

# The Socioeconomic Assimilation of Caribbean American Blacks\*

MATTHIJS KALMIJN, *Utrecht University*

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## *Abstract*

*Several authors have examined whether black Caribbean immigrants are more successful in the American economy than African Americans. This study examines the earnings and occupations of Caribbean American men in the 1990 census and expands previous analyses by examining generational differences within this new black minority. Central findings suggest that: (1) There continue to be important socioeconomic differences between Caribbean American blacks and African Americans. (2) If we can speak of a "black success story," however, it is the story of British Caribbeans; blacks from the French- and Spanish-speaking Caribbean do worse than African Americans. (3) Second- and later-generation Caribbean blacks generally have higher socioeconomic status than the immigrant generation. (4) For British Caribbeans, this implies that later generations have gained further advantages on African Americans. The pattern of generational differences within the Caribbean American community generally does not support a notion of structural assimilation into the black American community.*

Although Caribbean American blacks form a small group in American society, they are important from a sociological point of view in that they have a dual status, a status as "black" and a status as "immigrant." The dual status they face raises important questions about the ethnic identity they form of themselves as a group (Waters 1991), the social and political boundaries they maintain vis-à-vis native-born blacks (Kasinitz 1992), and the way they are treated in labor markets and other public spheres by the white American majority (Model 1991). One of the more intensely debated issues in this respect is the question of whether Caribbean blacks are more successful in the American economy than native-born blacks. Some authors regard Caribbean Americans as a "black success story" in a racially segregated society (Sowell 1978; Glazer & Moynihan 1964), while others believe they face the double hurdle of xenophobia and racism in the American labor market (Bryce-Laporte 1972).

The assimilation of Caribbean blacks in the U.S. has been studied as far back as the 1930s (Reid 1939), but only recently have researchers begun to

*\* An earlier version of this article was presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association in Los Angeles in 1994. I thank Frank Dobbin for encouraging comments and helpful suggestions. Address correspondence to Department of Sociology, Utrecht University, Heidelberglaan 1, Utrecht 3584 CS, Netherlands.*

examine their socioeconomic status in a systematic fashion. In an analysis of the 1970 census, Sowell (1978) found that first- and second-generation West Indian blacks had higher family incomes and were more likely to be employed in the professions than native-born blacks. Differences were found both in the U.S. as a whole, and in the New York metropolitan area, where most West Indian blacks live. Although Sowell did not take into account differences in background characteristics, multivariate analyses of the 1970 census by Chiswick (1979) led to similar conclusions. Chiswick compared foreign-born blacks, most of whom are from the West Indies, to native-born blacks and showed that ten years after arrival, foreign-born blacks had higher annual earnings than native-born blacks, even after the influence of education and experience was taken into account. While these findings are consistent with the stereotype of Caribbeans as a black model of achievement, analyses of the 1980 census suggest that the gap between Caribbean and African Americans has narrowed. In a multivariate analysis of Caribbean immigrants in the 1980 census, Butcher (1994) shows that after controlling for education, experience, and several other background characteristics, Caribbean immigrants were more likely to be employed than African Americans. Conditional on employment, however, they did not have higher annual or weekly earnings than native-born blacks. In a comparable analysis of the 1980 census, Model (1991) found the same result for foreign-born blacks in states with large Caribbean populations (e.g., New York, Florida, Massachusetts). In their monograph of the 1980 census, Farley & Allen (1989) found no differences in earnings either, but they also showed that foreign-born blacks were more often employed in professional and managerial occupations than native-born blacks. While comparisons of studies with different measures and models should be made with care, previous analyses generally lead to the conclusion that if there is a Caribbean advantage, it was greater in 1970 than in 1980, and in 1980, it seemed limited to advantages in the occupational domain.

Using 1990 census data on earnings and occupation, I examine generational differences within this new black minority. Assimilation theory argues that through a process of generational replacement, national origin groups gradually become more similar to the members of the host society (Hirschman 1983). For Caribbean Americans, the assimilation process is more uncertain because if they are losing part of their cultural heritage, the possibility arises that they are identified with the larger black American community (Foner 1985). Cultural assimilation in this context may imply that members of the second generation lose some of the advantages that their immigrant parents had over African Americans, and that their race again becomes a handicap in the status attainment process. In this study, I examine the socioeconomic aspect of the Caribbean American assimilation process by comparing the earnings and occupations of American-born Caribbean men with those of Caribbean immigrant and African American men.

Next to examining generational differences, I contribute to previous research in three ways. First, I update findings of 1970 and 1980 census analyses. Recent data are important because the earnings of native American blacks have deteriorated considerably during the 1980s (Bound & Freeman 1989). The question thus arises whether Caribbean blacks have suffered to the same extent as native blacks, or whether they have been protected from the economic

downturn of the 1980s. Second, I emphasize the heterogeneity of the Caribbean community by examining socioeconomic differences with respect to linguistic group (i.e., Spanish, French, and British-speaking Caribbeans). Does the "black success story" apply to all Caribbean groups, or is it limited, as several authors suggest, to those of British Caribbean descent? Third, I systematically compare differences in occupation and earnings, thus broadening the scope of previous analyses. Are socioeconomic differences in 1990 limited to the occupational domain, or do they also apply to advantages in earnings?

## Background

In the past, several authors have tried to explain the socioeconomic success of Caribbean immigrants in the U.S. (Bryce-Laporte 1972; Butcher 1994; Foner 1985; Model 1991; Sowell 1978). These explanations can be grouped in hypotheses focusing on characteristics of the immigrants themselves (supply-side hypotheses), and hypotheses focusing on the way Caribbeans are treated in the American labor market (demand-side hypotheses).

