

**Beyond Disruption: The Forgotten Origins of Affirmative Action  
in College and University Admissions, 1961-1969<sup>1</sup>**

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Lisa M. Stulberg  
Dept. of Humanities and Social Sciences in the Professions  
Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development  
New York University  
246 Greene Street – 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10003

Anthony S. Chen  
Department of Sociology  
Room 3001 LSA Building  
500 South State  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1382

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Abstract: What explains the rise of affirmative action policies in undergraduate admissions? Most accounts ascribe the initial advent of such policies to the social unrest that engulfed northern cities and campuses during the late-1960s. Examining a new selection of primary sources in which policy change is closely observed, we find mixed support for these “disruption-centered” theories. In a sample of seventeen schools, we observe that affirmative action in undergraduate admissions arose in two, distinct waves during the 1960s. The first wave was launched in the early-1960s by northern schools whose administrators were inspired by nonviolent, civil rights protests in the South. The second wave of affirmative action emerged in the late-1960s as a response to other forms of disruption. A campaign of nonviolent, direct action by black students and their allies, following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., prompted administrators to expand affirmative action at schools with such programs already in place. A small set of schools without affirmative action finally consented to adopting such programs in the wake of urban riots and King’s assassination. These late-adopting schools were bastions of social exclusivity favored by the Protestant upper class. Our findings challenge existing formulations of “disruption-centered” theories and underscore the combined importance of collective mobilization, elite perceptions, and status-group struggle in understanding patterns of institutional change in higher education.

Few policies in higher education are more politically or legally contentious than affirmative action. The passion of both critics and defenders is matched only by the hyperbole of their rhetoric and the incommensurability of their perspectives. In 2003, only days after the Supreme Court upheld the use of affirmative action at the University of Michigan Law School, conservative commentator Shelby Steele lamented the ruling as a pyrrhic “victory for white guilt” (Wall Street Journal 2003, p. A16). The same ruling led the liberal-leaning editorial page of the New York Times to praise the slim majority for taking a “historic stand for equality of opportunity” (New York Times 2003, p. A30).

For a policy that has generated so much rhetorical heat, surprisingly little is known about where it came from. What are the origins of affirmative action in higher education? Many writers simply assume that affirmative action began in earnest shortly before the Supreme Court’s famously divided Bakke ruling of 1978. To the extent that claims about the origins of the policy are based on actual research, scholars have implicitly formulated what might be labeled a “disruption-centered” theory. The underlying intuition of the theory is powerfully straightforward: Affirmative action in higher education arose largely as a policy response to campus protests, urban riots, and other expressions of social unrest during late-1960s and early-1970s (Anderson 2004; Bowen and Bok 1998; Karabel 2005a; Skrentny 2002; Wilkinson 1977). The threat to social order had grown so acute by then that college administrators were forced to stem the tide by making their institutions more inclusive.

It is easy to see why disruption-centered theories are so appealing, but the empirical evidence supporting them remains partial and limited. The most thorough and convincing research traces the onset of affirmative action at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton

(Karabel 2005a). But a great deal remains unknown, in large part because so few empirical studies of the subject exist. How representative are the so-called Big Three? Did most other selective schools adopt affirmative action at roughly the same time as they did? Is the correspondence between disruption and institutional change evident among a wide range of institutions? If so, what was the mechanism by which disruption shaped admissions policy? If the level of black enrollment in American colleges and universities displayed a marked upswing with the onset of disruption, is the increase specifically attributable to the adoption of brand-new policies, or the more aggressive implementation of existing policies, or a combination of both? If disruption does not appear to be systematically related to the rise of affirmative action policies by selective institutions of higher education, then what did drive their adoption?

In this paper, we analyze the origins of affirmative action in undergraduate admissions. Using newly collected data that span the 1960s, we closely trace the advent of the policy for a sample of seventeen highly selective schools. To understand the sources of institutional change, we identify the year when each school adopted affirmative action and then compare early adopters to late adopters. We ask, what is the process by which the adoption of affirmative action occurs? What distinguishes early adopters from late adopters? To what extent does the timing of adoption correspond to the onset of urban or campus disruption versus other factors?

This paper proceeds in five sections. The first section reviews the literature on institutional change in higher education, along with a burgeoning sub-literature on the rise of affirmative action. It also formulates the substantive and theoretical motivation for our project. A second section describes and justifies our definition of affirmative action in

higher education. The third section of the paper describes our approach to sampling, our method of data collection, and our empirical strategy for drawing inferences about the sources of policy adoption. A fourth section presents the results of our analysis. In a purposive sample of seventeen northern schools, we find mixed support for disruption-centered theories. Disruption mattered, but not in the way currently postulated by the literature. We find that affirmative action in undergraduate admissions arose in two waves. In the early- to mid-1960s, nonviolent protest by the southern branch of the civil rights movement led to the quiet adoption of affirmative action by administrators at a surprisingly large subset of schools on our sample. This constituted a first wave of affirmative action. A second wave emerged in the mid- to late-1960s as a response to other forms of disruption. Among the subset of schools that had already launched affirmative action programs, administrators expanded existing programs in response to nonviolent, direct action campaigns mounted by black college students and their supporters in the wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Among the smaller subset of schools that did not participate in the first wave, urban riots combined with King's assassination to prompt the adoption of affirmative action for the very first time. The observed variation in the timing of initial adoption corresponds strongly with the social exclusivity of the institution. Schools that were historically most central to the social reproduction of the Protestant elite were among the slowest to initially adopt affirmative action. Princeton, Yale, Amherst, Williams were the latest-adopting schools in our sample, and they were also bastions of social exclusivity most favored by the Protestant upper class. The final section of the paper discusses the historical and

theoretical implications of our findings; it also points out new directions for future research.

## **DISRUPTION AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Any scholar interested in the origins of affirmative action confronts a vast but imbalanced literature. The emergence of affirmative action in employment is now the subject of numerous studies that together offer a range of complementary and contradictory perspectives (Chen forthcoming; Frymer forthcoming; Graham 1990; Lieberman 2005; MacLean 2006; Skrentny 1996; 2002; 2006; Stryker and Pedriana 1997; Sugrue 2004). Scholarship on the origins of affirmative action in college admissions is far sparser by comparison.

The most useful point of departure is the sociological literature on institutional change in higher education. Much of this literature is framed by the dramatic social transformation that took place over the course of the twentieth century. At the beginning of the century, college-going was almost exclusively the province of white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant (WASP) men hailing from the uppermost reaches of the class structure. Even the most elite colleges could not have been called selective, in that their admissions process was informal and based largely on relationships with a small community of elite and exclusionary preparatory schools. The most exclusive of these were Groton, St. Mark's, St. Paul's, St. George's, Middlesex, and Kent – Episcopalian schools known collectively as “St. Grottlesex” – along with Andover and Exeter (Levine 1980, p. 86). Given the close ties between elite preparatory schools and elite colleges, there was simply no need for the latter to exercise much selectivity. As Levine (1986) has written of the

period: “Before World War I, institutions of higher learning matriculated essentially all interested young people. A potential student’s parents or principal – or, more commonly, his headmaster – simply wrote the president or dean of a college about the student; the boy arrived at the college in September, took the school’s entrance examination, and enrolled. The student inquired about only one college; there was no admissions office, no formal application process” (p. 137). In fact, Levine found that very few of the nation’s top colleges and universities turned down any applicants in the first few decades of the twentieth century (p. 139).

