribbean male and female immigrants had higher weekly wages than African Americans, Spanish Caribbean immigrants, and African immigrants.

Model (2008) tested several theories of immigrant advantage and found that Black immigrants from the British West Indies generally had favorable outcomes compared to African Americans, yet immigrants from Africa or from the Hispanic Caribbean did not have stronger labor market outcomes than African Americans. Model also found that although West Indians displayed an immediate advantage on labor force participation, unemployment, and occupational prestige, they did not earn more than African Americans until a decade or more after their arrival (p. 43). She ultimately concluded that selectivity may explain the West Indian advantage.

One puzzle regarding research on Black immigrants has emerged from the fact that while West Indian immigrants seem to benefit from their higher levels of education relative to native
Blacks, African immigrants do not. For example, Dodoo (1997) analyzed data from the 1990 U.S. Census to identify the factors that predict earnings for male African immigrants, Caribbean immigrants, and native Blacks. Dodoo found that African immigrants had an earnings advantage over both groups before controlling for variables such as education and experience, but found that Caribbean immigrants had an earnings advantage over both African immigrants and native born Blacks once controls were added to his models. He also found that African immigrant college degree holders had an earnings disadvantage when compared to other Black college degree holders, particularly if their degree was earned abroad.

As with studies comparing foreign-born Black males to native-born Black males, the studies that have included Black women immigrants have found evidence to support both immigrant advantages and disadvantages depending on the period, data, and outcomes measured. Schoeni (1998) analyzed Census data from 1970, 1980, and 1990 to compare labor market outcomes of native-born women and immigrant women by region of origin. Although women from Africa, Oceania, the Caribbean, and South America were collapsed into one group, Schoeni found that unemployment rates were slightly higher for immigrants in this group (6.3%) than for U.S. born non-Hispanic Black women in 1970 (6.1%), but higher for the latter group in 1980 (7.5% vs. 8.3%) and 1990 (8.6% vs. 9.8%). After controlling for several variables known to impact earnings, Schoeni also found a slight disadvantage in median weekly earnings for immigrants from Africa, Oceania, the Caribbean, and South America when compared to U.S.-born Black women in 1970, but found an earnings advantage for U.S.-born Black women in 1980 and 1990.

Model (2008) also analyzed Census data from the same 30-year period and found that West Indian women had an advantage over African and U.S.-born Black women on
unemployment, prestige, and earnings, but that the advantages in earnings only appear after taking West Indian women’s time of arrival into account. New female immigrants were at an earnings disadvantage compared to African Americans when they first arrived but their earnings eventually caught up to (and ultimately surpassed) those of the native-born.

In a study comparing occupational status among minorities in New York and London using data from the 1990 PUMS and the 1987-1993 Labour Force Surveys, Model & Ladipo (1996) found that African women in New York were disadvantaged in occupational status relative to native-born Black women. They suggest that a larger share of occupational status disadvantage of Africans in New York is attributable to discrimination, compared to that of African-Americans and Caribbean immigrants. Model (1997) also found a native-born Black female advantage over West Indian women on prestige. Using data from the 1991 UK Census Samples of Anonymised Records and data from the 1990 U.S. Census, Model found that foreign-born West Indian women had lower net occupational status than African-American women in New York. This study suggested that employers in New York hired and promoted native-born minority women before they hired and promoted Black immigrant women.

Using 1990 Census data, Kollehon & Eule (2003) assessed the socioeconomic attainment patterns of African immigrants to native Blacks and Whites by gender and found that after controls were introduced into their models, there was no statistically significant difference in net hourly earnings between African American & Black African women. In another recent study comparing the earnings of Black women by nativity, Corra and Kimuna (2009) used census data from 1990 and 2000 to compare earnings of native-born Black women to those of Caribbean- and African-born Black women in the U.S. They found that English-speaking
Caribbean women had an earnings advantage over African, African-American, and Spanish- and French-speaking Caribbean women in both census years.

Given the range of outcomes documented in these studies, it is important to investigate labor market outcomes for different segments of the Black population. This dissertation aims to contribute to this effort by tracking the labor market trajectories of Black women in the U.S. by education and nativity over a 30-year period, and by identifying additional factors that predict earnings for Black women workers in the United States today.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Introduction

The preceding chapters explored research on the labor market experiences of Black women, highlighting the ways that race, gender, education, and nativity intersect to shape Black women’s employment and earnings. They employed Becker’s theory of human capital, Bourdieu’s theories of social and cultural capital, theories of immigrant advantage, and the work of Collins and other feminist theorists as frameworks to analyze labor market outcomes for Black women. This chapter describes the methodology employed for this study.

This study has two primary goals. The first is to examine the trajectories over time of different groups of Black women according to their nativity (U.S.- vs. foreign-born status) and level of educational attainment (college-educated vs. non-college-educated). A second goal of this dissertation is to examine recent national data to determine which variables currently predict earnings for full-time Black women workers.

Using data from the Minnesota Population Center’s Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) for the United States Census Bureau’s 1980, 1990, and 2000 Census, and 2010-2012 American Community Survey (ACS), this study employs synthetic cohort analysis and multiple regression analyses to test and apply theories of social and cultural capital, intersectionality, and social mobility to Black women in the United States.

This chapter is divided into two parts. Part I provides a detailed description of the procedures for the synthetic cohort analysis, and Part II provides a detailed description of the procedures for the multiple regression analyses.

The following section includes a detailed description of the dataset, measures, and analytic strategy used to examine three labor market outcomes (employment rates, earnings, and occupational prestige) of different groups of Black women over time according to their nativity (U.S.- vs. foreign-born) and level of educational attainment (college-educated vs. non-college-educated).

Dataset

Data employed in Part I of this dissertation is drawn from the Minnesota Population Center’s Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) for the United States Census Bureau’s 1980, 1990, and 2000 Census, and 2010-2012 American Community Survey (ACS). The IPUMS provides high-precision samples of the American population drawn from fifteen federal censuses and from the American Community Surveys of 2000-2012. These samples collectively constitute the richest source of quantitative information on long-term changes in the American population and assign uniform codes across all samples to facilitate analysis of social and economic change. The large sample size of these data allow for robust statistical analyses.

The Census data are a 5% random sample of the American population, while the American Community Survey data are a 3% random sample of the American population. This study includes only those female respondents from the ages of 25-64 who identified themselves by race as Black, were in the labor force, and were not enrolled in school. For analyses of earnings, only those women who reported positive annual earnings were included. To minimize the effects of unemployment and underemployment on income, these analyses were further
restricted to individuals who worked full-time year-round. The final sample size for the cohort analysis is 454,265 (73,520 in 1980; 145,535 in 1990; 149,515 in 2000; and 85,695 in 2010).

Measures

Below is a list of variables used to conduct Part I of this study. First, the dependent variables are listed, followed by the operational definitions of the independent predictors (the synthetic cohorts).

Dependent Variables: Synthetic Cohort Analysis

There are three dependent variables in the synthetic cohort analysis. Each represents a labor market outcome:

1) “Employed” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent is employed (coded 1) or is not employed (coded 0) in the civilian labor force. This dummy results from the recoding of EMPSTAT-Employment status.

2) “Wage & Salary Income” is an interval measure of the respondent’s total pre-tax wage and salary income. This measure was adjusted to 2010 dollars using the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U). This measure results from the recoding of INCWAGE, which reports the respondent’s total pre-tax wage and salary income for the previous year. Only respondents with incomes of at least $1 were included in the analysis.

3) “Occupational Prestige Score” is measured with the variable PRENT, which is a constructed variable that assigns a Nakao-Treas prestige score to each occupation. The PRENT
variable is based on prestige assessments assigned by Keiko Nakao and Judith Treas, using data from the 1989 General Social Survey.

**Independent Variables: Synthetic Cohort Analysis**

In Part I of this dissertation, synthetic cohorts serve as the predictors of the dependent measures explained above. Below is a description of how the synthetic cohorts were constructed. The section on Analytic Strategy provides a detailed description of their application.

**Variables Used to Construct Synthetic Cohorts**

“Age” is a continuous variable in the IPUMS datasets (AGE “Age”) reporting the respondent’s age in years as of their last birthday.

“Nativity” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent is US-born (coded 1) or foreign-born (coded 0). This dummy results from the recoding of BPL “Birthplace.”

“College” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent has a college degree (coded 1) or does not have a college degree (coded 0). This dummy results from the recoding of EDUC “Education.”

“Years in the US” is a categorical variable that reports how long a person who was born in a foreign country or U.S. outlying area had been living in the United States at the time of the survey. The variable results from the recoding of two variables. For 1980 and 1990 data YRSUSA2 “Years in the United States” is used and the variable is measured as follows: 1 = “0 to 5 years”; 2 = “6 to 10 years”; 3 = “11 to 15 years”; 4 = “16 to 20 years”; 5 = “21+ years”. For 2000 and 2010-2012 data YRSUSA1 “Years in the United States” is used and is a continuous measure. This continuous measure was not available for 1980 and 1990.
Construction of Synthetic Cohorts

Two synthetic cohorts were constructed and followed over time: 1) those who were 25 to 34 in 1980, and 2) those who were 25 to 34 in 1990. The synthetic cohorts were then stratified by nativity (US-born and foreign-born) and education (college-educated and non-college-educated).

Cohort 1 included Black women who met the following criteria: 25 to 34 years old in 1980; 35 to 44 years old in 1990 (and for foreign-born, those having lived in the United States for at least 11 years); 45 to 54 years old in 2000 (and for foreign-born, those having lived in the United States for at least 21 years); 55 to 64 years old in 2010 (and for foreign-born, those having lived in the United States for at least 31 years).