Hypotheses focusing on the supply-side of the labor market argue that Caribbean blacks have a greater motivation for achievement and a stronger work ethic than native-born blacks. Originally, this argument was proposed by Sowell (1978), who attributed differences in work ethic to differences between the American and Caribbean systems of slavery. In a frequently contended essay, Sowell (1978) argued that because slaves in the Caribbean did not experience strong economic competition from a large white lower class, as slaves did in the American south, they had more opportunity for economic initiative and were socialized into a "spirit of capitalism" early on (46). Sowell's argument has been considered provocative because it seemed to imply that a "lack of achievement" orientation, rather than racism or discrimination on the basis of color, is the cause of racial inequality in American society. When we compare the position of West Indian blacks to native whites, however, this implication is disputable. Even if one assumes a greater work ethic on the part of West Indian blacks, one still needs another theory to explain why this has not brought them on a par with whites. Since the West Indian disadvantage vis-à-vis whites is large, Sowell's conclusion that "the West Indian success pattern undermines the explanatory power of current white discrimination as a cause of current black poverty" (49) is exaggerated. In addition, his argument that the position of West Indians in the contemporary U.S. can be traced to differences between the economies of the American South and the Caribbean many generations ago is difficult to prove or to refute, and hence less practical as an explanation.

A more obvious hypothesis about the motivation and work ethic of Caribbean immigrants focuses on differences between American and Caribbean society in modern times. Although many American blacks have entered the middle class in the last decades, structural changes in American society, such as the deteriorating manufacturing industry and the flight of the middle class to the suburbs, have deprived many young urban blacks of successful models for achievement in their community (Wilson 1987). Although most of the Antilles

face serious economic problems as well, blacks have traditionally formed the majority in the Caribbean islands and have occupied a more diverse range of positions in the social hierarchy. The more positive examples of black achievement and the less rigid social classification of racial groups in these societies may well lead to a stronger orientation toward socioeconomic achievement among Caribbean blacks. This argument would apply more to the British Caribbean, where blacks form the majority, than to the Hispanic Caribbean, where they generally constitute a minority.

A second reason why Caribbean immigrants may have a stronger motivation for achievement lies in the process of migration itself. Since people who voluntarily come to the U.S. tend to migrate for economic reasons, they may be specially motivated to perform well in the American economy and may have more talents and abilities that are relevant for socioeconomic achievement than people who do not make the move abroad. Since economically motivated migration is considered to be more selective with respect to economic skills and abilities than politically driven migration (Chiswick 1979), this hypothesis is particularly plausible for immigrants from the English-speaking Caribbean, almost all of whom were motivated by the desire to escape poor domestic economies (Palmer 1974). Because individual data comparing who migrates and who stays behind are scarce, it has been difficult to prove the selective migration hypothesis directly. Indirect evidence for the Caribbean context comes from an old and small-scale study by Tidrick (1971), which shows that students in two Jamaican universities who planned to move to the U.S. were more competitive and more strongly oriented toward economic success than those who planned to stay home, even after considering the influence of class background.

Next to hypotheses focusing on characteristics of the immigrants themselves are arguments focusing on the demand side of the labor market. It has long been argued that the main reason why Caribbean blacks are more successful in the American economy than native born blacks is that they suffer less from racial discrimination by whites (Reid 1939). Some assume that they are favored because of their British accents; others believe they present themselves to prospective or current employers as culturally distinct from, and possibly superior to, native American blacks. These arguments have not been proven systematically, but anecdotal evidence confirms that Caribbeans are perceived as more favorable (Foner 1985). The argument of white favoritism applies more to the English- and French-speaking Caribbean than to the Spanish-speaking Caribbean because the latter may face the risk of double discrimination as blacks and Hispanics in the American labor market.

My study elaborates on earlier analyses of nativity differentials within the black community by comparing Caribbean immigrants to American born blacks with Caribbean ancestry. Both supply- and demand-side hypotheses suggest that second-generation Caribbean blacks would be less successful in terms of achievement than Caribbean immigrants. Second-generation Caribbeans have not experienced a more favorable climate of race relations in the Caribbean, and hence may lack part of the self-confidence that Caribbean immigrants presumably bring with them. In addition, members of the second generation are not selected in the migration process, though they may display some of their

parents' traits. The second generation is also less likely to return if achievements in the U.S. fail to meet expectations.

Demand-side hypotheses imply similar outcomes. The children and grandchildren of Caribbean immigrants have not gone to schools that are heavily based on British or other European traditions, they are probably less likely to be exposed to Caribbean culture, and they may be more likely to speak English fluently or without a British accent. If white employers are less able to distinguish second-generation Caribbean blacks from African Americans, American-born Caribbeans will have less of an advantage over African Americans than Caribbean immigrants.

In summary, an elementary assimilation perspective implies that the children of Caribbean immigrants are becoming more similar to African Americans than their parents. Caribbean blacks thus represent a case where cultural assimilation may hamper rather than improve their socioeconomic achievement. While the scenario of cultural assimilation is plausible in light of what many white national origin groups have experienced in American society (Hirschman 1983), the question of whether Caribbeans lose the cultural distinctiveness that characterized their immigrant parents remains open (Foner 1985). In this study, I address this question by examining the socioeconomic dimension of the Caribbean American assimilation process. I describe income and occupational differences between Caribbean and African Americans, between different generations of Caribbeans, and between different linguistic groups within the Caribbean community. Though census data provide important information on such patterns, they do not allow me to decide between the demand- and supply-side hypotheses directly.

## Data

The data I use are the Public Use Microsamples of the 1990 census (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992). Using the census questions on a person's ancestry and country of birth, I define Caribbean Americans as black immigrants who were born in the Caribbean (first-generation Caribbeans), and American-born blacks who reported Caribbean ancestry (second- and later-generation Caribbeans). African Americans are defined as American-born blacks who did not report a specific ancestry. Of this latter group, 85% answered "black" or "African American" in response to the ancestry question, 3% answered "American," and 12% did not answer the question. That few native-born African Americans report a specific ancestry is plausible given the fact that the vast majority of them have been here for several generations. Because the census dropped the question on foreign parentage after the 1970 census, ancestry data are the only possible way of identifying second and later generation Caribbeans in recent censuses. Lieberman & Santi (1985) have compared classifications on the basis of ancestry and foreign parentage and concluded that inferences regarding educational and economic characteristics were generally similar under the two systems.