This cozy arrangement began to shift somewhat during the early interwar years, as growing numbers of Americans began to view higher education as “a critical avenue of economic and social mobility” (Levine 1986, p. 148). The pool of applicants gradually expanded, and elite colleges were forced to become selective for the first time (Levine 1986; Synnott 1979), relying on quantitative criteria – grades, test scores, and class ranking – as a means of discriminating among applicants.<sup>1</sup> But the turn toward meritocracy did not last. Among the most successful of the new applicants were Jews, a development that met with more than a little chagrin at places like Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. To resolve their newfound “Jewish problem,” many elite colleges responded by placing severe restrictions on Jewish admission, often times imposing quotas. Indeed, among the Ivy League, the University of Pennsylvania was the rare school that did not introduce a quota on Jewish admission (Karabel 1995a, p. 655, n. 134). Elite schools thus traded academic rigor for a “social homogeneity” that kept their schools overwhelmingly wealthy and Protestant – and white (Bloomgarden 1961, p. 11). The choice led to

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<sup>1</sup> Welch and Gruhl (1998) indicate that law and medical schools did not become truly selective until much later, the early 1960s (p. 52).

strikingly visible consequences. When a Princeton faculty member who had served on the admissions committee met his first group students in 1940, he could not help but express surprise at the uniformity of their appearance: “It was like looking at a room full of siblings” (Bloomgarden 1961, p. 11).

The social transformation of American higher education would grow complete only after the Second World War, when the GI Bill made college an attainable goal for many working- and middle-class men – for the first time in American history. Their enrollment, followed shortly by that of their baby boomer children and the significant expansion of federal student aid for higher education, caused a massive expansion of higher education by the end of the 1950s and through the 1960s (e.g., Duffy and Goldberg 1998).<sup>2</sup> A gradual slackening of anti-Semitism made it possible for Jews to enroll in colleges and universities in greater numbers, and the subsequent decades witnessed the growing inclusion of women and racial minorities as well. By the end of the century, American college students looked very different than they did on the eve of the Second World War. They were a more diverse lot in many ways, and college-going had ceased to be the prerogative of rich, WASP men. What explains such a major change?

Studies examining the onset of Jewish exclusion during the interwar period form a bulwark of the literature (Farnum 1990a; 1990b; Karabel 2005a; Synnott 1979; Wechsler 1977). In a seminal contribution, Karabel (1984) accounts for Jewish exclusion by pointing to the role of status-group struggle and organizational self-interest. Based on a

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<sup>2</sup> Duffy and Goldberg (1998) note: “The real beginning of a federal student aid system in this country dates to the passage in 1958 of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA),” which “established a federal loan program for academically superior science and foreign language students” (p. 169).

comparative analysis of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, he finds that the movement toward “social closure” at all three institutions during the interwar period was driven by the effort of the Protestant upper class to retain control over the Big Three. At the same time, he argues that the organizational interests of the Big Three were responsive to demands for social closure because they needed to retain the financial and cultural support of the Protestant upper class (Karabel 1984, p. 29). Though he broadly agrees with Karabel’s analysis, Farnum adds that institutional “values, ideology, and identity” were important “constitutive elements of interest” that critically shaped how schools responded to exclusionary forces (Farnum 1997, p. 509). Examining a different set of schools, he highlights the experience of University of Pennsylvania, which rejected Jewish quotas because they were fundamentally incompatible with the egalitarian traditions and meritocracy ideology of the institution. Farnum concludes that “ideologies or beliefs or values were crucial to the process of determining perceptions of organizational interest” (Farnum 1997, p. 515).<sup>3</sup>

If status-group conflict, organizational interest, and institutional identity are essential to understanding how colleges and universities responded to Jewish enrollment during the interwar period, changes in access after the Second World War were shaped by the political mobilization of excluded groups. Comparing the experience of African Americans to the experience of women and working-class students (of all racial

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<sup>3</sup> Jewish exclusion forms a key storyline in Wechsler (1997), whose study chronicles the history of Columbia University, the University of Michigan, the University of Chicago, and the City University of New York. But he is less concerned with explaining changing patterns of access to higher education than understanding the “century long trend toward turning the college admissions office into a social sorter” (Wechsler 1997, p. 299). Farnum’s dissertation (1990) also considers the case of Jewish exclusion. More broadly it traces the checkered history of meritocracy at Columbia, Harvard, and the University of Pennsylvania, from the Civil War to World War Two.

backgrounds) during the 1960s and 1980s, Karen (1991) argues that variation in the degree of their political mobilization is the key to understanding their differential pattern of incorporation in higher education. All three groups succeeded in winning greater representation in higher education over the course of the period. But only African Americans and women gained access to the most highly selective institutions. These aggregate differences across groups reflected the fact that African Americans and women mobilized themselves politically, while working-class students did not. Karen concludes that “it is only when the threat from below is strong and pervasive that traditional selection criteria may be amended to allow for the admission of previously excluded groups” (p. 228)<sup>4</sup>

Through a sophisticated analysis of individual-level surveys conducted by the American Council of Education in 1972 and the College Board in 1983 and 1992, Grodsky (2007) notes a similar pattern. His results indicate that African American and Latino applicants were more likely than socioeconomically disadvantaged students to attend four-year colleges rather than community colleges; moreover, he finds that the differential is strongest and most consistent among elite schools. Controlling for self-selection on the part of applicants, Grodsky concludes that the observed pattern of incorporation in his data reflects institutional policy—namely, affirmative action—and not student preferences. To account for the pattern, he (2007, p. 1964) proposes a theory of compensatory sponsorship, arguing that admissions and recruitment personnel gave

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<sup>4</sup> Karen (1985, 1990) further develops a political-organizational model of gatekeeping in a case study of the admissions process at Harvard. Dougherty (1988), too, studies institutional change in higher education. He examines a case of community college policy-making to argue that we must not overlook the role of “government officials pursuing their own interests” (1988, p. 400).

special consideration to racial and ethnic minorities not only to address past injustices but also to “craft new cohorts of elites that conform more closely to a vision of a just society.”