Cohort 2 included Black women who met the following criteria: 25 to 34 years old in 1990; 35 to 44 years old in 2000 (and for foreign-born, those having lived in the United States for at least 11 years); 45 to 54 years old in 2010 (and for foreign-born, those having lived in the United States for at least 21 years).

Analytic Strategy

The goal for Part I of this dissertation is to examine changes over time on three labor market outcomes (employment status, earnings, and occupational prestige) for Black women in

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2 Comparing U.S.- and foreign-born groups requires a few additional considerations. An analysis that begins by comparing a group of U.S.-born Black women who were included in the 1980 survey would then compare them to a group of Black immigrant women who were also present in the U.S. at the time of the 1980 survey. To compare the trajectories of these synthetic cohorts over time, one must exclude from such analysis any immigrant women who entered the United States after 1980, or one is including immigrants with a shorter period of adjustment to life in the U.S. To facilitate the inclusion of the foreign-born population that is appropriate for this analysis, the variables YRSUSA1 and YRSUSA2 will be used.
the United States. Employment status and earnings are important objective indicators of labor market success and personal well-being (Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993), while occupational prestige, a subjective measure, has important implications for workers’ social and material rewards as well as their susceptibility to discrimination (Ortiz & Roscigno, 2009; Xu & Leffler, 1992).

While social mobility for individuals cannot be directly measured\(^3\) using the cross-sectional data provided by the census and ACS, a technique known as “synthetic cohort analysis” can be used to infer changes occurring in certain birth cohorts, thus addressing change over time. Therefore, this dissertation will analyze two age cohorts (one cohort aged 25-34 in 1980, and one cohort aged 25-34 in 1990) and will identify the labor market outcomes for those cohorts over time, stratified by nativity and education. Even though different people were surveyed in each of the censuses and American Community Surveys, the samples are very large and nationally-representative thus making it reasonable to compare outcomes for these cohorts over time.

Each of the three dependent variables will have a set of two analyses for the synthetic cohorts. The first set of analyses will focus on nativity, assessing employment rates, earnings, and occupational prestige over time for U.S.-born Black women and foreign-born Black women; the second set of analyses will focus on education, assessing employment rates, earnings, and occupational prestige over time for college-educated Black women and non-college-educated Black women. The analyses examine changes in labor market outcomes within and across the two synthetic cohorts. What this type of analysis can reveal are particular decades or life stages where the labor market outcomes for these groups converge or diverge.

\(^3\) Currently, there are no longitudinal data available, with the variables needed for this study, which follow Black women in the United States over several decades.
Part II: Predicting Earnings for Black Women in the U.S.

While the goal of Part I of this dissertation is to examine changes over a thirty year period on three labor market outcomes for Black women wage workers in the United States, the goal of Part II is to examine recent national data to determine which independent variables currently predict earnings for full-time Black women workers in the U.S.

Dataset

Data employed in Part II of this dissertation is drawn from the Minnesota Population Center’s Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) for the United States Census Bureau’s 2010-2012 American Community Survey (ACS). The American Community Survey data are a 3% random sample of the American population. This study includes only those female respondents from the ages of 25-64 who identified themselves by race as Black, were in the labor force, were not enrolled in school, and reported positive annual earnings. To minimize the effects of unemployment and underemployment on earnings, income analyses were further restricted to individuals who worked full-time year-round. Due to the relatively large size of the African-American sub-group relative to the Caribbean and African sub-groups, a random 10% sample of African-Americans was drawn from the IPUMS (Corra & Kimuna, 2010; Dodoo, 1997). The final sample size for the regression analyses is 23,408.

Measures

Below is a list of variables used to conduct Part II of this study. First, the dependent variable is listed, followed by the independent predictors for the multiple regression analyses.
Dependent Variable: Multiple Regression Analyses

There is one dependent variable in the multiple regression analyses:

1) “Logged Wage and Salary Income” is the log of the interval measure of the respondent’s total pre-tax wage and salary income. The income measure was somewhat skewed, so the logged wage and salary income was used to minimize this effect. This measure results from the recoding of INCWAGE, which reports the respondent’s total pre-tax wage and salary income for the previous year. Each respondent’s income was adjusted to 2010 dollars using the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U). Only respondents with incomes of at least $1 were included in the analysis.

Independent Variables: Multiple Regression Analyses

In this dissertation, the following variables are the predictors of the dependent measure explained above. Each of these represent human capital and other demographic variables available in the American Community Survey known to impact earnings for Black women (Corra & Kimuna, 2010). These variables include respondents’ region of origin (referred to as “group origin”), year of immigration, human capital (measured by level of education completed), and other demographic variables including marital status, region of residence, age, and industry.

Group origin variables:

“African American” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent was born in the United States (coded 1); all other respondents were coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of BPL “Birthplace.”
“African” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent was born in Africa (coded 1); all other respondents were coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of BPL “Birthplace.”

“Caribbean” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent was born in the Caribbean (coded 1); all other respondents were coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of BPL “Birthplace.”

“Other origin” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent was born outside of the United States, Africa, or the Caribbean (coded 1); all other respondents were coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of BPL “Birthplace.”

Year of immigration variables:

“Native born and Pre-1995” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent was born in the United States or immigrated to the United States prior to 1995 (coded 1); all other respondents were coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of YRIMMIG “Year of immigration.”

“1995-2004” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent immigrated to the United States between 1995-2004 (coded 1); all other respondents were coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of YRIMMIG “Year of immigration.”

“2005-2012” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent immigrated to the United States between 2005-2012 (coded 1); all other respondents were coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of YRIMMIG “Year of immigration.”
Education variables:

“Less than high school” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent has less than a 12th grade education (coded 1); all other respondents were coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of EDUC “Educational Attainment.”

“High school graduate” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent has a 12th grade education (coded 1); all other respondents were coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of EDUC “Educational Attainment.”

“Some college” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent has between 1 and 3 years of college education (coded 1); all other respondents were coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of EDUC “Educational Attainment.”

“College degree” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent has 4 years of college education (coded 1); all other respondents were coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of EDUC “Educational Attainment.”

“More than college” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent has more than four years of college education (coded 1); all other respondents were coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of EDUC “Educational Attainment.”

English ability variables:

“Does not speak English” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent does not speak English (coded 1); all other respondents are coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of SPEAKENG “Speaks English.”

“Speaks English, but not well” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent speaks English, but not well (coded 1); all other respondents are coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of SPEAKENG “Speaks English.”
“Speaks English well” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent speaks English well (coded 1); all other respondents are coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of SPEAKENG “Speaks English.”

“Only English” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent speaks only English at home (coded 1); all other respondents are coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of SPEAKENG “Speaks English.”

Marital status variables:

“Married” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent is married (coded 1) or is not married (coded 0). This dummy results from the recoding of MARST “Marital Status.”

Region variables:

“Northeast” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent’s housing unit is located in the Northeast region of the U.S. (coded 1) or is not (coded 0). This dummy results from the recoding of REGION “Census region and division.”

“Midwest” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent’s housing unit is located in the Midwest region of the U.S. (coded 1) or is not (coded 0). This dummy results from the recoding of REGION “Census region and division.”

“West” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent’s housing unit is located in the West region of the U.S. (coded 1) or is not (coded 0). This dummy results from the recoding of REGION “Census region and division.”

“South” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent’s housing unit is located in the South region of the U.S. (coded 1) or is not (coded 0). This dummy results from the recoding of REGION “Census region and division.”
Age variable:

“Age” is a continuous variable indicating the person’s age in years as of the last birthday.

Industry variables:

“Education and health” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent performed an occupation in the educational, health, or social services industry (coded 1); all other respondents were coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of IND “Industry.”

“Manufacturing” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent performed an occupation in the manufacturing industry (coded 1); all other respondents were coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of IND “Industry.”

“Retail” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent performed an occupation in the wholesale or retail trade industries (coded 1); all other respondents were coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of IND “Industry.”

“Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent performed an occupation in the finance, insurance, real estate, or rental and leasing industries (coded 1); all other respondents were coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of IND “Industry.”

“Professional” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent performed an occupation in a professional, scientific, management, administrative, or waste management industry (coded 1); all other respondents were coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of IND “Industry.”
“Other services” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent performed an occupation in a service industry (coded 1); all other respondents were coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of IND “Industry.”

“Public Administration” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent performed an occupation in public administration (coded 1); all other respondents were coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of IND “Industry.”

“Other” is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent performed an occupation in an industry other than the ones listed above (e.g. agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting; mining; construction; transportation and warehousing; utilities) (coded 1); all other respondents were coded 0. This dummy results from the recoding of IND “Industry.”

**Analytic Strategy**

The goal of Part II of this dissertation is to determine which independent variables currently predict earnings for full-time Black women workers. Annual earnings are an important indicator of a worker’s economic well-being. Multiple regression analyses were employed to determine which independent variables currently have the greatest impact on predicting earnings for Black women who are employed full-time.

One of the questions at the core of this dissertation and recent literature on Black women’s labor market outcomes is understanding how nativity impacts earnings. Similar to the approach of Corra & Kimuna (2009), the first model is a bivariate regression estimating the effects of group origin on logged annual earnings. The second model adds the year of
immigration variable to the group origin variable controlled in Model 1. The third model controls for the net effects of all of the independent variables described above.

The results of these analyses can help shed light on factors impacting outcomes for Black women in the U.S. labor market.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

The preceding chapter discussed the research methods used to address the following research questions: What are the labor market outcomes (e.g., employment status, earnings, and occupational prestige) of Black women in the United States according to age, nativity (U.S.- vs. foreign-born status), and level of educational attainment (college-educated vs. non-college-educated)? How do these labor market outcomes change throughout the life course, for different age cohorts, over a period of several decades? Considering the most recent national data, what factors predict earnings for full-time Black women workers? This chapter presents the results of the analyses.