African Americans are obtained from a 25% sample of individual records in the 1% microsample. Because of their small numbers, Caribbean Americans are

obtained from the full 5% microsample. The samples I analyze are limited to the noninstitutionalized population, they exclude persons who were born abroad of American parents, and they do not include persons in the U.S. outlying areas. Except for the analyses in Figures 1 and 2, which show the geographical origins and destinations of Caribbean blacks, all my analyses focus on men. For a comparison with women, see Model (1991).

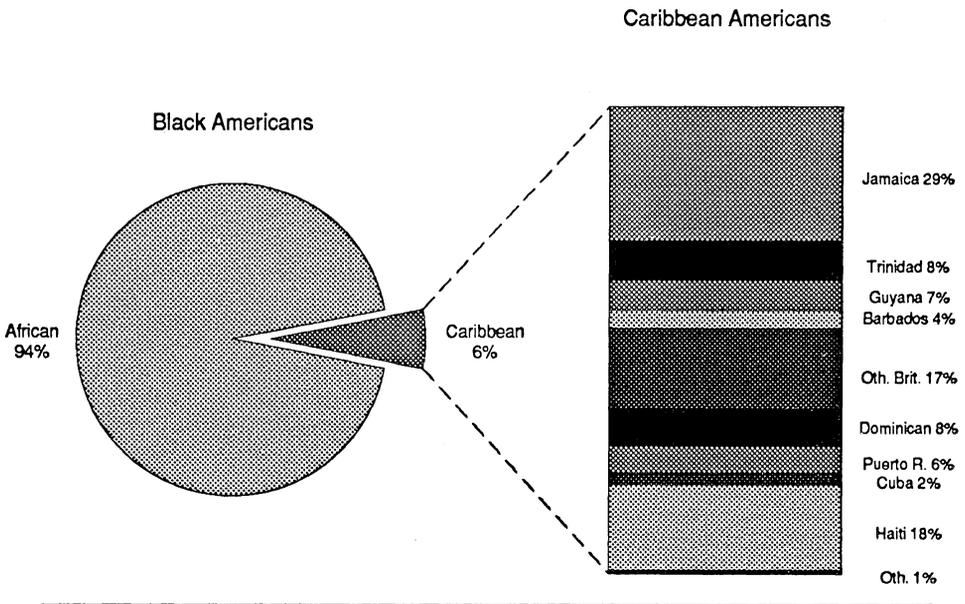
As Figure 1 shows, about 6% of the black community 16 years or older is Caribbean American. Caribbean blacks come from a large number of islands, but a few countries make up the bulk of the immigration flow: Jamaica (29%), Haiti (18%), the Dominican Republic (8%), and Trinidad-Tobago (8%). Considering differences with respect to immigration history and colonial heritage (Reid 1939), the various national origin groups can be classified in three linguistic groups: the English-speaking West Indians (65%), the Spanish-speaking West Indians (16%), and the French-speaking West Indians (19%). Persons are classified based on where they came from or where their ancestors came from, not on the language they themselves speak (which is affected by the assimilation process). The English-speaking Caribbean countries included are Jamaica, Trinidad-Tobago, Guyana, Barbados, Belize, the Bahamas, the Virgin Islands, and a range of smaller islands such as the Cayman and Leeward Islands. The main Spanish-speaking Caribbean countries are the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Cuba. The French-speaking Caribbean countries are Haiti, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and French Guyana. Note that the term *French West Indian* is often used to refer to Martinique and Guadeloupe, while the population analyzed here is almost exclusively from Haiti. The Dutch-speaking West Indians (Surinam, Curacao, Aruba, Bonaire) are too small of a group in the U.S. to include in the analyses.

As is well known, Caribbean blacks are heavily overrepresented in the Northeast (Figure 2) and concentrated in a few states. About half of them live in New York, 17% in Florida, 7% in New Jersey, and 4% in Massachusetts. More importantly, virtually all of them live in large cities (primarily New York City, Miami, Newark, and Boston). I therefore decided to limit my comparisons to urban blacks. Though uncommon in the literature, the focus on urban blacks is warranted because rural and urban areas have widely different income and opportunity structures. If the aim is to compare groups in fairly similar structural positions, it seems inappropriate to include rural native-born blacks in a comparison with such a highly urbanized ethnic minority.

### Differences in Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status is measured by two related indicators, occupational status and hourly earnings. Occupational status is measured by the 1980 version of Duncan's socioeconomic index (SEI) of occupations (Stevens & Cho 1985). Because the 1980 and 1990 occupational classification systems are virtually the same, there were no problems in assigning SEI scores to 1990 census respondents. Earnings are measured by a person's 1989 income from wages, salaries, and self-employment. Because my main interest is in status attainment, not in labor supply, I consider hourly earnings, using information on the number of