Despite the rich literature examining broad patterns of change, and despite the fact that race-based affirmative action is widespread in American higher education (Grotsky 2007; Grotsky and Kalogrides 2005), few studies have focused specifically on unearthing the origins of affirmative action policies.<sup>5</sup> One exception is an important stream of work on affirmative action in law and medical school admissions, which reveals the central role that professional and accrediting associations played in introducing recruitment, summer, and financial aid programs for students of color in the late mid- to late-1960s (Association of American Law Schools 1977, pp. 14-16; Skrentny 2002, p. 169; Welch and Gruhl 1998, pp. 54-57). Such associations applied positive “pressure” on university administrators to take affirmative action in admissions (Welch and Gruel 1998, pp. 79-82), a policy that was at times construed by some observers to entail “the relaxation of admission standards” (Association of American Law Schools 1977, p. 15). Research on college admissions, by contrast, has tended to focus on the period after affirmative action had already been widely adopted. For instance, Lipson (2007) draws on new interview data to explain how affirmative action, once originated, came to win near-consensus support among admissions officers and top administrators at

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<sup>5</sup> One noteworthy exception is Grotsky and Kalogrides (2005). But it should be noted that that they do not analyze policy change per se but rather the degree of institutional support for affirmative action (measured by a Likert scale) as recorded in the Annual Survey of Colleges, first conducted by the College Board in 1986. They find that claims of support for affirmative action are more likely among prestigious institutions compared to non-prestigious institutions; more likely among public institutions than private institutions; more likely among institutions that face court rulings and administrative regulations than those that do not.

the University of California at Berkeley, University of Texas, and University of Wisconsin. Examining the experience of Asian Americans, Takagi (1992) ably analyzes the “retreat from race” in admissions policy during the 1980s. These are all valuable contributions to the literature, but the origins of affirmative action policies – particularly in undergraduate admissions – still remain largely unexamined.

To the extent the question is explicitly addressed, scholars have postulated what may be roughly characterized as a “disruption-centered” theory of the origins of affirmative action policies in higher education. By “disruption” we mean a type of social or collective action that creates a sense of crisis or a break from the normal order of things. This can include forms of disruption that are largely nonviolent in intent and effect – for instance, southern civil rights protests (McAdam 1982; Morris 1984) or peaceful demonstrations on college campuses. But it can also include more overtly violent events such as the “commodity riots” of Watts and Newark or campus protests that become violent by accident or design.<sup>6</sup> This latter sense of disruption – violent disruption stemming from urban riots or campus protests – is the one invoked in the current literature on the origins of affirmative action. It is the specific sense in which the existing theories are “disruption-centered.” One version of the theory assigns causal

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<sup>6</sup> In sociology, there is a well-developed and important literature on racial violence, including work on lynching (Olzak 1990; Tolnay and Beck 1995), other public expressions of racial grievances against racial targets (Olzak and Shanahan 2003), and urban riots (Grimshaw 1969; Janowitz 1979; Myers 1997; Olzak, McEneaney, and Shanahan 1996; U.S. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 1969). As far as riots are concerned, sociologists of racial violence distinguish between three main types of riots: “communal riots” such as the Chicago riot of 1919 or the Detroit riot of 1943; “commodity riots” such as those happening in Watts in 1965 and Newark and Detroit in 1967; and the “political riots” of 1968 and thereafter (Grimshaw 1969; Janowitz 1979). The literature on the origins of affirmative action essentially contemplates the effect of “commodity riots” and “political riots” on institutional change, although it does not do so in such explicit terms.

primacy to campus protest. In their landmark study, Bowen and Bok (1998) acknowledge that active recruitment of African American students grew out of a “rising concern over civil rights” that began in the early 1960s, but they insist that schools initially did not “significantly modify their regular standards for admission and financial aid” (p. 5). Such shifts came only after 1965. “Often spurred by student protests on their own campuses,” they write, “university officials initiated active programs to recruit minority applicants and to take race into account in the admissions process” (pp. 6-7). Wilkinson (1979) concurs, concluding that affirmative action and other “[special admissions] programs were enacted late in the 1960s to appease student militants” (p. 262). Other scholars, such as Anderson (2004), are not so careful to distinguish between types of disruption and simply trace the origins of affirmative action to a period of social ferment characterized by “[u]rban riots, campus demonstrations, the Vietnam war, and...countercultural ‘youthquake’” that “ended political and social consensus and divided the nation” (p. 111).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Karen’s (1991) theory of political mobilization and countermobilization is consistent with disruption-centered theory, but he also acknowledges the need for further research to clarify how political mobilization meshes with other explanatory factors, particularly the interests of governmental and university elites. Some of Skrentny’s work (2002) is also consistent with disruption-centered theory, as it is currently formulated. He argues that “black violence in the nation’s cities...fostered an interest among university administrators in affirmative admissions” and special admissions programs (Skrentny 2002, 166). Especially crucial was “violence, or the threat of it, on the campuses themselves” (Skrentny 2002, 167). According to Skrentny, the effects of such disruptions became manifest in 1969, when there was a series of increases in black matriculation at Harvard, Dartmouth, Princeton, Cornell, Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois. At the same time, Skrentny – like Karen – stresses the importance of factors other than disruption, particularly the perceptions of elite policy-makers (2006). Building on selected aspects of Skrentny’s neoinstitutional account (1996, 2002), Grodsky (2007, pp. 1696-1697) suggests that racial and ethnic minorities, particularly African Americans, became the objects of elite, “compensatory sponsorship,” primarily through a logic of crisis management. Racial and ethnic minorities remained the objects of compensatory

Disruption-centered theories of affirmative action – particularly those that point to the importance of urban riots or campus unrest – have become the prevailing wisdom in the field. They are a powerful origin story readily invoked by almost everyone writing on the affirmative action in college admissions (see also Duffy and Goldberg 1998, p. 140; Orlans 1992, p. 145).<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, there is little evidence to support such theories. The most comprehensive and compelling evidence comes from The Chosen, Karabel’s groundbreaking history (2005a) of admission and exclusion at the Big Three.<sup>9</sup> Drawing on exhaustive research in the institutional archives of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, he finds that disruption had crucial consequences for the incorporation of racial minorities. Karabel acknowledges that the campaign to dismantle Jim Crow was regarded as “morally compelling” and stirred a “deeper awareness of racial injustice among the men who ran the nation’s leading colleges.” But he nonetheless concludes that the civil rights

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sponsorship, he argues, due to the diffusion of organizational norms amidst legal uncertainty over the status of affirmative action (Edelman 1992).

<sup>8</sup> The appeal of disruption-centered theories would appear to transcend ideological boundaries. To liberal-leaning authors, disruption is a powerful expression of mass discontent with social inequality and racial exclusion. To conservative-leaning authors, it is a crude instrument of racial blackmail. In a thoughtful review of Karabel’s book, Traub (2005) actually uses the exact phrase “racial blackmail,” but it seems fairly clear that he invokes the term for dramatic effect rather than as a genuine indictment of the policy.

<sup>9</sup> Considering the University of California, Karabel does make similar observations about the effects of disruption: “[I]t was less the moral claims of the civil rights movement than the palpable threat to the existing order posed by the urban (and, to a lesser extent, the campus) uprisings of the late 1960s that led to a rupture in long-standing patterns of racial and ethnic exclusion not only at the University of California but at colleges and universities throughout the country” (Karabel 1999, p. 110). Douglas likewise observes that student protests over Vietnam and civil rights, growing political clout among African Americans, and the rise of radical groups such as the Black Panthers all contributed to a growing conviction among UC administration to “seek new policy solutions” (Douglass 1999, p. 99). This solution eventually, in 1968, took the form of raising the percentage of students admissible through a “special action” program from 2% to 4% (Douglass 2007, p. 99). Such students did not have to meet the usual standards of admission.

movement “had not been enough in and of itself to fundamentally alter the admissions practices of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton” (p. 406). In his view, all three institutions jettisoned their race-neutral admission criteria only after a surge of “disruptive activity, both on and off campus” (p. 406).