To address these questions, this dissertation utilized data from the Minnesota Population Center’s Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) of the United States Census Bureau’s 1980, 1990, and 2000 Census, and 2010-2012 American Community Survey (ACS). Synthetic cohort analysis and multiple regression analyses were conducted. The data selected from the ACS to facilitate the synthetic cohort analysis focus on 454,265 Black females from ages 25-64 who were in the labor force and not enrolled in school (73,520 in 1980, 145,515 in 1990, 149,535 in 2000; and 85,695 in 2010-2012). The data selected from the ACS to facilitate the regression analyses focus on 23,408 Black females from ages 25-64 who were in the labor force, not enrolled in school, worked full-time year-round, and reported positive annual earnings.

First, the findings from Part I of this dissertation (synthetic cohort analysis) are presented. Results from the analysis by nativity show how native-born Black women and foreign-born Black women fare and compare on each of three labor market outcomes: employment status, earnings, and occupational prestige. Results from the analysis by education show how non-
college-educated Black women and college-educated Black women fare and compare on each of the same three labor market outcomes. Cross-cohort comparisons also reveal how younger and older cohorts fared when they were at the same point in the life cycle.

Second, the findings from Part II of this dissertation (multiple regression analyses) are presented. This includes a report of the descriptive statistics that were computed to characterize the sample, correlation analyses to estimate the magnitude and direction of statistical relationships among variables, and regression analyses that estimate the influence of various human capital and demographic variables on the dependent variable: logged annual wage and salary income.

**Part I(a): Immigrant Advantage? Comparing Trajectories of Native-Born Black Women and Foreign-Born Black Women (Synthetic Cohort Analysis)**

The following section presents the findings from the synthetic cohort analysis comparing groups of Black women by nativity. The three outcomes are employment rates, earnings, and occupational prestige. Cross-cohort comparisons also reveal how younger and older cohorts fared when they were at the same point in the life cycle.

**Employment Rates by Nativity**

For both Cohorts 1 and 2, across all time periods, foreign-born Black women had higher rates of employment than native-born Black women (Figures 2 and 3). Employment rates decreased from 2000 to 2010 for both foreign-born and native-born women in Cohorts 1 and 2, though the decline was slightly steeper for native-born Black women. For example, the employment rate declined from 95.2% to 93.0% for foreign-born women in Cohort 1 (a decline
of 2.2%), while the employment rate went from 94% to 90.9% for native-born Black women in Cohort 1 (a decline of 3.1%).

For Cohort 1, from 1980 to 2000 employment rates for both native-born Black women and foreign-born Black women rose, with nearly identical increases in employment rates for both groups (5%) (Figure 2). Employment rates were highest for both groups in the year 2000, prior to the Great Recession.

Cross-cohort comparisons reveal that employment rates for Black women were comparable to those of their same-age and same-education counterparts from ages 25 to 44, but rates were lower for Black women aged 45 to 54 in Cohort 2 than they were for Black women aged 45 to 54 in Cohort 1.

**Earnings by Nativity**

Across cohorts and life stages, foreign-born Black women had higher incomes than native-born Black women (Figures 4 and 5). The income gap also increases over time: for example, foreign-born women and native-born women in Cohort 1 have nearly identical incomes when they are 25-34 ($23,152 and $23,071, respectively) but by the time the women are 55-64 foreign-born women out-earn native-born women by about $7,000 ($43,119 and $36,000, respectively). Both foreign-born women and native-born women had the largest gain in income between the years 2000-2010; thus the women in Cohort 2 experienced a larger gain in income between ages 35-44 and 45-54 than did the women in Cohort 1.
**Occupational Prestige by Nativity**

Across cohorts and life stages, foreign-born Black women had higher occupational prestige scores than native-born Black women (Figures 6 and 7). The gap also increases over time until the year 2000; in 2010, the gap in occupational prestige scores narrows due to a decline in prestige scores for foreign-born women in Cohort 1 (Figure 6) and a smaller than average increase in prestige scores for foreign-born women in Cohort 2 (Figure 7).


The following section presents the findings from the synthetic cohort analysis comparing groups of Black women by education. The three outcomes are employment rates, earnings, and occupational prestige. Cross-cohort comparisons also reveal how younger and older cohorts fared when they were at the same point in the life cycle.

**Employment Rates by Education**

Figures 8 and 9 show that for both Cohort 1 and Cohort 2, college-educated Black women were consistently employed at higher rates than non-college-educated Black women. From 1980 to 2000 employment rates for both college-educated and non-college-educated women in Cohorts 1 and 2 rose, though there was a sharper increase in employment rates for non-college-educated Black women than for college-educated Black women. For example, the percentage of college-educated women in Cohort 2 went from 96.2% in 1990 to 97.3% in 2000 (+1.1%), while the rate for non-college-educated women rose from 84.8% in 1990 to 90.3% in 2000 (+5.5%).
Employment rates for all women decreased from 2000 to 2010, though the decline was sharpest for college-educated Black women in both cohorts.

Earnings by Education

As expected, college-educated Black women consistently earned higher incomes than non-college-educated women at all time periods and across cohorts (Figures 10 and 11). In line with the literature on the payoffs of a college education, the gap in income between college-educated and non-college-educated Black women grew larger over time for both cohorts. While 25 to 34 year old college-educated women earned about 50% more than 25 to 34 year old non-college-educated women, the incomes of college-educated women were nearly twice that of non-college-educated women 20 years later, when they were 45 to 54 years old.

The incomes for both college-educated and non-college-educated Black women in Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 were nearly identical from the ages of 25 to 44, but both college-educated and non-college-educated women in Cohort 2 earned more than their same-age counterparts in Cohort 1 when they were 45 to 54 years old.

Occupational Prestige by Education

As expected, college-educated Black women had higher occupational prestige scores than non-college-educated Black women at all ages and across cohorts (Figures 12 and 13). The prestige scores for both college-educated and non-college-educated women increased over time, and the gap in prestige scores between college-educated and non-college-educated also increased slightly over time. Cross-cohort comparison reveals that college-educated Black women had
similar prestige scores at each life stage; the same held true for non-college-educated Black women.

**Part II: Predicting Earnings for Black Women in the U.S. (Multiple Regression Analyses)**

Part II of this study further explored the findings from Part I and identified additional factors that currently impact earnings for full-time Black women workers in the United States. Multiple regression analyses was employed to determine which independent variables have the greatest impact on predicting earnings for Black women.

*Univariate analysis*

Table 4.1 presents descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, ranges, and descriptions of variables for the full-time Black women workers included in this analysis (N=23,408):

**Dependent variable**

Logged Wage and Salary Income ranged from 1.39 to 13.36 for Black females who were employed full-time in the years preceding the 2010, 2011, and 2012 American Community Surveys. The mean logged annual earnings was 10.49.

**Independent variables**

Eight sets of variables were chosen to predict logged wage and salary income. The variable “Birthplace” was recoded into a set of dummy variables indicating the group origin of the respondent. The four variables were “African American,” “African,” “Caribbean,” and
“Other origin.” African Americans were 41% of the sample. Caribbeans were 34%, Africans were 15% and Black women of other origin were 10%.

“Year of Immigration” was recoded into a set of dummy variables indicating how long a given respondent has been in the United States. This variable gives some indication of the time that adjustment and/or socioeconomic assimilation could have been happening. Seventy-eight percent of the sample were native-born and pre-1995 immigrants. Seventeen percent of the respondents in this sample immigrated to the U.S. between 1995 and 2004, and five percent immigrated to the U.S. between 2005 and 2012.

The variable “Education,” the measure of respondents’ human capital, was recoded into a set of dummy variables indicating the following five levels of educational attainment: “less than high school,” “high school graduate,” “some college,” “college degree,” and “more than college.” Thirty four percent of respondents in this sample were high school graduates.

The variable “Speaks English” was recoded into a set of dummy variables indicating the following four levels of English ability: “does not speak English,” “speaks English, but not well,” “speaks English well,” and “speaks only English.” Nearly 90% of the women in this sample speak only English at home.

“Marital status” was recoded into a dummy variable “Married.” Forty-three percent of the women in this sample were married.

“Region” was recoded into a set of dummy variables indicating whether a respondent resided in the Northeast, Midwest, West or South. The majority of respondents (51%) reside in the South.

“Age” is a continuous variable indicating the person’s age in years as of the last birthday. The average age of the women in this sample was 45.19 years.
The variable “Industry” was recoded into a set of dummy variables indicating whether or not a respondent worked in one of eight industries. Nearly half of the sample (49%) worked in education and health.
Table 4.1. Means, Standard Deviations, Ranges and Description of Variables for Black Women (N=23,408)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>ACS Variable NAME and Label</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent Variable</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logged annual earnings</td>
<td>10.49</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>1.39 – 13.36</td>
<td>Log of INCWAGE ‘Wage and Salary Income’</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Independent Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Origin</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American (ref.)</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>BPL ‘Birthplace’ ‘Where was this person born?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>BPL ‘Birthplace’ ‘Where was this person born?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>BPL ‘Birthplace’ ‘Where was this person born?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other origin</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>BPL ‘Birthplace’ ‘Where was this person born?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of Immigration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native born and Pre-1995 (ref.)</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>YRIMMIG ‘When did this person come to live in the United States?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-2004</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>YRIMMIG ‘When did this person come to live in the United States?’</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005-2012</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>YRIMMIG ‘When did this person come to live in the United States?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>EDUC ‘What is the highest degree or level of school this person has completed?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate (ref.)</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>EDUC ‘What is the highest degree or level of school this person has completed?’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>EDUC ‘What is the highest degree or level of school this person has completed?’</td>
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<td>College degree</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.39</td>
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<td>EDUC ‘What is the highest degree or level of school this person has completed?’</td>
</tr>
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<td>More than college</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>EDUC ‘What is the highest degree or level of school this person has completed?’</td>
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Table 4.1, cont. Means, Standard Deviations, Ranges and Description of Variables for Black Women (N=23,408)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>ACS Variable NAME and Label</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English ability</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Speaks only English (ref.)</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.32</td>
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<td>SPEAKENG ‘How well does this person speak English?’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Speaks English well</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>SPEAKENG ‘How well does this person speak English?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks English, but not well</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>SPEAKENG ‘How well does this person speak English?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not speak English</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>SPEAKENG ‘How well does this person speak English?’</td>
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<td>Married</td>
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<td>0.50</td>
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<td>Region</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
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<td>Midwest</td>
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<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>REGION ‘Census Region and Division’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>REGION ‘Census Region and Division’</td>
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<tr>
<td>South (ref.)</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>REGION ‘Census Region and Division’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>45.19</td>
<td>10.18</td>
<td>25 – 64</td>
<td>AGE ‘What is person X’s age?’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and Health (ref.)</td>
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<td>0.50</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>IND ‘What kind of business or industry was this?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>IND ‘What kind of business or industry was this?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>IND ‘What kind of business or industry was this?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>IND ‘What kind of business or industry was this?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>IND ‘What kind of business or industry was this?’</td>
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<td>Other Services</td>
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<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>IND ‘What kind of business or industry was this?’</td>
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<td>Public Admin.</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>IND ‘What kind of business or industry was this?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>IND ‘What kind of business or industry was this?’</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Bivariate analysis**