FIGURE 1: National Origin of American Blacks 16 Years Old or Older in 1990

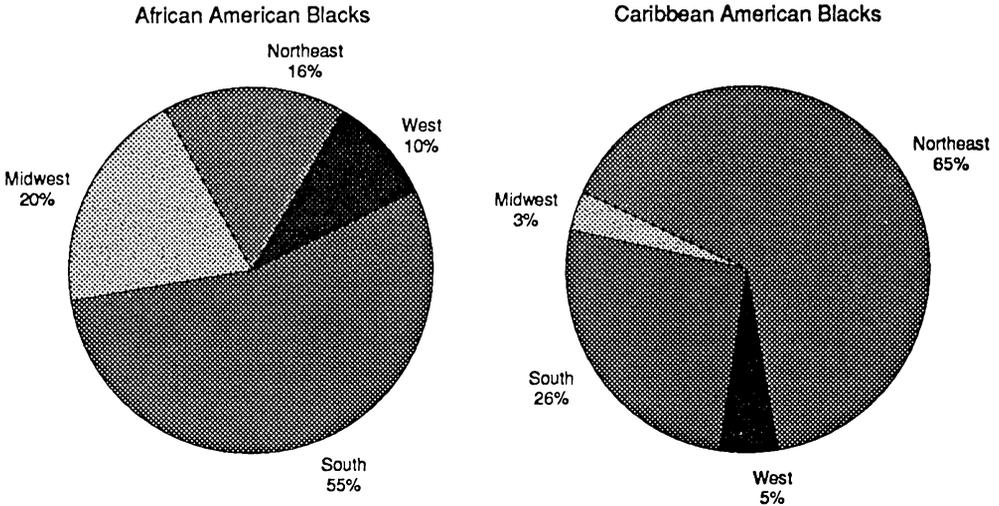


weeks worked in 1989 and the usual number of hours worked per week in that year. Only persons with positive annual earnings are considered.<sup>1</sup>

Since not all men work for pay, the possibility arises that my comparisons are affected by selection bias. Following previous research on black/white differences in earnings (e.g., Bound & Freeman 1989), I therefore limit my analyses and conclusions to a group for whom employment rates are high, that is, out-of-school men who were 25-64 years old at the time of the census. In addition, I use information on "last occupation" for men without a job at the time of the census. For persons who are not working, past occupation is probably the best predictor of the occupation they would have had, had they been in the labor force. Hence, the models of occupational attainment are practically unaffected by possible selection bias.

In the top panel of Table 1, I present data on mean earnings and occupational status for each of the four groups separately (African American, Hispanic Caribbean, French Caribbean, British Caribbean). Because extreme earnings may affect my comparisons, I also present mean logged earnings. Table 1 shows that British Caribbeans have higher earnings than African American blacks. On the other hand, men from the French- and Spanish-speaking Caribbean have lower earnings than African American blacks. It makes little difference here which mean we consider. Differences in occupational status parallel differences in hourly earnings. The British Caribbeans do best, followed by African Americans, Hispanic Caribbeans, and French Caribbeans respectively.

FIGURE 2: Geographical Location of Black Americans



### Differences in Background Characteristics

The socioeconomic differences observed in Table 1 may be due to differences in human capital, differences in living arrangement, and differences in geographical location. I therefore estimate regression models to examine subgroup differences in socioeconomic status, net of the influence of such background characteristics. Table 1 (bottom panel) presents the means of the variables included in the regression models.

The first and foremost indicator of human capital is education. I include two measures of schooling: years of schooling completed and attainment of a college degree. Because the 1990 census question on schooling is not phrased in terms of years, as was the practice in earlier censuses, I approximate years of schooling by assigning the number of years it takes to receive the particular grade or degree.<sup>2</sup> I use the attainment of a college degree (B.A., M.A., Ph.D.) as an additional measure to capture possible wage or status premiums for college degrees on top of the benefits a person receives for additional years of schooling. Table 1 shows that on average, British Caribbeans complete slightly more years of schooling than African Americans. When focusing on the top end of the schooling distribution, the difference becomes clearer. The percentage of British Caribbeans who received a college degree is higher than the percentage of African Americans receiving a degree. Men from the Spanish- and French-speaking Caribbean, in contrast, are less educated than both African American and British Caribbean males.

A second human capital indicator is labor market experience and experience squared. Experience is approximated by age minus years of schooling minus 6.

TABLE 1: Means of Dependent and Independent Variables for Out-of-School Urban Black Males Aged 25-64 in 1990

	U.S.-born African American	Spanish- speaking Caribbean	French- speaking Caribbean	British- speaking Caribbean
Hourly earnings (in 1989)	12.41	11.56	11.26	13.64
Logged hourly earnings	2.28	2.16	2.16	2.39
Status of current or last occupation (SEI score)	30.2	28.3	27.7	33.2
Logged SEI score	3.27	3.22	3.18	3.37
Years of schooling	12.0	10.3	10.9	12.1
College degree (percent)	11.2	7.9	12.3	15.5
Years of experience	22.9	24.2	23.2	22.9
Poor English language ability (percent)	.4	31.6	23.0	.9
Married (percent)	49.4	55.5	60.0	64.4
Living in the West (percent)	12.1	4.4	1.8	6.9
Living in the Midwest (percent)	21.5	3.7	2.2	3.7
Living in the Northeast (percent)	17.9	76.6	50.0	63.9
Living in the South (percent)	48.5	15.3	46.0	25.5
Born in the U.S. (percent)	—	16.4	2.7	11.3
Years in U.S. (for immigrants)	—	17.0	12.5	14.7
Unweighted N	8,981	1,977	2,660	7,848

Although this measure captures potential rather than actual experience, it is to be preferred to a model with age and age squared, which does not take into account variations in the duration of schooling (Mincer 1974). Only small differences in experience are observed in Table 1.

A third indicator of human capital is English language ability. Table 1 shows that 32% of Hispanic and 23% of French Caribbeans rate their ability to speak English as poor or nonexistent. In the regression models, I include a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 for those whose language ability is poor (0 otherwise). Because virtually all British Caribbean and African American men have good English language ability, this specification implies that subgroup differences in socioeconomic status apply to men whose English is good.

I further include marital status because earlier studies have found that married men have higher earnings than single men, net of the influence of education and experience. Though part of this difference may be due to selection on the marriage market — highly paid men being more likely to marry — recent empirical studies have suggested that employer favoritism and greater productivity among married men are more important causes of the marital pay advantage (Korenman & Neumark 1991). Table 1 shows that all Caribbean American groups are more likely to be married than African American men. Since this gives them a socioeconomic advantage over African American men, marital status needs to be taken into account in the regression models.