Using changes in the level of black enrollment at each institution to infer shifts in admission criteria and practice, Karabel finds that the “watershed event” was the succession of riots in the mid-1960s, starting with the Watts riot in 1965 and followed by the 1967 riots in Newark and Detroit. Unnerved by the devastation wrought in Newark (pp. 406-407), Princeton tripled the number of African American students entering in 1968. Harvard and Yale followed on the heels of a “terrifying wave of riots in the wake of Martin Luther King’s assassination” (p. 407).<sup>10</sup> Black students at both campuses mobilized to demand greater representation, but Karabel argues that their mobilization “would not have had nearly as powerful an impact in the absence of the urban riots that preceded it” (p. 406). The mobilization of students was not unimportant, but the urban riots were ultimately what made it politically possible to incorporate substantial numbers of African Americans: “What the civil rights movement had been unable to accomplish – a fundamental alteration of racially neutral admission practices that had the effect, if not the intent, of limiting black enrollment to token levels – the riots had made possible” (p. 407).

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<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that Harvard – located in Massachusetts, cradle of Yankee abolitionism – is something of an exception among the Big Three. To an extent greater than either Yale or Princeton, it seemed open to the most able African Americans. It is true that black enrollment jumped at Harvard after the 1968 riots, but it seems that a formal decision to take affirmative action had already been made in 1961 by Fred Glimp, Harvard’s incoming admissions director (Karabel 2005a, p. 401). We return to this point below.

However, with the exception of Karabel (2005a) and a very limited number of additional studies (Duffy and Goldberg 1998; Karen 1991; Wechsler 1977; Williamson 2003), empirical evidence supporting disruption-centered theories remains partial and limited.<sup>11</sup> There are simply too few studies that follow various colleges and universities closely enough over the proper time frame to sustain a broad generalization. Karabel's conclusions about Harvard, Yale, and Princeton seem both appropriate and correct, particularly in connection with changes in enrollment patterns, but how widely applicable are they? None of the Big Three represents the average American university; these schools are unusual even among the elite echelon of selective institutions where affirmative action has been practiced the most aggressively. Harvard, Yale, and Princeton are among the oldest and most exclusive institutions in the United States, and they are arguably the most resistant to change as well. Perhaps nothing less than the plausible threat of societal breakdown could have forced them to incorporate African Americans. It is not clear that disruption was even a necessary (much less a sufficient) condition at other selective schools that were less stratospherically elite. What about other schools in the Ivy League, particularly ones that boasted stronger egalitarian traditions (Farnum 1990a)? What about the top public universities, like the University of Michigan or the University of California, which ostensibly were founded to serve the public interest? What about the leading liberal arts colleges, most of which were located quite far from any episodes of urban disorder? It is not known whether the disruptions of the late-1960s

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<sup>11</sup> Wechsler (1977) also follows shifts in admissions practices at selected schools throughout the twentieth century. While his work does not focus solely on race, he does document the way in which student demands and action at City University of New York in 1969, "the seizure by more than 150 black and Puerto Rican students of eight buildings on the South Campus of City College" (p. 281), resulted in an overhaul of admissions at the university: the adoption of Open Admissions in the city's school system.

forced their hand as well, or whether they perhaps adopted affirmative action earlier than the Big Three. Clearly, further research on a wider range of cases is necessary before the precise scope and validity of disruption-centered theories can be fully assessed.

What also is needed is a closer look at the reasons why minority enrollment increased so sharply during the 1960s. Did the uptick reflect the adoption of brand-new affirmative action policies that were adopted in the wake of disruption? More precisely, did it stem directly from a rejection of racially neutral admissions criteria and the embrace of admission policies that permitted the consideration of race? Or did the rise in minority enrollment simply reflect a shift in institutional effort, and not a shift in policy? That is, did this expansion simply result from a more aggressive implementation of affirmative action programs that may have already been in place?<sup>12</sup> Substantial increases in minority enrollment are observationally equivalent with all of these possibilities, and it is necessary to take a closer look at the policy-making process. For instance, what role was played by policy elites and their perceptions (Karen 1991, p. 228; Skrentny 2006, p. 1764)? This represents more than a purely empirical exercise. If it appears that the enrollment of students of color – particularly African Americans – surged directly as a result of new admissions programs implemented after campus protests or urban riots, then disruption-centered theories would receive strong empirical validation. If colleges and universities proved willing to change their admissions policies only when the “threat

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<sup>12</sup> We use the phrase “admissions policies” to describe the formal criteria and procedures used to assess candidates for admissions and the phrase “admissions practices” to describe the actual behavior of admissions officials, which may or may not conform to formal admissions policies. These definitions represent a minor modification of the framework proposed by Karabel (2005a), who defines “admissions policy” as the “criteria (academic, cultural, personal, etc.) that govern decisions of inclusion and exclusion, the procedures for assessing applications, and finally the practices of the office of admissions, which may not correspond to the official criteria and procedures” (p. 559).

from below” (Karen 1991, p. 228) was sufficiently strong, then the advent of affirmative action could be plausibly attributed to disruption. On the other hand, it is not difficult to imagine that college officials may have begun to alter their admission policies in the years before the riots, particularly at schools other than Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. This would mean that disruption in the form of urban and campus unrest – that is, disruption in the sense invoked by the current literature – did not give rise to affirmative action so much as it contributed to the accelerated expansion of programs already underway. Indeed, if affirmative action had been adopted in the early 1960s, it suggests that a different source of disruption – civil rights protests in the South – may have been responsible for the willingness of college administrators to rethink admissions policies. In this case, students of affirmative action would have to begin reconsidering the origins of the policy.

There are scattered hints that the initial adoption of racially-attentive recruitment and admissions programs may have started much earlier than conventionally thought. For example, although the University of Illinois did not appear to formally permit racial consideration in admissions until 1968, it did initiate a series of early programs to address the academic needs of matriculating students from “disadvantaged” neighborhoods and high schools – primarily black students. The program was launched in 1965, partially in response to the mobilization of white students the year before. The program was held over the summer of 1965, before the students enrolled, and it was designed to enable them preemptively to “correct and alleviate any deficiencies as might interfere with the prosecution of college work” (Williamson 2003, p. 61). In 1967, Michigan State University appears to have adopted something closely akin to affirmative action in

college admissions. Weeks before the Detroit riot, participants in the Detroit Project fanned out to visit 13 inner-city high schools; they recruited 66 “not-normally-admissible Negro freshmen” for enrollment in the fall (Sabine 1968, p. 11). These two examples, of course, do not qualify as conclusive evidence of a general trend, but they do suggest that it is worthwhile to look closely at a diverse sample of schools in the early 1960s to determine whether some colleges and universities were willing to modify their admission criteria before urban and campus disruptions became commonplace later in the decade.