Table 4.2 presents results from T-tests performed on the dummy variables for group origin, year of immigration, education, marital status, region, and industry to determine whether their mean scores on the dependent variable “Logged Wage and Salary Income” were significantly different at .05 level (p=0.05). The bivariate analysis revealed that there were statistically significant differences between mean incomes of African Americans and all other groups. The score for African women was only statistically significantly different from the mean score for African American women. The score for Caribbean women was statistically significantly different from women assigned “Other origin.” Women assigned “Other origin” had a higher logged wage and salary income ($\bar{x}=10.54$) than all other Black women. African American women had the lowest logged wage and salary income ($\bar{x}=10.45$).

There were statistically significant differences between mean logged wage and salary incomes of all groups differentiated by time in the U.S. Women who were native-born or who immigrated to the U.S. before 1995 had the highest mean logged wage and salary income ($\bar{x}=10.53$), followed by women who immigrated from 1995 to 2004 ($\bar{x}=10.39$). Black women who immigrated to the U.S. from 2005 to 2012 had the lowest logged wage and salary income ($\bar{x}=10.21$).

There were statistically significant differences in the mean logged wage and salary incomes of all five of the education groups compared. Black women who have more than a college degree had the highest mean logged wage and salary income ($\bar{x}=11.05$), followed by those with a college degree ($\bar{x}=10.78$), those with some college ($\bar{x}=10.46$), those with a high school diploma ($\bar{x}=10.24$) and those with less than a college degree ($\bar{x}=10.04$).
There were statistically significant differences in mean logged wage and salary incomes for women based on marital status. Married Black women had higher earnings ($\bar{x} = 10.54$) than single Black women ($\bar{x} = 10.45$).

Regarding region of residence, there were statistically significant differences in mean logged wage and salary incomes between women in the Northeast and women in the Midwest and South. There were also statistically significant differences in mean logged wage and salary incomes between women in the West and women in the Midwest and South. Black women in the Northeast and Midwest had the same mean logged wage and salary income ($\bar{x} = 10.59$), while women in the Midwest and South had similar logged wage and salary incomes: ($\bar{x} = 10.43$) for Black women in the Midwest and ($\bar{x} = 10.42$) for Black women in the South.

With regard to industry, Black women in Public Administration had the highest earnings ($\bar{x} = 10.76$), and the score was statistically significantly different from Black women who worked in all other industries. Black women who worked in Finance, Insurance and Real Estate had the next highest earnings ($\bar{x} = 10.66$), and the mean score was statistically significantly different from women in all industries except for “Professional” and “Other.” Black women who worked in wholesale or retail trade ($\bar{x} = 10.30$) and other services ($\bar{x} = 10.14$) had the lowest earnings.
Table 4.2. Comparison of Means on Logged Wage and Salary Income by Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Logged Wage and Salary Income (n in parentheses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group Origin</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>10.45(^a) (9,645)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>10.52(^b) (3,534)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>10.51(^b) (7,992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other origin</td>
<td>10.54(^b) (2,237)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year of Immigration</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native born or before 1995</td>
<td>10.53(^a) (18,313)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995 to 2004</td>
<td>10.39(^b) (3,925)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005 to 2012</td>
<td>10.21(^c) (1,170)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>10.00(^a) (1,617)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma</td>
<td>10.24(^b) (7,984)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>10.47(^c) (6,459)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College degree</td>
<td>10.78(^d) (4,391)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than college</td>
<td>11.05(^e) (2,957)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English Ability</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks only English</td>
<td>10.53(^a) (20,775)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks English well</td>
<td>10.27(^b) (1,755)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks English, but not well</td>
<td>10.01(^c) (737)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not speak English</td>
<td>9.92(^e) (141)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2, cont. Comparison of Means on Logged Wage and Salary Income by Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Logged Wage and Salary Income (n in parentheses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital status</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>10.45&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; (13,003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>10.54&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; (10,405)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Region</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>10.59&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; (7,668)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>10.43&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; (2,167)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>10.42&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; (11,925)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>10.59&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; (1,648)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industry</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>10.41&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; (1,318)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>10.30&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; (1,793)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate</td>
<td>10.66&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt; (1,765)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>10.60&lt;sup&gt;c-d&lt;/sup&gt; (1,597)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and Health</td>
<td>10.49&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt; (11,374)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Services</td>
<td>10.14&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt; (2,128)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Administration</td>
<td>10.76&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt; (1,994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10.61&lt;sup&gt;c-d&lt;/sup&gt; (1,439)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Within the predictor on the dependent variable, two categories share a common superscript if their difference is not statistically significant at .05 level (“a” or “b” indicate p = .05).
Table 4.3 presents results from Pearson’s Correlations that analyzed the relationship between age and the dependent variable “Logged Wage and Salary Income.” Age had a statistically significant weak positive relationship on logged wage and salary income ($r=0.08$).

![Table 4.3. Pearson’s Correlations (N=23,408)](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Logged Wage and Salary Income</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Age</td>
<td>.08***</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***$p = .001$

*Multivariate analysis*

Multiple regression analyses were employed to determine which independent variables have the greatest impact on earnings for full-time Black women workers.

Table 4.4 presents unstandardized regression coefficients and betas for the dependent variable ‘Logged Wage and Salary Income’ in 2012 (n=23,408). Three multivariate regression models, Model 1, Model 2, and Model 3 are presented on this table. All of the variables in each of the three models were significantly associated with earnings for Black women.

Model 1 examined the impact of group origin. This included the variables ‘African American’, ‘African’, ‘Caribbean’, and ‘Other origin’. This model indicated that Black women born outside of the U.S., Africa and the Caribbean (‘other origin’) had a 9% income advantage over African American women before controlling for other variables. African women had a 6.8% income advantage over African American women and Caribbean women had a 5.5% income advantage over African American women. The adjusted $R^2$ was 0.003, so this was a very weak model.
In Model 2, year of immigration variables were added to the regression model. These variables were ‘Native-born and Pre-1995’, ‘1995-2004’, and ‘2005-2012’. After controlling for time in the U.S., African women had a 25% earnings advantage over African American women. Black women assigned ‘other origin’ had a 17% earnings advantage over African American women, and Caribbean women had a 14% earnings advantage over African American women.

Black women who immigrated to the United States between 1995 and 2004 had a 25% earnings disadvantage compared to women who were native-born or immigrated to the United States before 1995. Black women who immigrated to the U.S. between 2005 and 2012 had a 43% earnings disadvantage compared to women who were native-born or immigrated to the United States before 1995. The adjusted $R^2$ for this model was 0.032.

Model 3 examined the impact of additional demographic variables including education, marital status, region, age, and industry. All of the variables were statistically significant at the 0.01 level except for ‘Midwest’. Having more than a college degree had the largest impact on mean logged wage and salary income. Controlling for all other variables in the model, Black women with more than a college degree had a 76% earnings advantage over women with a high school diploma. African-born women continued to have an earnings advantage (13%) over women born in other regions, and newer immigrants had a 22% earnings disadvantage compared to the native-born and pre-1995 immigrants.