Because a disproportionate number of Caribbean blacks live in New York, New Jersey, Florida, and Massachusetts, and since incomes are generally higher in these areas than, for instance, in the south, where the majority of African Americans lives (Figure 2), I take into account geographical differences by including a set of 4-1 binary variables referring to the region in which a person lives at the time of the census. To further check whether my findings are sensitive to regional differences, I also estimate models for specific regions separately.

## Regression Models

### CARIBBEAN VERSUS AFRICAN AMERICANS

In Table 2, I present ordinary least squares (OLS) estimates of unstandardized regression coefficients for hourly earnings and occupational status. The first model I consider is defined as follows,

$$\ln Y_i = \beta_0 + \gamma_1 \text{His}_i + \gamma_2 \text{Fren}_i + \gamma_3 \text{Brit}_i + \epsilon_i \quad (\text{A})$$

In model A, *His<sub>i</sub>*, *Fren<sub>i</sub>*, and *Brit<sub>i</sub>* are binary variables that are coded 1 if the individual is in the particular group (0 otherwise). Hence, the effects of these variables can be interpreted as the difference between Caribbean and African American blacks. The variable *Y<sub>i</sub>* refers to occupational status and hourly earnings. Both measures are transformed into natural logarithms to reduce the influence of heteroskedasticity. Although transforming SEI scores to logarithms is uncommon, it facilitates interpretation of the coefficients and allows me to compare effects of a given variable across equations. Both can be regarded as percentage change in the dependent variable.<sup>3</sup>

Model A in Table 2 shows that there are large socioeconomic differences between Caribbeans and African Americans, though the magnitude and direction of these differences depend on which linguistic group we consider. The British Caribbean have a clear advantage over African Americans. For occupational attainment, the coefficient is .089, meaning that they have 9% higher occupational status than African Americans. For hourly earnings, the coefficient is .111, meaning that they have 12% higher earnings. Comparisons with the other two Caribbean groups yields the opposite picture. Compared to African Americans, the French-speaking Caribbean have 5% lower occupational status and 11% lower earnings. The Spanish-speaking Caribbean have 10% lower earnings and equal occupational status. Since no other variables are

TABLE 2: Regression of Occupational Status and Hourly Earnings on Selected Characteristics for Out-of-School Urban Black Males Aged 25-64 in 1990 (Model A and B)<sup>a</sup>

Independent variable	SEI Score (Logged)		Hourly Earnings (Logged)	
	A	B	A	B
Years of schooling	—	.038** (.001)	—	.038** (.002)
College degree (0/1)	—	.480** (.012)	—	.297** (.019)
Experience (in decades)	—	-.002 (.011)	—	.249** (.018)
Experience <sup>2</sup>	—	.000 (.002)	—	-.028** (.004)
Poor English ability (0/1)	—	-.080** (.020)	—	-.167** (.033)
Married (0/1)	—	.070** (.006)	—	.166** (.010)
West versus South (0/1)	—	.101** (.010)	—	.174** (.016)
Midwest versus South (0/1)	—	.009 (.009)	—	.132** (.014)
Northeast versus South (0/1)	—	.053** (.008)	—	.215** (.013)
Spanish-speaking Caribbean ( $\gamma_1$ ) <sup>b</sup>	-.096** (.016)	.021 (.018)	-.114** (.028)	-.103** (.029)
French-speaking Caribbean ( $\gamma_2$ ) <sup>b</sup>	-.056** (.019)	-.042** (.015)	-.119** (.024)	-.089** (.024)
British-speaking Caribbean ( $\gamma_3$ ) <sup>b</sup>	.089** (.010)	.049** (.009)	.111** (.014)	.011 (.015)
Intercept	5.571** (.004)	5.014** (.021)	2.275** (.006)	1.226** (.034)
R <sup>2</sup>	.007	.271	.006	.134
F test comparing models B and A		813.8**		302.7**
Unweighted N	20,182	20,182	18,436	18,436

<sup>a</sup> Estimated standard errors in parentheses.

<sup>b</sup> Native-born African Americans are the reference group.

\* p < .05    \*\* p < .01

included in the model, these results essentially replicate the differences in mean logged earnings observed in Table 1.

To examine whether these differences are due to the influence of human capital, living arrangements, and geographical location, I add a set of  $j = 10$  control variables for each individual  $i$ ,

$$\ln Y_i = \beta_0 + \sum_j \beta_j X_{ij} + \gamma_1 \text{Hisp}_i + \gamma_2 \text{Fren}_i + \gamma_3 \text{Brit}_i + \epsilon_i \quad (\text{B})$$

In this model, the effects of  $\text{Hisp}_i$ ,  $\text{Fren}_i$ , and  $\text{Brit}_i$  can be interpreted as the difference between Caribbean and African American blacks when holding all other relevant measured characteristics constant.

Model B in Table 2 shows that for British Caribbeans, differences in socioeconomic status net of the influence of background characteristics are smaller than the differences observed in model A. Their occupational advantage over African Americans is reduced to 5% and their earnings advantage is reduced to 1%. When we compare total (model A) and net relative differences (model B), we can conclude that about half of the British occupational advantage and nearly the entire earnings advantage can be attributed to their more favorable background characteristics. That British Caribbeans have a net occupational advantage over African Americans without a corresponding earnings advantage suggests that they have difficulty in translating their occupational advantage into an earnings advantage. Perhaps this is due to a greater emphasis on — relatively poorly paying — high cultural segments of the labor market, such as teaching. That British West Indians have higher-status occupations but similar earnings is consistent with Farley & Allen's analysis of the 1980 census (1989).

For Hispanic and French Caribbeans, controlling for background characteristics changes the socioeconomic disadvantage they have compared to African Americans in a modest fashion. After controlling for the influence of background characteristics, Hispanic Caribbeans have 10% lower hourly earnings than African American males and 2% higher occupational status. Men from the French-speaking West Indies have both lower occupational status (4%) and lower earnings (9%).