Admittedly, such programs did not appear to involve numerous students. But we nonetheless argue that shifts in institutional policy are a worthy object of sociological analysis. The explanatory focus of the literature thus far has been individual-level changes in admission probabilities, institutional-level changes in enrollment, or aggregate-level shifts in patterns of incorporation. But explaining institutional policy change – specifically the initial adoption and the subsequent expansion of affirmative action policies – would seem equally significant. There has been such a strong and abiding current of individualism and “color-blind” ideology in American political culture (Skrentny 1996), that any programmatic departure from it – towards racially-attentive admissions or otherwise – deserves attention.<sup>13</sup> What would lead college officials formally to break with such a long-standing ideological tradition? If the actual rise in

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<sup>13</sup> We use the term “color-blindness” advisedly; hence the quotation marks. The history of the term – as chronicled Bonilla-Silva (2003), Haney López (2006), Lassiter (2006), Lieberman (2005), and MacLean (2006) – warrants caution. We acknowledge that the term is laden with normative significance; moreover, we do not wish to downplay the numerous instances in which policies that were “color-blind” on their face have nevertheless had the effect of exacerbating or reinforcing inherited patterns of racial inequality. Still, we choose use it – albeit for strictly analytical purposes. In particular, we deploy the term as a way of distinguishing policies that do not explicitly invoke racial distinctions from policies that do.

minority enrollment is worthy of sociological accounting, so is the initial establishment of policies and programs that permit the consideration of race in admissions.

There is therefore strong warrant for additional research on the advent of affirmative action policies in college and university admissions, and the key questions seem straightforward. When did selective schools other than the Big Three adopt affirmative action programs? What is the process by which the adoption occurred? As “disruption-centered” theories suggest, did most schools establish affirmative action as a response to urban riots or campus protest? Did any schools establish affirmative action before the onset of urban riots or campus protest? If so, what motivated them? To the extent that there is any variation in the timing of adoption, what distinguishes early adopters from late adopters?

## **DEFINING AFFIRMATIVE ACTION**

### The Varieties of Affirmative Action

Anyone proposing to analyze the origins of affirmative action must first begin with a clear and defensible definition of the policy. At the most general level, we define affirmative action as any admissions policy or program that formally permits a degree of racial consideration – however big or small – in the treatment of potential or actual applicants for admissions. Our definition is not unusual or idiosyncratic. It is consistent, for instance, with the definition presented in President William J. Clinton’s comprehensive Affirmative Action Review (Edley and Stephanopolous 1995). There, affirmative action is defined as “any effort taken to expand opportunity for women or racial, ethnic, and national origin minorities by using membership in those groups...as a

consideration” (Edley and Stephanopoulous 1995, quoted in Edley 1996, pp. 16-17). In this respect, our general definition does not break radically from common usage by various experts in the field. However, it is even more stringent in the sense that it assumes that the consideration of race is a formal one. For example, it excludes ad hoc actions taken by individual administrators in the absence of a policy or established practice. Affirmative action, by our definition, is a kind of policy in higher education that gives racial considerations special weight in the allocation of opportunity; race is explicitly nominated as a basis of consideration.

We distinguish between two broad kinds of affirmative action policies that are used by schools of all types. Table 2 summarizes the differences. “Soft” affirmative action involves policies or programs that aim to expand and/or enhance the pool of minority applicants to a particular school through talent searching programs or through preparatory or “bridge” programs for elementary or secondary school students, incoming college students, or college graduates (in the case of graduate and professional school admissions). A clear example is the Berkeley Pledge (c. 1995-1996), a multifaceted program adopted in the wake of the regental directives that banned affirmative action throughout the University of California system in 1995 (Chávez 1998; Honan 1995; Kell 1996). This program sought to recruit college applicants from schools with predominantly minority and low-income students. The program involved not only expanded outreach to minority high school applicants, but also enhanced educational programming at selected elementary and middle schools (Kell 1996).<sup>14</sup> What makes such

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<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that the Berkeley Pledge also strove to raise the minority yield rate (proportion of admits who matriculate) by convincing minorities admitted under race-neutral policies to attend Berkeley (Berkeleyan 1996).

a program representative of “soft” affirmative action is that racial considerations were invoked to bring minorities into the pool of applicants. The program even went so far as to provide assistance in taking special steps to prepare minority applicants for the rigors of the application process. But it did not actually alter the application process for minority applicants in any other regard. Like other “soft” policies, the Berkeley Pledge did not permit the assignment of special weight to their status as minorities at the point of decision to admit. Under “soft” affirmative action, race is not considered as a criterion of admission, only as a criterion of recruitment, outreach, or preparation. While this kind of “soft” program may seem fairly routine today, it was a significant shift in practice for many schools in the 1950s and 1960s. Even recruiting in general beyond a small group of feeder schools or geographic areas was not commonplace (Duffy and Goldberg 1998, pp. 44-45, 171).

By contrast, “hard” affirmative action is any policy or program that permits the racial background of the applicant to be considered in the decision to admit. One of the most rigid policies is a separate track of admission for minorities. This program was in place at the University of Washington Law School in 1971, when information on the application form was used to predict the first-year grade point average of all applicants (Posner 1974, pp. 1-2). Applicants who fell below a certain numerical threshold were divided into two groups. One group consisted of certain racial minorities, while the other group consisted of all other applicants below the threshold.<sup>15</sup> Minority applicants in the first group were evaluated competitively against one another, but they were not compared to applicants in the second, non-minority group. This segregation of applicants below the

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<sup>15</sup> Posner indicates that the minority group included “black, Chicano, American Indian, or Filipino” applicants (Posner 1974, p. 2).

threshold of admissibility effectively constituted a “separate track” of consideration. In combination with a set aside that was also operating at the time, Washington’s separate track led to a higher admission rate for minority applicants than white applicants. A set aside entails reserving a specific number or percentage of seats in the matriculating class for a particular group of students. Only members of the group are eligible for these seats. A set aside may not be met or may be exceeded. A well-known example is the program at the School of Medicine at the University of California, Davis, where admissions officials in 1974 reserved 16 places for racial minorities in a matriculating class of 100 (Wilkinson 1979, p. 254). Perhaps the most infamous and controversial example of “hard” affirmative action is the racial quota. A quota is a ceiling on the maximum number or percentage of students from a particular group that may be admitted in a given year (e.g., Jews in the interwar period). Alternatively, a quota is a floor on the minimum number or percentage of students from a particular group that must be admitted. We do not know of any examples where a quota serving as a floor was the official policy of a college or university, although many critics of affirmative action have alleged that such a floor existed for minority admits (e.g., white applicant Barbara Grutter’s allegations against the University of Michigan Law School). Other forms of “hard” affirmative action include point systems and use of race as a plus factor.

To reiterate our view, then, what distinguishes “soft” policy from a “hard” policy is not the consideration of race per se, but rather the point in the process at which race may be taken into account. “Soft” policies permit the consideration of race at the point of recruitment, while “hard” policies permit the consideration of race at the point of

admission. Under a “hard” policy, admissions officers can place a metaphorical thumb on the scale when weighing the admissibility of a minority applicant.