In addition, married women had a 6.5% earnings advantage over unmarried women, and women in the Northeast had higher earnings than women in other regions. Women who worked in public administration had higher earnings than women who worked in all other industries, and women who worked in wholesale and retail trade had the lowest earnings among full-time Black women workers.
The adjusted $R^2$ for Model 3 was .307, indicating that approximately 31% of the variation in the outcome variable, ‘Logged Wage and Salary Income’ is accounted for by these variables. The F-test was statistically significant at the .001 level, confirming that these predictors are useful in predicting the outcome variable. The substantial and successive increase of the adjusted $R^2$ due to the addition of independent variables in each model indicates that there is no collinearity amongst the independent variables.
Table 4.4. Unstandardized Regression Coefficients (Beta in parentheses) for Logged Wage and Salary Income, 2010-2012 ACS (N = 23,408)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model II</th>
<th>Model III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group origin</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American (ref.)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>0.068***</td>
<td>0.247***</td>
<td>0.129***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.039)</td>
<td>(0.140)</td>
<td>(0.073)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>0.055***</td>
<td>0.139***</td>
<td>0.091***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.042)</td>
<td>(0.104)</td>
<td>(0.068)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other origin</td>
<td>0.093***</td>
<td>0.170***</td>
<td>0.088***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.043)</td>
<td>(0.079)</td>
<td>(0.041)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year of immigration</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native-born and Pre-1995 (ref.)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-2004</td>
<td>-0.249**</td>
<td>-0.104**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-0.147)</td>
<td>(-0.062)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2012</td>
<td>-0.430**</td>
<td>-0.219**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-0.148)</td>
<td>(-0.076)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate (ref.)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.181**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(-0.073)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.201**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.142)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College degree</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.496**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.307)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than college</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.759**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.399)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English ability</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks only English (ref.)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks English well</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.113**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(-0.047)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks English, but not well</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.234**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(-0.065)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks only English</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.233**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(-0.029)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried (ref.)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.065**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.051)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Model I</td>
<td>Model II</td>
<td>Model III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South (ref.)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>(0.009)</td>
<td>0.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>0.161***</td>
<td>(0.120)</td>
<td>0.161***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>0.146***</td>
<td>(0.059)</td>
<td>0.146***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.006***</td>
<td>(0.091)</td>
<td>0.006***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Model I</th>
<th>Model II</th>
<th>Model III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education and Health (ref.)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>0.088***</td>
<td>(0.032)</td>
<td>0.088***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>-0.039**</td>
<td>(-0.017)</td>
<td>-0.039**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate</td>
<td>0.157***</td>
<td>(0.066)</td>
<td>0.157***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>0.121***</td>
<td>(0.048)</td>
<td>0.121***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Services</td>
<td>-0.136***</td>
<td>(-0.062)</td>
<td>-0.136***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Administration</td>
<td>0.195***</td>
<td>(0.086)</td>
<td>0.195***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.178***</td>
<td>(0.068)</td>
<td>0.178***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Constant       | 10.45***| 10.45*** | 9.86***   |
| Adjusted R²    | .003    | .032     | .307      |
| F              | 22.07***| 157.16***| 430.76*** |

** p < .01     *** p < .001
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This dissertation has revealed several important trends regarding labor market outcomes for full-time Black women workers in the United States from 1980 to 2010. One important trend is that foreign-born Black women fared better than U.S.-born Black women in terms of employment rates, earnings and occupational prestige, and the earnings gap between these groups increased over time. College-educated Black women fared much better than non-college-educated Black women on the same three outcomes, yet there was more pronounced growth in employment rates for non-college-educated women over time and a steeper decline in the employment rates for college-educated women from 2000 to 2010 (apparently due to the Great Recession). Multiple regression analyses of 2010-2012 ACS data confirmed the significance of education and nativity as predictors of Black women’s earnings, and identified several other factors that impact earnings for full-time Black women workers in the U.S.

This chapter will discuss the major findings of this dissertation in light of other research on Black women’s labor market outcomes. First, findings from Part I (synthetic cohort analysis) will be discussed, followed by findings from Part II (multiple regression analyses).

Part I(a): Immigrant Advantage? Comparing Trajectories of Native-Born Black Women and Foreign-Born Black Women (Synthetic Cohort Analysis)

The following are the findings from the synthetic cohort analysis for each of the three labor market outcomes (employment rates, earnings, and occupational prestige) by nativity.
Employment Rates by Nativity

This study found that foreign-born Black women were employed at higher rates than native-born Black women across cohorts and over each census year. This contrasts with the research of Schoeni (1998) who found that immigrant women had slightly lower employment rates than native-born women in 1980 and 1990, but supports studies that suggest that immigrant women tend to be employed at higher rates than native Black women (Butcher, 1994; Model, 2008). The rise in employment rates for both U.S.-born and foreign-born women in Cohorts 1 and 2 between 1980 and 2010 align with research suggesting that employment rates rise as workers age (United States Department of Labor, 2012).

Employment rates decreased between 2000 and 2010 for both foreign-born and native-born women in Cohorts 1 and 2, though the decline was slightly steeper for native-born Black women. This decline in employment rates across cohorts suggests that the Great Recession negatively impacted employment for women in both cohorts. The fact that employment rates declined more sharply for native-born Black women than foreign-born Black women from 2000 to 2010 suggests that another aspect of the “immigrant advantage” is less vulnerability to job loss during recessions.

Earnings by Nativity

While prior research has documented the existence of race wage gaps that disadvantage Black people as a whole, the findings confirm that nativity also plays an important role in predicting earnings for Black women in the United States. Across cohorts and age groups, foreign-born Black women have higher median incomes than native-born Black women. This supports the findings of several researchers who have documented the “immigrant advantage” in
earnings (Corra & Kimuna, 2009; Kalmijn, 1996; Logan & Deane, 2003; Mason, 2010; Model, 2008; Waldinger & Gilbertson, 1994).

Model (2008) and others have also found that immigrant women tend to make less than native-born women when they first arrive in the United States but eventually catch up to and even surpass native-born women in earnings over time. Although the foreign-born women in this study were never at an earnings disadvantage relative native-born women, their earnings trajectory was more positive than that of the native-born. This trend is especially evident for Cohort 1: foreign-born women and native-born women had nearly identical median incomes in 1980, when they were 25 to 34 ($23,152 and $23,071, respectively), but as the decades progressed the gap in earnings between foreign-born and native Black women grew (it converged slightly in 2000, but increased again between 2000 and 2010). By the time the women were 55 to 64, foreign-born women out-earned native-born women by about $7,000 ($43,119 and $36,000, respectively).

These results contrast with studies that demonstrate an earnings advantage for native-born Blacks over foreign-born Blacks (e.g Butcher, 1994; Farley & Allen, 1987; Schoeni, 1990) but these studies control for additional variables and, in the case of Farley & Allen (1987), focus on Black men’s earnings.

**Occupational Prestige by Nativity**

Occupational prestige can play an important role in workers’ lives, as a boost to self-esteem, a proxy for job-related benefits and working conditions, an indicator of social status and a buffer against discrimination (Ortiz & Roscigno, 2009; Xu & Leffler, 1992). As with employment rates and median earnings, foreign-born Black women have higher occupational prestige scores than native-born Black women across cohorts and age groups. The gap in prestige increases over
time for both cohorts of foreign-born Black women until the year 2000, suggesting that the Great Recession slowed their occupational advancement.

These findings are supported by those of Model (2008), who found that West Indian women had a prestige advantage over native Black women from 1970 to 2000, but contrast with another study by Model (1997) that found that native Black women had a prestige advantage over West Indian women in 1990. These findings, though, were limited to workers in New York City. Model & Ladipo (1996) found that native Black women had a prestige advantage over African women, but again this study was limited to workers in New York.


The following are the findings from the synthetic cohort analysis for each of the three labor market outcomes (employment rates, earnings, and occupational prestige) by education.

*Employment Rates by Education*

Many studies have shown that having a college degree versus a high school diploma is associated with significantly better labor market outcomes, including better employment rates, higher earnings, and increased occupational prestige (Julian & Kominski, 2011; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). As expected, college-educated Black women in both Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 were consistently employed at higher rates than non-college-educated Black women. One of the goals of this dissertation was to identify the time periods when labor market outcomes for college-educated and non-college-educated women converged or diverged. The gap in employment rates was largest for both cohorts when they were youngest (ages 25-34). The gaps narrowed for both cohorts until the year 2000 when employment rates declined for women in
both cohorts. This again suggests that the Great Recession impacted employment opportunities for the Black women in this study.

However, from 2000 to 2010, the decline in employment was sharpest for college-educated Black women in both cohorts, echoing the findings of Dozier (2012) who found that Black women college degree holders faced disproportionate unemployment spells relative to White women during the economic downturns of the early 1980s and 1990s. These findings suggest that while educational attainment does impact rates of employment, it does not appear to provide superior protection from economic downturns.

**Earnings by Education**

As expected, college-educated Black women consistently earned higher incomes than non-college-educated Black women at all time periods and across cohorts. In line with research on the economic returns to college (Becker, 1964; Julian & Kominski, 2011; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005), the gap in income between college-educated and non-college-educated Black women grew larger over time for both cohorts. While 25 to 34 year old college-educated women earned about 50% more than 25 to 34 year old non-college-educated women, the incomes of college-educated women were nearly twice that of non-college-educated women 20 years later, when they were between 45 and 54 years old. These findings support several studies that highlight the “new inequality” of wage gaps based primarily on education, such as Browne & Askew (2005) who found growing gaps between the wages of non-college-educated and college-educated workers over time.

While the Great Recession appeared to negatively impact employment rates for foreign-born and native-born Black women at all levels of education, it is not clear whether or not it suppressed earnings for those Black women who remained employed. In fact, between 2000 and
2010, incomes increased substantially for college-educated and non-college-educated women in both cohorts, although the increase was steeper for college-educated women than for non-college-educated women. The rise in incomes during this decade was much steeper than the rise in incomes for both cohorts the prior decade, suggesting that the Great Recession was also a time of unprecedented wage increases for the women in this study.

Another noteworthy finding is that the wage gap between college-educated and non-college-educated women was primarily due to an increase in the median income for college-educated women as opposed to a decrease in earnings among non-college-educated women. This contradicts the findings reported by Morris & Western (1999) citing that the so-called rise in the college premium was almost entirely driven by the collapse in the earnings of high-school graduates and dropouts. One explanation for this difference could be that fact that the Black women included in this study are full-time, year-round workers; if part-time workers were included a similar trend might be found since the less-educated are more likely to work part-time and less than year-round (Dozier, 2012).