Effects of the other independent variables are generally consistent with findings in previous studies of status attainment. Each additional year of schooling is associated with a 3.8% increase in occupational status and a 3.8% increase in hourly earnings. For obtaining a college degree, there is an occupational premium of 62% and an earnings premium of 35% in addition to the benefits of extra years of schooling. There is an increase in earnings for additional years of experience as well, but given the negative effect of the squared term, the rate of this increase declines over the working life.<sup>4</sup> A somewhat unexpected finding is that experience does not affect occupational status. Apparently, black men in the U.S. make monetary gains in careers without corresponding changes in occupation. Also, individuals whose English proficiency is poor or absent have 8% lower occupational status and 15% lower earnings. Married persons have higher earnings and occupational status. The

regional effects show that earnings and occupational status are highest in the Northeast and the West, followed by the Midwest and the South, respectively.

Although the model controls for geographical location, it remains possible that the socioeconomic gap between Caribbean and African American men is different in states where Caribbeans are concentrated. To examine this issue, I estimate model B for Caribbean states (i.e., New York, Massachusetts, and Florida) and non-Caribbean states separately. Subsequently, I test whether the relative socioeconomic advantages differ significantly across these two regions. The results of these comparisons, presented in Table 3, generally show that the relative position of Caribbean Americans is somewhat better in areas where they are not concentrated. The British Caribbean have more of an advantage over African Americans in the non-Caribbean states, and the Hispanic and French Caribbean have somewhat less of a disadvantage over African Americans in those states. These findings are consistent with earlier analyses showing that minority concentration is associated with greater gaps between minority and majority wages (Tienda & Lii 1987). Since these contrasts are not statistically significant, however, no firm conclusions can yet be made about the impact of minority concentration on immigrant earnings, and we may proceed the analysis by focusing on the Caribbean population at large.

#### GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

Are there generational differences within the black Caribbean community? To answer this question, we can compare Caribbean immigrants to native-born blacks of Caribbean ancestry (second and later generation Caribbeans). Comparing immigrants and natives is complicated by the fact that immigrants typically face some disadvantages in the labor market upon arrival in American society due to a lack of information on jobs and possibly a shortage of social capital to support the status attainment process as well. The longer they have been in the U.S., the more they overcome such problems, and at some point, they tend to reach socioeconomic parity with natives (Chiswick 1979; Chiswick & Sullivan 1995). Because assimilation may occur during an immigrant's lifetime, and not only between generations, we need to compare American born Caribbeans to Caribbean immigrants who have been in the U.S. for different periods of time.

To make these comparisons, I estimate the following regression model.

$$\ln Y_i = \beta_0 + \gamma_1 \text{Hisp}_i + \gamma_2 \text{Fren}_i + \gamma_3 \text{Brit}_i + \gamma_4 \text{Hisp}_i \times \text{Imm}_i + \gamma_5 \text{Fren}_i \times \text{Imm}_i + \gamma_6 \text{Brit}_i \times \text{Imm}_i + \gamma_7 \text{Hisp}_i \times \text{Imm}_i \times \text{Dur}_i + \gamma_8 \text{Fren}_i \times \text{Imm}_i \times \text{Dur}_i + \gamma_9 \text{Brit}_i \times \text{Imm}_i \times \text{Dur}_i + \epsilon_i \quad (\text{B})$$

In model B,  $\text{Imm}_i$  is coded 1 for immigrants (0 otherwise) and  $\text{Dur}_i$  is the number of years immigrants have been in the U.S., scaled in decades (0 for all other groups). Due to the specification of interaction effects chosen in model B, each parameter has a meaningful interpretation:  $\gamma_1$  through  $\gamma_3$  give the difference between native-born Caribbeans and African Americans;  $\gamma_4$  through  $\gamma_6$  give the difference between native-born Caribbeans and Caribbean immigrants upon arrival in the U.S.;  $\gamma_7$  through  $\gamma_9$  give the increase in earnings or

TABLE 3: Predicted Relative Differences between Caribbean and African American Males by Area of Residence (in Percentages Compared to African Americans)<sup>a</sup>

<i>Socioeconomic indicator</i>	Place of Residence			Difference ( <i>t</i> test)
	Origin group	Entire U.S.	Caribbean <sup>b</sup> states	
<i>SEI score</i>				
Spanish-speaking Caribbean	+2.1	-7	+2.8	.9
French-speaking Caribbean	-4.1	-6.6	-.9	1.5
British-speaking Caribbean	+5.0	+3.1	+5.1	1.3
<i>Hourly earnings</i>				
Spanish-speaking Caribbean	-9.8	-11.7	-7.9	.7
French-speaking Caribbean	-8.5	-9.2	-4.8	.7
British-speaking Caribbean	+1.1	-.9	+4.5	1.7

<sup>a</sup> New York, Florida, and Massachusetts  
<sup>b</sup> Net of the influence of other characteristics (see Table 2)

occupational status among immigrants for each ten years of duration in the U.S.<sup>5</sup> Estimates of model B appear in Table 3. For the sake of presentation, I do not report effects of the other independent variables in the equation.