#### Affirmative Action by Another Name

It is important to note that we apply the phrase “affirmative action” to describe policies that permitted the consideration of race but that did not always explicitly isolate race as the relevant special category. In the lexicon of the early- to mid-1960s, “disadvantage” was the term of choice for college officials, and race was considered the main form of disadvantage (see, e.g., Gordon and Wilkerson 1966). This usage was far from a specialized jargon used by the administrators of elite colleges. In conflating disadvantage with race, university officials were perfectly in step with the times and drew on a national discourse about race and poverty. This discourse found its clearest expression in the widely discussed Moynihan Report, authored in 1965 by political scientist Daniel Patrick Moynihan, an Assistant Secretary of Labor in the Lyndon B. Johnson administration.<sup>16</sup>

In college admissions, it is fairly safe to say that programs that permitted the consideration of disadvantage by definition permitted the consideration of race. The lead sentence of a prominent article in the New York Times in the summer of 1964 typifies how the terms were used almost interchangeably at the time: “Throughout the nation this summer there has been considerable emphasis on special education programs designed to help disadvantaged youngsters – particularly Negroes” (Currivan 1964, p. E4). Similarly, in response to a concerned resident of Washington State, Charles A. Evans, special

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<sup>16</sup> See Rainwater and Yancey (1967) for an excellent discussion of the report and its political aftermath.

assistant to President Odegaard, made it perfectly clear that the “Special Education Program” formed by the University of Washington in 1968 was meant to bring “disadvantaged” students into the student body. “The term ‘disadvantaged,’” he noted, “referred specifically to those economic and cultural factors that cause Negroes, for example, to comprise less than 1% of our University student population for last year (University of Washington Office of Minority Affairs, October 9, 1968).<sup>17</sup> This “disadvantage,” when applied in the context of the admissions process, was assumed to be economic, educational, and cultural in nature, and it was believed to limit the usefulness of traditional measures of academic achievement when judging applicants. For example, when John C. Hoy (1965), then dean of admissions at Wesleyan, wrote about the dilemma of college students “from deprived backgrounds,” he expressed a set of beliefs common among his peers: “When a boy grows up in a home where neither parent graduated from the eighth grade, where there may be few books, newspapers, little conversation of an intellectual nature, where most of his peers are under-motivated and he attends a segregated school (or de facto segregated), test results will generally be poor.” Thus, for Hoy and many other admissions officials, programs or policies targeted at “disadvantaged” or “deprived” applicants were based on the idea that race and racial segregation were virtually synonymous with disadvantage and deprivation (p. 9). Tailoring a program toward these groups almost always meant the consideration of race.

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<sup>17</sup> Williamson (2003) notes that the federal government developed a definition of “disadvantaged” through the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) as a part of its Equal Opportunity Grant program. Under this definition a “disadvantaged” student was: “an American of college-going age whose family income and number of siblings, as well as the condition of his home, school, and community, restrict his opportunities to develop socially, culturally, and economically toward becoming a useful member of society” (quoted in Williamson 2003, pp. 159-160, note 4).

This conflation is worth noting for our purposes because it gives us the chance to make clear that the object of our explanation is not the origins of the phrase “affirmative action.” Instead, we are concerned with understanding the origins of admissions programs and practices that take affirmative action; namely, understanding how and why racial considerations formally entered into the admissions process. Hence the conflation of race and disadvantage during much of the 1960s means that affirmative action programs – as we have defined them – may have been in operation at many schools, even though the words “affirmative action” did not become commonplace until the late-1960s. As our methodological discussion will indicate, what is crucial to us is not the appearance of the phrase itself but whether there is evidence that a school adopted policies or programs (perhaps under the rubric of disadvantage or deprivation) that formally permitted the consideration of race in the admissions process.

## **METHODS AND DATA**

We took a comparative-historical approach to investigating the origins of affirmative action in undergraduate admissions. Although large-N statistical analysis can provide the strongest basis for generalization, it simply was not feasible. There simply was not enough data, and data collection for a sufficiently large sample of institutions would have been prohibitively time-consuming and expensive.<sup>18</sup> Even if a usable large-N data set already existed, analyzing it might not have yielded nearly enough detail to

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<sup>18</sup> Grodsky and Kalogrides (2005) have ably analyzed the decline of affirmative action using data from annual surveys of colleges and universities carried out by the College Board between 1986 and 2003. Their sample of schools is quite large, but it does not cover the years of interest to us. More importantly, Grodsky and Kalogrides (2005, pp. 14-15) do not directly observe policy in their data. Their dependent variable is a Likert scale that measures the “relative importance of minority status to admissions decisions.”

illuminate the black box of institutional change. A case study, on the other hand, certainly would have provided the necessary level of detail. But it could not have sustained any broad generalizations. Therefore, in much the same spirit as Voss and Sherman (2000), we relied on a comparison of several cases in order to identify the actual mechanisms and processes of institutional change in a way that is more amenable to generalization than a case study.

Our analysis is based on a purposive sample of 17 non-southern schools.<sup>19</sup> We selected these schools according to a straightforward rationale. Our sample started with Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, because the literature focuses primarily on them. We then sought to broaden our sample to include a greater range of selective schools, where affirmative action first took root. We first added the remaining schools in the Ivy League, because of their historical and social significance and their tendency to coordinate with each other on institutional matters. We then included selective schools from each of the three major types of undergraduate institutions: private universities, liberal arts colleges, and public universities. This sampling strategy made it possible for us to detect or rule out variation across type. In order to judge which of the schools were most selective, we relied on a recent list from U.S. News and World Report (USNWR).<sup>20</sup> Among private

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<sup>19</sup> We know almost nothing about the advent of affirmative action at southern colleges and universities. This is a subject well worth attention. But it is complicated by the struggle for desegregation of higher education in the South, which was virtually contemporaneous with the introduction of race-based affirmative action in the North. To simplify our inferential burden, we excluded southern schools from our sample, though we hope to study them in future work.

<sup>20</sup> Concerned that our use of a recent ranking guide to assess selectivity might not reflect the selectivity of schools in the period, we consulted two earlier sources: a 1964 college guide by Cass and Birnbaum and a 1971 Barron's guide. Neither of these listings provided a rank order of schools, but they did classify schools according to their level of selectivity. We would have preferred to use USNWR rankings, but it did not yet exist.

universities (in addition to the Ivy League) we included Northwestern.<sup>21</sup> Among liberal arts colleges, we included Amherst, Williams, Wesleyan, and Swarthmore. Among public universities, we selected University of California at Berkeley; University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA); University of Michigan; and University of Washington.<sup>22</sup> Table 1 lists all schools in our sample by type of institution.<sup>23</sup>

We collected original data for all schools that were not the subject of a major empirical study (i.e., all schools except Harvard, Yale, and Princeton). This meant that we carried out intensive data collection for fourteen schools.<sup>24</sup> We especially were

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After consulting these two earlier guides, it appeared as though our case selection would not have changed significantly. The schools we chose based on the USNWR list were also the most selective according to the earlier rankings.