**Occupational Prestige by Education**

Similar to the findings regarding employment rates and earnings, college-educated women had an occupational prestige advantage over non-college-educated Black women across cohorts and age groups. These findings are consistent with those of Pascarella & Terenzini (2005), who found that those with a bachelor’s degree enjoyed a 34% advantage in occupational prestige over those without a bachelor’s degree in 1990. The prestige scores for both college-educated and non-college-educated women increased over time, and the gaps between prestige scores remained fairly consistent. Cross-cohort comparison reveals that prestige scores were similar for women of the same age groups.
Summary of Findings from Synthetic Cohort Analysis

The synthetic cohort analysis revealed several important trends. With regard to employment rates, both foreign-born status and college education contributed to higher employment rates across time. Although neither of these statuses provided total protection from the impact of the Great Recession, they were nonetheless privileged vis-à-vis U.S.-born women and non-college-educated women, respectively. Regarding earnings, median incomes rose over time for all groups of Black women compared in this study, although the earnings of some groups rose more quickly than others. College-educated women had the highest median earnings of all groups compared, confirming that college still pays. Incomes rose most steeply between 2000 and 2010, suggesting that the years of the Great Recession did not completely hamper the earnings attainment of those Black women who remained employed. Occupational prestige scores were highest for college-educated and foreign-born women, further affirming theories of human capital attainment and immigrant advantage.

Part II: Predicting Earnings for Black Women in the U.S. (Multiple Regression Analyses)

The goal of Part II of this study was to examine recent national data to determine which independent variables, in addition to education and nativity, currently predict earnings for full-time Black women workers. Data employed was drawn from the Minnesota Population Center’s Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) for the United States Census Bureau’s 2010-2012 American Community Survey (ACS).

All of the variables in each of the three models were significantly associated with earnings for Black women. Model 1 examined the impact of group origin. This included variables such as “African American,” “African,” “Caribbean,” and “Other origin.” This model
indicated that foreign-born Black women had an earnings advantage over native-born Black women, with Black women of “other origin” (not from the Africa or Caribbean) having the greatest earnings advantage. In Model 2, year of immigration variables were added to the regression model. These variables were “Native-born and Pre-1995,” “1995-2004,” and “2005-2012.” After controlling for year of immigration, African women continued to have an earnings advantage over other Black women. Model 3 examined the impact of additional demographic variables on logged annual income, including education, marital status, region, age, and industry. Controlling for these variables did not erase the African earnings advantage.

*Group origin variables*

Unlike Corra & Kimuna (2009), this study found that African women had an earnings advantage over both Caribbean and African American women. One reason for this difference could be that this study does not disaggregate the Caribbean population by linguistic heritage. In their study, they found English Caribbean women to have higher average earnings than French Caribbean, African, Spanish Caribbean and African American women. Their study also included part-time workers and estimated log hourly wages, while this study only included full-time year-round workers and estimated log annual income.

The findings from this study contrast with the findings of several researchers who have documented the “immigrant advantage” in earnings for West Indians (e.g. Corra & Kimuna, 2009; Kalmijn, 1996; Logan & Deane, 2003; Mason, 2010; Model, 2008; Waldinger & Gilbertson, 1994), but they are supported by studies that have found that Africans tend to have higher wages than Caribbeans and African-Americans before controls are introduced (e.g. Dodoo, 1997; Model, 2008). In addition, these results contrast with studies that find an earnings advantage for native-born Blacks over foreign-born Blacks (e.g. Butcher, 1994; Farley & Allen,
One finding unique to this study of full-time Black women workers is that the earnings advantage for Africans remained even after controlling for other earnings-related measures.

**Year of immigration variables**

Regarding year of immigration, the findings from this study are consistent with prior research that shows that time of arrival is an important predictor of earnings. This study finds that newer arrivals are at an earnings disadvantage compared to older immigrants and native-born Blacks. This is consistent with the findings of Model (2008) who found that immigrant women tend to make less than native-born women when they first arrive in the United States but eventually catch up to and even surpass native women in earnings over time. These findings are also supported by Corra & Kimuna’s (2009) findings regarding Black women in 1990 and 2000.

**Education variables**

Having a college education or more than college education were the most important predictors of Black women’s annual earnings. Controlling for all other variables in the model, Black women with more than a college degree had a 77% earnings advantage over women with a high school diploma. Again, these findings are consistent with the literature on the economic returns to college (Becker, 1964; Julian & Kominski, 2011; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Relative to the group origin variables, the education variables predicted a much larger proportion of Black women’s earnings. These findings thus support studies of the “new inequality”, which emphasize education as the primary source of intra-group wage gaps (Browne & Askew, 2005; Leicht, 2008).
Other demographic variables

This study found that being married was a statistically significant positive predictor of Black women’s logged wage and salary income. Married women had a 6.5% earnings advantage over unmarried women. This finding is supported by numerous other studies that find that marriage is positively associated with earnings (AAUW, 2012; Marini & Fan, 1997; Newsome & Dodoo, 2002). Being married “has long been associated with higher earnings in that marital status is seen as an index of personal & economic stability” (Dodoo, 1991, pg. 46). Unmarried women, particularly those with children, are more susceptible to poverty than their married counterparts (Newsome & Dodoo, 2002).

Living in the Northeast or West was found to be a statistically significant positive predictor of income. Black women full-time workers in the Northeast have a 16% wage advantage over women living in the South. Women living in the West have a 14% earnings advantage over women living in the South. Prior research supports these findings, which generally suggest that wages are lower in the South due to the lower cost of living relative to other regions (Newsome & Dodoo, 2002, pg. 456).

While Black women living in the South have the lowest earnings, some recent research suggests that median earnings in the region are rising, which is good news for Black women given that the South is where most Black women reside and that it has historically been the region where Black women faced the greatest barriers to labor market equality (Amott & Matthaei, 1991; Branch, 2011; Branch & Hanley, 2013).

As expected, age was found to have a very small but statistically significant positive relationship to Black women’s income.

All of the industry variables were statistically significantly related to earnings for the Black women in this study. Working in public administration was associated with the highest
earnings. Working in finance, insurance and real estate, professional and management industries, manufacturing and other non-traditional industries (e.g. mining, construction, and construction) were also associated with above average earnings. Working in retail and other services was associated with lower than average earnings.

These findings support prior research that has emphasized the importance of the public sector as an employer of Black women. Black women experienced substantial gains in earnings and occupational mobility immediately after the passing of civil rights legislation, when many left domestic work to take on newly-created jobs in the public sector (Branch, 2011; King, 1995; Newsome & Dodoo, 2002). Title VII of the Civil Rights Act made employment discrimination on the basis of race or gender illegal in the United States, and many Black Americans were able to fill both public and sector jobs to which they had formerly been denied access.

**Summary of Findings from Multiple Regression Analyses**

The regression analyses confirmed that foreign-born Black women have an earnings advantage over native-born Black women. All three groups of foreign-born Black women earned more than native-born Black women, even after controls were introduced. Having at least some college was also associated with increased earnings among Black women, as well as being in the United States for a longer period of time, being married, living in the Northeast or West, and working in public administration or professional industries.

**Education, Immigration, and the Forms of Capital**

Gary Becker (1964) posited that human capital investments, or investments made in education or training, could be made for the purpose of deriving future economic benefits. In *The Forms of Capital* (1986), Pierre Bourdieu distinguishes between three distinct forms of
capital – economic, social, and cultural – that contribute to the reproduction of social class. In this study, human capital is measured by educational attainment, particularly a college degree, which both requires and tends to increase social and cultural capital for those who attain it. The accumulation of increased human capital translated to increased economic capital for all of the Black women in this study. In addition, being foreign-born translated to increased earnings for the Black women in this study, even after controlling for education. It appears that the social and cultural capital of native Black women does not result in the same labor market returns as the social and cultural capital of foreign-born Black women.

*Selectivity arguments* ascribe immigrant success to the notion that immigrants generally constitute a highly selective group who arrive with high levels of human, social, and cultural capital that enhance their likelihood of economic success in competitive labor markets, ultimately enabling them to surpass the native born (Butcher, 1994; Chiswick, 1979; Lee, 1966).

These explanations seem plausible, as the foreign-born Black women in this study outperformed the native-born on all of the labor market outcomes over a 30-year period. These data do not allow for the testing of demand-side hypotheses, and they are limited in the extent to which they can account for cultural factors due to the diversity of cultural groups in all of the regions under study. Therefore, future research is needed to further investigate the underlying dynamics of the observed immigrant advantages.

**Intersectionality**

In her article *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*, Kimberle Crenshaw argues that the experiences of women of color are frequently “the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism” (pg. 1243). Black women,
as members of groups marginalized on the basis of both race and gender, are positioned at the intersection of two powerful systems of oppression.

Although originating in studies on the role of race, class, and gender in the lives of Black women, an intersectional framework can be used to conceptualize the role that other social identities have on the lives of subjects, including their experiences in the labor market. In the same way that the legal system about which Crenshaw writes is shaped by hegemonic racism, so too is the labor market shaped by various forms of oppression (and conversely, privilege). Some workers have historically been favored (e.g. native-born middle- and upper-class White males) while others (e.g. women, working-class, racial minorities) have been subject to labor market constraints even as opportunities emerge at particular times or within certain occupational niches. Immigrant status, marital status, and other social statuses interact to shape the opportunities of individuals in the labor market.

The finding that foreign-born Blacks have an advantage over native-born Blacks in terms of employment rates, earnings, and occupational prestige affirms that there are diverse outcomes and trajectories among Black women by nativity. Future studies that compare the impact of these variables on different groups may add to our understanding of the ways that various structures of oppression and privilege intersect to shape earnings and other labor market outcomes.

**Summary**

This study had two main objectives. The first was to identify how employment status, earnings, and occupational prestige vary based on the intersection of age, educational attainment level, and nativity for different age cohorts of Black women in the United States between 1980 and 2010. Another goal was to identify additional factors that currently impact earnings for full-
time Black women workers in the United States. Part I of this study suggests that nativity and education play substantial roles in shaping labor market outcomes for Black women. Part II of this study confirms the findings from Part I and reveals in more detail the factors that contribute to earnings, such as region of origin, level of education, industry, and year of immigration. Having more than a college education was the most significant predictor of earnings for Black women who work full-time. Another key finding is that being foreign-born, and from Africa in particular, positively contributes to earnings in the U.S. In addition, working in public administration continues to positively contribute to Black women’s earnings.