Effects of duration of stay in a cross-sectional dataset of immigrants should be interpreted with some caution. Borjas (1985) has shown that the socioeconomic potential or "quality" of more recent immigrant cohorts is lower than that of immigrant cohorts who entered many decades ago, a phenomenon he attributes to changes in the 1965 Amendments to the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act. Because duration of stay and year of immigration are by definition perfectly (negatively) correlated in a cross-section, assimilation during the life of an immigrant as inferred from cross-sectional analyses may in fact reflect a secular decline in the socioeconomic potential of entering immigrants (i.e., immigrant cohorts). There are several reasons, however, why an analysis of duration effects is still valuable in the present context. First, Borjas's argument applies more to the changing national origin mix of immigrants than to changes in the socioeconomic potential of specific national origin groups,

which is the issue examined here. Second, Borjas has shown that even when immigration cohort effects are removed, large effects of assimilation remain. Third, an important aspect of the socioeconomic potential of immigrants, i.e., educational attainment, is included in the model. It is somewhat difficult to imagine that there will be a decline in the socioeconomic potential across immigrant cohorts once educational attainment is controlled for. Fourth, in an analysis of cohort and duration effects for various national origin groups, Borjas (1987) has shown that for several of the sending countries considered here (e.g., Jamaica, Trinidad, Haiti, Cuba, with the exception of the Dominican Republic), there is no statistically significant decline in the socioeconomic potential of entering immigrants. Hence, the duration effects estimated in Table 4 will largely reflect assimilation during the life course of an immigrant.

The effects of the immigrant interactions in Table 4 are negative and generally statistically significant, indicating that natives have higher occupational status and earnings than immigrants who just arrived in the U.S. For example, in the occupational status equation, the effect for British immigrants is  $-.065$ , showing that immigrants have 6% lower occupational status than natives with similar amounts of education and experience. We further notice that all duration effects are positive, and generally statistically significant as well. Hence, immigrants gain status the longer they have been in the U.S. For British immigrants, the effect on occupational status is  $.028$ , indicating that they gain about 3% per decade. In general, we observe that assimilation occurs slower for British Caribbean immigrants than for the other Caribbean immigrants, probably because their human capital skills are more easily transferrable to the American labor market.

Although Caribbean natives are doing better than Caribbean immigrants who just arrived in the U.S., the question remains whether they are also doing better than immigrants who have been in the U.S. for longer periods of time. To answer this question, I use the model in Table 4 to make comparisons with immigrant Caribbeans at different periods of stay (5 years, 15 years, and 25 years).<sup>6</sup> These calculations show that even though Caribbean immigrants improve their position during their life in the U.S., at most of the relevant durations, they are still surpassed by native Caribbeans (Table 5). We can also compare native Caribbeans to the "average" Caribbean immigrant, that is, immigrants who have been in the U.S. for the average duration of the particular immigrant group. This comparison yields a similar pattern, though the generational advantage is clearly greater for French and Hispanic Caribbeans than for British Caribbeans. Hence, we can conclude that native Caribbeans have higher socioeconomic status than most immigrants, and that they are comparable to immigrants who have been in the U.S. for quite a long period of time. This pattern of assimilation is similar to what many white ethnic groups experienced in the U.S. (Hirschman 1983).

The final question is how immigrants and natives compare to the African American community. To answer this question we focus on native-born Caribbeans first. Table 4 shows that the main effects of language group ( $\gamma_1$ ,  $\gamma_2$ , and  $\gamma_3$ ) are generally positive, suggesting that native Caribbeans have higher earnings and occupations than African Americans. However, this effect is only significant for British Caribbeans, and for them, it is limited to the occupational

TABLE 4: Regression of Occupational Status and Hourly Earnings on Nativity and Duration in the U.S. for Out-of-School Urban Black Males Aged 25-64 in 1990 (Model C)<sup>a</sup>

Independent variable	SEI Score (Log)	Hourly Earnings (Log)
<i>Native Caribbean versus African American</i>		
Spanish-speaking Caribbean ( $\gamma_1$ )	.065 (.038)	-.016 (.062)
French-speaking Caribbean ( $\gamma_2$ )	.058 (.087)	.038 (.140)
British-speaking Caribbean ( $\gamma_3$ )	.070** (.024)	.000 (.038)
<i>Immigrant versus native Caribbean</i>		
Spanish x Immigrant ( $\gamma_4$ )	-.094* (.050)	-.249** (.082)
French x Immigrant ( $\gamma_5$ )	-.205* (.092)	-.291* (.148)
British x Immigrant ( $\gamma_6$ )	-.065* (.028)	-.062 (.045)
<i>Duration effects for immigrants</i>		
Spanish x Immigrant x Duration ( $\gamma_7$ )	.020 (.016)	.077* (.026)
French x Immigrant x Duration ( $\gamma_8$ )	.078** (.019)	.119** (.031)
British x Immigrant x Duration ( $\gamma_9$ )	.028** (.009)	.051** (.015)
R <sup>2</sup>	.273	.136
F test comparing models C and B	5.03**	6.12**
Unweighted N	20,182	18,436

<sup>a</sup> Regression coefficients are net of the influence of other independent variables (listed in Table 2). Estimated standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < .05$     \*\*  $p < .01$

TABLE 5: Predicted Relative Differences between Native and Immigrant Caribbean Black Males<sup>a</sup>

<i>Socioeconomic indicator</i>	Duration in the U.S./Immigrant Entry Cohort			
	5 years/ 1985	15 years/ 1975	25 years/ 1965	Average Immigrant <sup>b</sup>
Origin group				
<i>SEI score</i>				
Spanish-speaking Caribbean	+8.8	+6.6	+4.5	+6.2
French-speaking Caribbean	+18.1	+9.2	+1.0	+11.3
British-speaking Caribbean	+5.2	+2.3	-1	+2.4
<i>Hourly earnings</i>				
Spanish-speaking Caribbean	+23.4	+14.3	+5.8	+12.5
French-speaking Caribbean	+26.0	+11.9	-1	+15.3
British-speaking Caribbean	+3.7	-1.4	-6.3	-1.3

<sup>a</sup> In percentages compared to Caribbean immigrants

<sup>b</sup> Based on the models in Table 4.

<sup>c</sup> Predicted differences between natives and immigrants who have been in the U.S. for 17.0 years (Spanish-speaking Caribbeans), 12.5 years (for French-speaking Caribbeans), and 14.7 years (British-speaking Caribbeans).

domain. On average, British Caribbean natives have 7% higher occupational status than African Americans.