<sup>21</sup> We could have chosen other schools in this category, including Stanford and the University of Chicago. We chose Northwestern partly because it was located in a Midwestern city and partly because our initial research indicated that it was a school that was actively interested in reaching out to minority applicants by the mid-1960s.

<sup>22</sup> Although they are both within the University of California system, we selected Berkeley and UCLA. Every campus in the UC system enjoys some latitude in setting various aspects of campus policy. The UC administration has the authority to issue systemwide regulations, and it also can offer incentives (e.g., matching grants) to encourage behavior it would prefer not to mandate. But its regulations and incentives are generally formulated in broad fashion, and individual campuses exercise a great deal of discretion to set policy, as long as it conforms to systemwide guidelines.

<sup>23</sup> An even larger sample of schools is ultimately desirable. However, there is currently so little empirical evidence on the origins of race-based affirmative action, it was necessary to start with a limited set of cases. Our current work represents the beginning of a larger research project. This larger project will examine not only affirmative action at northern schools that did not make the current sample (e.g., University of Chicago, Stanford, and the University of Minnesota), but also southern colleges and universities (e.g., University of Virginia and University of North Carolina) as well as engineering schools (e.g., Massachusetts Institute of Technology and California Institute of Technology).

<sup>24</sup> In a pilot study, we collected data on the advent of affirmative action policies for a sample of one hundred of the most selective schools, based on a recent U.S. News and World Report ranking. After interviewing scores of admissions officers and school archivists, however, it became increasingly clear that research in the primary sources would be necessary. The interview data were simply too ambiguous, contradictory, and imprecise.

interested in locating primary sources that would allow us to closely observe (to the extent it was possible) changes in admissions policies. We began our data collection by examining relevant articles in student newspapers during the 1960s and 1970s. (Appendix A lists the schools newspapers we read). Based on the relevant articles, we compiled lists of people, programs, and dates that seemed pertinent. Recognizing that student newspapers might be unreliable sources of accurate information, we followed up by conducting archival research in the manuscript collections of most of the schools in our sample. The primary archival sources we consulted included articles from alumni magazines and faculty and staff periodicals, press releases, internal reports, memoranda and correspondence, and minutes of administrative meetings, including minutes from trustees or regents meetings. Especially useful were the records of presidents, provosts, deans of admission, and other administrative officers of the schools.

Once the data were collected, we identified the year in which each school in our sample adopted affirmative action in undergraduate admissions.<sup>25</sup> To do this, we looked for empirical evidence that colleges and universities were making a programmatic effort to enroll minority students (“soft” affirmative action) as well as evidence that they formally or officially permitted the consideration of race at the point of undergraduate

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<sup>25</sup> Our archival work turned up no evidence that any of the schools in our sample adopted affirmative action in graduate or professional schools before they did so in undergraduate admissions. This seems to be supported in the literature on professional schools. Welch and Gruhl (1998), for instance, date the origins of affirmative action programs in law and medical school to the period between 1965 and 1974 (pp. 54-57). This is the basis of our claim that we have identified when affirmative action started at particular schools, even though we do not specifically research the origins of affirmative action policies in graduate and professional admissions.

admission (“hard” affirmative action).<sup>26</sup> Several types of evidence entered into our consideration. The strongest evidence consisted of contemporaneous written or verbal statements about admissions policy by admissions officers, top administrators (e.g., presidents or provosts), or others likely to have detailed or direct knowledge of the admission process. We also accepted ex post facto claims about past policies – for instance, claims made in institutional reports – if the statements were made within a reasonable time frame of the policy to which they referred. More specifically, we looked for statements that indicated the existence of a recruitment program as well as a policy that permitted a metaphorical thumb to be placed on the scale when weighing the admissibility of a minority applicant.<sup>27</sup>

We should reiterate that we did not code a school as having adopted affirmative action if it adopted only “soft” affirmative action. Evidence of “hard” affirmative action was necessary for us to identify the year of initial adoption. Nor did we code as affirmative action a program targeted for “disadvantaged” or “deprived” applicants if there was no evidence that it permitted the consideration of race. We thus coded the initial adoption of affirmative action at each school if and only if there was evidence indicating the establishment of “hard” admissions policies that permitted the consideration of race at the point of admission. This approach to operationalizing our

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<sup>26</sup> If an administrator took personal initiative to admit minority students – as Yale’s Arthur Howe apparently did in the late 1950s or early 1960s (Soares 2007, p. 112) – we did not count their behavior as affirmative action. There had to be some evidence of a formal or official policy or program.

<sup>27</sup> Within the limits of our data, we tried our best to identify the initial date of adoption as precisely as possible. However, in some cases, we could not be entirely certain of the exact year. In these instances, we sought to make coding decisions that minimized the bias in our analysis, or even biased us in favor of finding support for disruption-centered theories. For instance, if there was uncertainty about the exact year of adoption for a particular school, we tended to choose the later date.

dependent variable is fairly stringent, and it did not bias us against finding evidence that contradicts disruption-centered theories as they are currently formulated. In fact, it may have actually biased us in favor of finding evidence in support of them. For example, if our sample includes a number of schools that adopted “soft” affirmative action policies before the first large-scale urban riot – Watts in August 1965 – and then adopted “hard” affirmative action after Watts, then the effect of disruption (as measured by the timing of urban riots) would actually be overstated. These schools, which would be classified as post-Watts adopters under our criteria, might be more properly classified as pre-Watts adopters under a less restrictive definition of affirmative action that counts “soft” affirmative action.<sup>28</sup>

Once we coded the date of initial adoption for all the schools in our sample, we began our comparative analysis. First, we constructed a basic chronology of urban riots and campus unrest, the two main forms of disruption that are currently highlighted by the literature. We then distinguished schools that adopted affirmative action before the onset of urban riots from schools that adopted affirmative action after the onset urban riots. We also sought to determine whether the adoption of affirmative action at each school was preceded by a campus protest, or at least the credible threat of a campus protest. Next, we compared selected characteristics of early-adopting schools with those of late-adopting schools. This took the specific form of comparing pre-Watts adopters with post-Watts

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<sup>28</sup> This is actually the case with the University of Washington, which appears to have taken strong and early action to enroll more black students before the onset of riots and protests. Its early actions, however, do not meet our criteria for identifying affirmative action, and it is thus a late adopter in our initial chronology. We discuss our handling of Washington in more detail below.

adopters.<sup>29</sup> Although there were other plausible ways to draw the line between “early” and “late” in our sample, we used Watts for two specific reasons. First, as we noted earlier, Watts is the first major “commodity riot” of the period. There were scattered riots around the country in the summer of 1964, but none were comparable to Watts in the scale or effect.<sup>30</sup> Watts simply belonged to a different order of magnitude. Second, Watts is indelibly marked as a historical dividing line in the literature, and it is clearly posited as a major source of institutional change (e.g., Karabel 2005a, p. 406-407). Hence our comparison essentially amounts to a comparison of schools that adopted affirmative action before Watts with schools that adopted affirmative action after Watts. This comparison is the basis of our inferences about the origins of affirmative action in undergraduate admissions. We infer that the set of factors that distinguishes early adopters (pre-Watts) from late adopters (post-Watts) was responsible for differences in the timing of adoption.