These findings affirm that there are many stories regarding Black social mobility. In support of prior research on the relationship between college education and labor market outcomes, college education dramatically impacts labor market opportunities for Black women workers. Nativity also informs labor market outcomes, with native-born women at an earnings disadvantage compared to foreign-born women. This supports other research that finds a similar advantage among immigrant Black women, although the mechanisms underlying this advantage need be further explored.

These findings suggest that improving access to higher education, investing in public-sector jobs, supporting new immigrants, and ensuring Black women’s access to non-traditional industries have the potential to increase earnings for Black women in America. These recommendations are discussed in further detail in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Introduction

This dissertation had two main objectives. The first objective was to identify how the variables employment status, earnings, and occupational prestige vary based on the intersection of age, educational attainment level, and nativity for different age cohorts of Black women in the United States from 1980 to 2010. Research questions included the following: What were the median incomes for different groups of Black women, and how did this change over time? Were there tangible differences in terms of employment levels and occupational prestige for the various cohorts under investigation during these time periods? Were different groups of Black women experiencing progress, stagnation, or decline? The second objective was to identify additional factors that currently impact earnings for Black women full-time workers in the United States.

Part I of the study (synthetic cohort analysis) revealed that for both age cohorts, college-educated Black women had significantly better outcomes than non-college-educated Black women in terms of employment rates, earnings, and occupational prestige. While the employment rates of college- and non-college-educated women converged over time (apparently due to the impact of the Great Recession on employment opportunities for college-educated Black women), the gap in their prestige scores remained relatively stable and the earnings gap between the two groups grew larger. Part I of the study also revealed that both age cohorts of foreign-born Black women had better labor market outcomes than U.S.-born Black women at all time periods, and the gap between them increased over time on all three outcomes.

Part II of this study (multiple regression analyses) revealed that foreign-born Black women had an earnings advantage over U.S.-born Black women, even after controlling for numerous demographic variables. African-born Black women had the highest earnings, followed by
Caribbean-born Black women. The regression analyses confirmed that having any amount of college education significantly increased Black women’s earnings; having more than a college degree was the single most important factor predicting annual income for full-time Black women workers in the United States.

These findings are consistent with prior research that indicates that attaining any amount of college education significantly predicts earnings for workers, and that foreign-born Blacks have significantly higher earnings than native-born Blacks in the U.S. These results highlight the need for additional studies on the role of nativity among Black sub-populations and among the labor force more broadly.

**Limitations**

Although the research questions were sufficiently addressed by this study, several limitations are worth mentioning. These limitations highlight the need for further research on the macro and micro level factors impacting labor market outcomes for workers in the United States.

**Data**

The census and American Community Survey data used for Part I of this study are cross-sectional rather than longitudinal, thus they do not allow for the observation of the same people over time. Because these data are not longitudinal, differences in labor market outcomes from one survey to the next could be due to changes in the unobserved characteristics of survey respondents. What they do allow for is analysis of individuals who share attributes on the variables of interest (i.e. race, gender, age, nativity, and education) at different points in time (e.g. 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010). Currently there are no longitudinal data tracking Black women
over multiple decades, so these data provide another way to approximate trends for cohorts of Black women over time.

In addition, because the census only provides data every ten years it is not possible to analyze these same outcomes for respondents during the years between censuses. For example, we cannot know if individual workers remained in the labor force, shifted from full-time to part-time work, obtained additional education or training, etc. Having additional information about what was happening with these populations prior to and subsequent to these surveys would allow for more in-depth analysis and interpretation of the observed labor market trends.

**Variables**

The responses to the surveys used in this dissertation were self-reported, thus they were subject to information bias. Questions about income can be particularly sensitive for survey respondents (Moore et al., 1997), with respondents at the low and high ends of the income distribution being the most likely to misreport earnings. Questions regarding respondents’ work hours and weeks worked also required them to reflect on the prior year, subjecting the responses to recall bias.

Another limitation of this dataset is that it did not include many other variables known to impact labor market outcomes. These include respondents’ background information, such as parental socioeconomic status, job-related training, college quality and major, and prior work experience. There were also no variables addressing respondents’ aspirations, attitudes, or satisfaction with their employment. The dataset also does not include variables related to some important aspects of the respondents’ current place of work, such as the racial or gender composition. Knowing the answers to these questions would explain more of the variance in labor market outcomes.
A third limitation of the variables in this dataset is that there was no question related to respondents’ parents’ birthplace, thus it was not possible to identify any immigrant generation beyond the first generation. There is a variable called “Ancestry” that records the respondent's self-reported ancestry or ethnic origin, but this variable does not require respondents to relate this to any particular ancestor(s). Recent sociological research on assimilation has often compared the outcomes and experiences of 2nd generation immigrants to 1st generation immigrants, so having a question regarding the birthplace of respondents’ parents or grandparents would allow for analyses of different immigrant generations.

Lastly, there is no variable reporting the specific national origins of women from Africa. Research has shown that there are tangible differences in labor market experiences and outcomes between people from different countries and regions (e.g. North Africa versus Sub-Saharan Africa) (Dodoo & Takyi, 2002). The availability of information regarding African nationality would allow for more detailed analyses.

**Methodology**

Several limitations of this study were related to the research questions and the way that available variables were analyzed.

In Part I of this study, the cohort analysis conveys information about trends over time for each of the groups under consideration. It is unclear whether or not the observed outcomes are due to age effects (changes among individuals as part of their aging process), period effects (impacts on individuals in a society due to a particular historical moment), or cohort effects (differences in the way that cohorts act or think). Having a more robust understanding of the impact of each of these variables could add new layers of understanding to the current analyses.
In both Part I and Part II of this study, the analyses of prestige and earnings were focused on Black women who work full-time year-round. Black women who were in school, work part-time or less than year-round were not included in this study. This impacts the generalizability of these findings because there are several groups of women who are more likely to work part-time or less than year-round, including women who are less educated, women who live in regions like the South where seasonal or domestic employment is more likely, and women who have spouses with high incomes. These biases should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings of this study and generalizing them to the entire population of Black women in the United States.

Additionally, one of the main dependent variables in this study was annual income. While many studies analyze annual income for different groups of workers, many other studies evaluate workers’ weekly or hourly earnings. Analyzing workers’ weekly or hourly earnings can reveal important information about wage rates, particularly for part-time workers and those who work less than year-round. These workers were not the focus of this study, but analyzing incomes at this level could provide another layer of detail regarding Black women’s labor market outcomes.

Furthermore, this dissertation did not include a qualitative component. Qualitative data collection could supplement the findings of this dissertation by adding additional information regarding respondents’ personal identity, experiences in the labor market, sense of economic well-being, and understanding of the relationship between their labor market experiences and other aspects of their lives (including family responsibilities, community supports, etc.). Additional qualitative information could enhance our understanding of the labor market outcomes observed in this study.

Lastly, this research set out to identify labor market trends and trajectories for Black women full-time workers in the United States. This study did not compare outcomes for this
population to outcomes for other race or gender groups in the United States. This means that the study does not allow for the analysis of race or gender gaps on any of the dependent variables. Studies focusing on gaps and inequities between racial and gender groups are critical to our understanding of the opportunity structure in the U.S., yet studies about diverse experiences within race and gender groups can also reveal important information about other gaps and additional factors influencing individuals’ life chances. Therefore, the analyses in this study add complexity to our understanding of Black women in the labor market and serve as a starting point for future comparative research within and across race-gender groups.

These limitations notwithstanding, findings from this dissertation have some very important implications worthy of consideration at multiple levels and by a variety of stakeholders interested in the success of these women of color. The next section will expound upon those points.

**Implications**

The findings of this study have important implications for many groups, including Black women workers, those considering entry into the labor market, educational leaders, policy makers, and organizations committed to the economic development of Black women and families in the United States. The findings from Part I of the analysis indicating that college-educated Black women had the best outcomes in terms of employment rates, earnings, and occupational prestige highlight the importance of college education in improving the life chances of Black women. The regression analyses in Part II confirmed that having any amount of college education significantly increased Black women’s earnings, and having more than a college degree was the single most important factor predicting annual income for Black women in the United States. These findings speak simultaneously to the ongoing vulnerability of women
without college degrees, as these women are least likely to be employed, most likely to work in low prestige jobs, and consistently at an earnings disadvantage compared to their college-educated counterparts.

President Obama has set the “North Star” goal of the U.S. being number one in college degree attainment by 2020, championing reforms of student loans and supporting programs to boost college completion. The First Lady’s Reach Higher initiative aims to encourage students to complete some form of education past high school, whether at a professional training program, a community college, or a four-year college or university (Creating Pathways to Opportunity, 2011). Although prior research shows that the returns to college education for Black women are less than those for similarly educated Black men and White women, college-educated Black women still fare significantly better in the labor market than their non-college-educated peers. At the same time, the high rates of student loan debt impacting many college graduates today suggest that improving access to affordable college education must be a priority for academic institutions and policy makers alike (Fry, 2012).

Part I of the study also revealed that both cohorts of foreign-born Black women had better labor market outcomes than U.S.-born Black women at all time periods, and the gap between them increased over time on all three outcomes. These findings were supported by Part II of the study, which revealed that all foreign-born Black women had an earnings advantage over U.S.-born Black women, even after controlling for numerous demographic variables. African-born Black women had the highest earnings, followed by Caribbean-born Black women. While more research is needed to fully understand the “immigrant advantage,” what is clear is that Black immigrant women are able to secure some measure of economic mobility despite the purported multiple jeopardy of being Black, female, and foreign-born. The findings of this study also supported studies that find that immigrants tend to fare better the longer they have been in the
United States. Therefore, it is important to maintain or expand supports for new immigrants while continuing to find ways to remove any existing barriers for native-born Black women in the labor market.