As shown before, immigrants have lower status than native Caribbeans, but they reach parity after a certain number of years in the U.S. At which point do Caribbean immigrants reach parity with African Americans? Simple algebraic manipulations of the equation in model B show that this point is reached when  $Dur_i = -(\gamma_1 + \gamma_4) / \gamma_7$ .<sup>7</sup> The point at which British Caribbeans immigrants begin to have an earnings advantage over African Americans is reached soon after they arrive (12 years). Their occupational advantage is already present when they arrive. For the other language groups, the picture is different. Immigrants from the Spanish- and French-speaking West Indies generally take much longer before they begin to have an advantage over African Americans (34 and 21 years for earnings, and 15 and 19 years for occupational status).

### Conclusion

In the 1990s, there continue to be socioeconomic differences between Caribbean American blacks on the one hand, and African American urban men on the other but the results differ strongly by linguistic group. Both native British Caribbeans and British Caribbean immigrants who have been in the U.S. for more than a short period of time are doing better than African American blacks.

Though this result is consistent with the stereotype of Caribbeans as a "black success story" in American society, the British advantage is limited to the occupational domain and is not as spectacular in magnitude as is commonly believed. The advantage is not large enough, for example, to bring them on a par with white men (Bound & Freeman 1989). The picture is different for Caribbean blacks from the Spanish- and French-speaking West Indies. Here, immigrants are worse off than African Americans for most of their life in the U.S. After a long period of stay in the U.S., they eventually reach parity with their African Americans peers. Similarly, native-born Hispanic and French Caribbeans are not significantly different from the African American community.

That differences are language-specific is consistent with hypotheses about demand and supply factors. Supply-side hypotheses argue that Caribbeans have a greater motivation for achievement than native-born African Americans. Such differences can be attributed to selective migration on the one hand, and to socialization in black majority societies on the other. British Caribbeans tend to migrate for economic reasons, while Haitians migrate for political reasons. Despite the high social and emotional costs involved, political immigration or other forms of coerced immigration are generally believed to be less selective with respect to occupational ability than economically driven immigration. In addition, the British Caribbeans generally have black majorities while the French and the Hispanic West Indies considered here do not. Hence, the British may be more oriented towards achievement because they have been socialized in societies with black majorities and relatively successful economic role models among their peers. Support for demand-side hypotheses can be found as well. Hispanic West Indian blacks, for example, may face double discrimination because they are both black and Hispanic. Unlike the British, they do not combine their race with a more favorably looked upon British heritage.

Generational differences within this new black minority were found as well. On average, Caribbean blacks who were born in the U.S. have higher earnings and occupational status than Caribbean immigrants upon arrival. Immigrants reach parity with natives after several years in the U.S., but the point at which this occurs is in most cases well above the average number of years that Caribbean immigrants have been in the U.S. For British Caribbeans, this implies that the second and later generations have a somewhat greater advantage over African Americans than the first generation. This result does not support the notion suggested by assimilation theory that later generations lose the "immigrant" advantage that their parents had, and consequently reach parity with African Americans.

Several reasons can be suggested to explain this exception. First, cultural assimilation may be mitigated by the influence that immigrants have on their children. More specifically, Caribbean immigrants may transmit their orientation toward hard work and achievement by emphasizing the importance of schooling for their children. They may be particularly motivated to transmit such values if they contrast their own experiences in the U.S. with those of African Americans in their surroundings. Second, even though American-born Caribbean blacks were never faced with the decision of whether to migrate, the talents and abilities on which their parents are "selected" can be passed on to

later generations through the socialization process (Chiswick 1977). Third, intergenerational influences may be amplified and reinforced by geographical segregation between Caribbean and African Americans. Though there is some evidence pointing in this direction (Denton & Massey 1989), more research is needed to examine patterns of segregation between the two black communities.

## Notes

1. Hourly earnings of \$100 and more are recoded to 100.
2. The coding is done as follows: no school, nursery school and kindergarten (0 years), 1st-4th grade (2.5 years), 5th-8th grade (6.5 years), 9th grade (9 years), 10th grade (10 years), 11th grade (11 years), 12th grade and high school graduates (12 years), some college without degree and associate college degree in occupational program (13 years), associate college degree in academic program (14.5 years), Bachelor's degree (16 years), Master's degree (18 years), professional and doctorate degree (22 years).
3. For continuous independent variables, the percentage change in the dependent variable is given by  $100 \times \beta$ ; for binary independent variables, the percentage difference in the dependent variable between subgroups is given by  $100 \times [\exp(\beta)-1]$ .
4. The point at which log earnings actually begin to decline with experience can be found by setting the derivative of equation B with respect to experience to 0 and rearranging terms. This yields  $(-1 \times .249)/(2 \times -.028) = 4.4$  which amounts to 44 years of experience.
5. I also tested nonlinear duration effects using duration and duration squared but generally found no significant improvement of the models.
6. The model also allows one to compute at which point the socioeconomic status positions of immigrant and native Caribbeans are equal. For example, according to model B, the (logged) earnings of Hispanic Caribbean immigrants are:  $\beta_0 + \sum_j \beta_j X_{ij} + \gamma_1 + \gamma_4 + \gamma_7 Dur_i$ . The (logged) earnings of Hispanic Caribbean natives are:  $\beta_0 + \sum_j \beta_j X_{ij} + \gamma_1$ . Hence, the earnings of Hispanic immigrants and natives are equal when  $Dur_i = -\gamma_4/\gamma_7$ .
7. According to model B, the (log) earnings of Hispanic Caribbean immigrants are:  $\beta_0 + \sum_j \beta_j X_{ij} + \gamma_1 + \gamma_4 + \gamma_7 Dur_i$ . The (log) earnings of African Americans are:  $\beta_0 + \sum_j \beta_j x_{ij}$ . Hence, the earnings of Hispanic immigrants and African Americans are equal when  $Dur_i = -(\gamma_1 + \gamma_4)/\gamma_7$ .

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