Although many of the studies comparing foreign-born Blacks to native-born Blacks highlight the relative advantage of the former, studies also find that Black immigrants fare worse than their White immigrant counterparts (Dodoo, 1991; Dodoo & Takyi, 2002; Kollehlon & Eule, 2003; Mason, 2010). For example, Mason (2010) found that between 1994 and 2006, Caribbean-English and African American women received 8 percent and 10 percent lower weekly wages, respectively, than otherwise identical White women. African immigrants received penalties of 22 percent and 10 percent during the periods 1994–2000 and 2001–2006, respectively. Haitian women received wage penalties of 19 percent during the same two periods. These findings highlight the ongoing significance of race and affirm that further research on racial disparities is warranted.

Another implication of this study is that Black women’s access to high-paying and non-traditional industries must be supported. Black women who worked in nontraditional industries had a significant earnings advantage over women who worked in more traditionally Black and female industries, with the exception of public administration. Educational institutions, industry leaders, and community organizations can work to support women’s participation in nontraditional fields.

In addition to supporting Black women’s entry into nontraditional fields, investments in the public sector and better pay can support women in the positions they currently occupy. The public sector has been a particularly large employer of Black women since the 1970s, thus investments in these jobs is very important for maintaining the social stability of Black women workers and their families. Although these analyses did not directly measure discrimination,
many studies of Black women in the labor market attest to the ongoing presence of discriminatory treatment in the workplace thus robust anti-discrimination laws need to be established and enforced. Eliminating barriers to dignified work and ensuring fair wages is key to improving the quality of life for individuals and creating just and healthy societies.

Regarding fair pay laws, President Obama has indicated his support of equal pay for women by signing the Lilly Ledbetter Act of 2009, which extended time to file a claim of wage discrimination. Additional support at the policy level could come from the passing of the Paycheck Fairness Act which would require employers to demonstrate that wage differentials are based on factors other than sex and strengthen penalties for equal pay violations.

Because being married tends to be associated with higher earnings, recommendations for improving household income often suggest marriage as a viable option for improving one’s socioeconomic standing. Yet an increasing number of women of all races, whether by choice or circumstance, are remaining single and raising children alone. Black women are the most likely to be single heads-of-households, thus improving women’s access to affordable childcare and compensating women fairly for their labor are critically important to support working women and their families (Hort & Allen, 1998; Laester, 1997).

In summary, the findings of this research highlight the need for new interventions and ongoing support of women at the individual, community, and national level. These supports include expanded access to affordable college education, investment in the public sector, supports for new immigrants, exposure to and mentoring in nontraditional fields, and equal pay protections for women within and across industries.
Areas for Future Research

This dissertation tracks employment rates, earnings, and occupational prestige for Black women in the U.S. by education and nativity from 1980 to 2010, and identifies additional factors currently impacting earnings for Black women full-time workers in the U.S. Future research could include comparisons to workers from other race and gender groups, which would allow for the assessment of wage gaps or other comparative labor market outcomes over time.

In addition, future studies could examine labor market outcomes for women not included in this analysis, such as younger or older workers (those below age 25 or over age 64), workers who are enrolled in school, or part-time workers. An analysis of outcomes for part-time workers could address some of the biases mentioned earlier regarding studies of full-time workers.

Given the challenges that many immigrants and minorities experience in the labor market, self-employment and entrepreneurship have become increasingly appealing to some workers (Harvey, 2005; Smith, 1992). Therefore future research could also focus on the experiences of women who are self-employed. In recent years, the number of women-owned businesses in the U.S. has grown tremendously, outpacing the number of businesses started by men (Center for Women’s Business Research, 2009; U.S. Census Bureau 2007). Many women who start their own businesses cite a combination of “push” and “pull” factors as motivations for exiting or never entering wage work. These include encountering a “glass ceiling” or more overt forms of sexism and racism, or embracing self-employment for the flexibility, independence, status, and financial opportunities that they believe it can provide (Davies-Netzley, 2000; Goffee & Scase 1983; Harvey-Wingfield, 2008; Hughes 2003). More research on this growing segment of women workers would expand our understanding of contemporary economic opportunities.

Furthermore, future research on Black women’s labor market outcomes could include a qualitative component that includes interviews with workers and employers, focus groups, and
observations of women in various workplaces. This research could provide additional information about the context of women’s work, including information about women’s work histories, workplace dynamics, aspiration, attitudes towards work, and workers’ overall sense of economic well-being.

In addition, the development of a truly longitudinal study of workers would allow for a more in-depth analysis of the labor market trajectories of individuals, while cross-national comparisons of workers could enhance our understanding of the factors impacting labor market dynamics. For example, a study comparing native and immigrant Black workers in the United States, Canada and the UK could inform our understanding of the roles of race, gender, and nativity in different contexts.

To broaden our understanding of labor market dynamics even more, studies could investigate the experiences of individuals who are not in the labor force, including women who work in the informal sector, discouraged workers, the unemployed, and others whose experiences cannot be observed by analyzing data on workers employed in the formal labor market. Studies of these populations would provide an even more nuanced picture of the conduits and barriers to economic well-being and meaningful work, as well as potential alternate definitions of such.

Conclusion

This study responds to calls for research on diverse groups in the labor market by examining how various factors shape employment rates, earnings, and occupational prestige for Black women in the U.S. The findings regarding the particularly important roles of education, industry, and nativity complement existing research on social mobility and socioeconomic diversity. The outcomes examined in this dissertation are important to track because they each
have important implications for workers’ short-term and long-term well-being, as well as for their families and communities. As noted earlier, consistent access to gainful employment is important for all workers, and it is of particular importance to Black women because they are more likely to remain single and to be heads of households than women of other races (Newsome & Dodoo, 2002; Reid, 2002).

While Black women’s activism and changes in legislation have dramatically improved Black women’s labor market opportunities over time, this research and prior studies show that there is still much work to be done to support workers in various social locations. In particular, supports are needed for the most vulnerable workers, including those with less than college education, new immigrants, and women working in low-wage industries.

At the national level, the decline of the middle class and growing wage and wealth gaps continue to attract the attention of workers, development organizations, and policy makers. It is critical that scholars and others continue to monitor these trends to assess the extent to which the American Dream becomes or remains attainable for all workers.
Figure 2. Employment Rates for Cohort 1:
Employment Rates of Black Women Age Cohorts by Nativity,
1980-2010

Census Year and Age Cohort

(25 to 34 years old) (35 to 44 years old) (45 to 64 years old) (55 to 64 years old)
Figure 3. Employment Rates for Cohort 2: Employment Rates of Black Women Age Cohorts by Nativity, 1990-2010

Census Year and Cohort Age

- All Black Women
- Foreign-born Black Women
- Native-born Black Women
Figure 4. Median Wage and Salary Income for Cohort 1: Median Wage and Salary Income of Black Women Age Cohorts by Nativity, 1980-2010

- All Black Women
- Foreign-born Black Women
- Native-born Black Women

Census Year and Age Cohort

(25 to 34 years old) (35 to 44 years old) (45 to 54 years old) (55 to 64 years old)
Figure 5. Median Wage and Salary Income for Cohort 2: Median Wage and Salary Income of Black Women Age Cohorts by Nativity, 1990-2010

Census Year and Cohort Age

- All Black Women
- Foreign-born Black Women
- Native-born Black Women
Figure 6. Occupational Prestige Scores for Cohort 1: Occupational Prestige Scores of Black Women Age Cohorts by Nativity, 1980-2010

Prestige Score

1980 1990 2000 2010
(25 to 34 years old) (35 to 44 years old) (45 to 64 years old) (55 to 64 years old)

Census Year and Cohort Age

- All Black Women
- Foreign-born Black Women
- Native-born Black Women
Figure 7. Occupational Prestige Scores for Cohort 2: Occupational Prestige Scores of Black Women Age Cohorts by Nativity, 1990-2010

Census Year and Cohort Age

Prestige Score

- All Black Women
- Foreign-born Black Women
- Native-born Black Women
Figure 8. Employment Rates for Cohort 1: Employment Rates of Black Women Age Cohorts by Education, 1980-2010

Census Year and Age Cohort

- All Black Women
- College-educated Black Women
- Non-college-educated Black Women
Figure 10. Median Wage and Salary Income for Cohort 1: Median Wage and Salary Income of Black Women Age Cohorts by Education, 1980-2010

Census Year and Age Cohort

- All Black Women
- College-educated Black Women
- Non-college-educated Black Women

(25 to 34 years old)  (35 to 44 years old)  (45 to 54 years old)  (55 to 64 years old)
Figure 11. Median Wage and Salary Income for Cohort 2: Median Wage and Salary Income of Black Women Age Cohorts by Education, 1990-2010

Census Year and Cohort Age

- All Black Women
- College-educated Black Women
- Non-college-educated Black Women
Figure 12. Occupational Prestige Scores for Cohort 1: Occupational Prestige Scores of Black Women Age Cohorts by Education, 1980-2010
Figure 13. Occupational Prestige Scores for Cohort 2: Occupational Prestige Scores of Black Women Age Cohorts by Education, 1990-2010

Census Year and Cohort Age

Prestige Score

- All Black Women
- College-educated Black Women
- Non-college-educated Black Women

(25 to 34 years old)  (35 to 44 years old)  (45 to 54 years old)
REFERENCES


Hull, G., Scott, P.B., & Smith, B. (1982). *All the women are White, all the Blacks are men, but some of us are brave: Black women’s studies.* Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press.