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<sup>29</sup> To our knowledge, there were no student protests about black admissions to northern campuses before 1965. Berkeley’s famous Free Speech Movement of 1964 did not focus extensively, if at all, on black admissions.

<sup>30</sup> In 1964, small-scale riots in Harlem, Brooklyn, Rochester, Jersey City, Paterson, Elizabeth, Chicago, and Philadelphia briefly caught the attention of some observers, including the Johnson administration (Janowitz 1979; New York Times, September 27, 1964, 1, 81; O’Reilly 1988). In the most significant cases, such as Harlem-Brooklyn, Rochester, and Chicago, thousands of people were involved in disturbances that lasted for several days and nights. These occurrences are surely worth further scrutiny, especially by students of civil rights in the North. But the scale and significance of such events was simply dwarfed by Watts. For weeks, stories about Watts made the front page of newspapers across the country. The affected area encompassed an estimated 45-square-mile site; damage assessments ran as high as \$200 million; more than 30 people were killed and more than 3,800 arrested; roughly 15,000 members of the National Guard were called in to stabilize the scene (New York Times, August 17, 1965, 1; August 19, 1965, 1). It was a riot unlike any other that had happened before.

## EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Our preliminary analysis reveals significant temporal variation in the initial adoption of affirmative action. This variation is not strongly correlated with the timing of urban riots. Nor does it seem to correspond with the type of institution. Figure 1 displays the initial date of adoption for all seventeen schools in our sample. It also includes the dates of four major riots that took place in the late-1960s. Visual inspection indicates very little correspondence between policy adoption and these riots. The majority of adoptions – eleven of them – appear to cluster in the early- to mid-1960s, before the outbreak of the Watts riot in 1965. The trend toward adoption begins climbing upward in 1963, when the Birmingham showdown and March on Washington galvanized national attention toward civil rights. In our sample, adoptions reach a peak in 1964, the year that Congress passed the Civil Rights Act. The trend toward adoption falls as riots begin to engulf American cities, starting with Watts in 1965, culminating with riots in Newark and Detroit in 1967, and more or less drawing to a close in 1968 with the riots that swept the country after the King assassination. Hence the initial emergence of affirmative action for a large set of schools in our sample does not appear to covary with the onset of urban riots. If anything, it appears correlated with the campaign of nonviolent, direct action against Jim Crow, which was cresting during the early-1960s. This particular form of disruption, it is worth mentioning, is not strongly emphasized in the current literature on the origins of affirmative action.

Table 3 provides a closer look at the data, listing initial adoptions by school and year. (Readers interested in somewhat finer-grained evidence about individual schools may wish to consult Appendix B, which describes the initial adoption at each school in

slightly more detail.) Our analysis of the evidence for individual schools indicates that few schools initially introduced affirmative action in response to fear of racial violence or to actual or threatened disruption on campus. In fact, most campus demonstrations that protested the underrepresentation of racial minorities did not begin until 1968. Often, they were precipitated by the King assassination.<sup>31</sup> By contrast, many affirmative action programs in our sample appear to have been launched for the first time before 1968 – and in the absence of student protest of any kind. Indeed, many schools adopted affirmative action in the first half of the 1960s, at the height of national mobilization by the southern-based civil rights movement. Large, public universities were among the leaders. For instance, in 1964, administrators at the University of Michigan and at UCLA started new programs aimed at “disadvantaged” students – primarily racial minorities – whose secondary school preparation would not normally make them admissible (University of Michigan News Service, March 5, 1964; Papers of Franklin D. Murphy, June 30, 1965). But public schools were not the only early adopters. In 1961, Harvard established the first affirmative action policy in our sample (and possibly in the country) under incoming admissions director Fred Glimp, who announced that the school would begin to seek greater diversity and give less weight to “objective” factors (Karabel 2005a, p. 401). Northwestern University adopted affirmative action in the handful of months leading up to the Watts riots. Its program targeted primarily students from predominantly black high schools in Chicago. Few of these students, it appears, would have qualified for normal admissions (Northwestern University, Subject Files, n.d., p. 2). Though the absolute numbers of students admitted under such programs were small by any reasonable

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<sup>31</sup> Though the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley in 1964 touched off a period of student disquiet on American campuses, it did not directly concern racial inequality.

standard, most of these programs had two crucial features in common. First, they disregarded, suspended, or modified traditional admissions criterion for minority admits. Second, the kind of disruption that motivated their adoption was not urban riots or campus protests (either actual or threatened), which had yet to take place. The precipitating force seems to have been the nonviolent disruption wrought by the southern civil rights movement. Sociologists have written compellingly about the southern impact of the southern civil rights movement (Andrews 2004; Button 1989; McAdam 1982; Morris 1984; Polletta 2002), but our evidence indicates that the southern civil rights movement had a “northern” impact as well.

Urban riots or campus protests were not completely irrelevant to the adoption of affirmative action. Among the subset of eleven schools that initially established affirmative action before Watts, there is evidence that the King assassination triggered further policy changes. This subset includes Harvard, but also schools such as Wesleyan, Swarthmore, Cornell, and the University of Michigan, among others. However, the effect of disruption – specifically a surge of student mobilization after King’s death – was not to launch affirmative action programs but to expand and accelerate programs that were already in place. Often times, racial considerations were given greater weight in the admissions process. At the same time, our evidence indicates that affirmative action was initially adopted by a small subset of laggard schools after the onset of urban riots or campus protests. Among the Big Three, according to Karabel, Yale and Princeton reconsidered their traditional admissions process only in the wake of Watts. Yale began to modify the weight and significance it ascribed to the College Boards when considering minority applicants, while Princeton created a distinct category in its admissions process

(Karabel 2005a, pp. 384, 394). (After the Newark riot and the King assassination, black enrollment at both schools rose dramatically). Among the Little Three, Amherst established affirmative action only in 1968 only after the King assassination, and Williams followed suit the next year after black students on campus mobilized a protest (see Appendix B). Of the top public universities, both the University of Washington and University of California at Berkeley also adopted their affirmative action programs in response to disruption in the latter half of the 1960s (see Appendix B), though the cases are somewhat complicated.<sup>32</sup> In sum, disruption – as it is currently defined by the literature – triggered a “second wave” of affirmative action among schools in our sample. This second wave involved two different kinds of policy changes. For one subset of schools in our sample, campus protest after King’s assassination led to the elaboration of existing programs. For a different subset of schools – essentially a group of laggards that had done little to alter their admissions policies – urban riots and campus protests encouraged the adoption affirmative action for the first time.

The temporal pattern of institutional change is highly revealing, but numerous questions remain. What were the mechanisms by which affirmative action was initially established, in both the first and second waves? Who were the key actors involved in the process of institutional change? How did the various types of disruption have their effect? Is it a mere coincidence that many schools adopted affirmative action in the early 1960s, or is there evidence of a firmer connection between the southern civil rights movement and the adoption of affirmative action at “northern” schools? If so, what is the

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<sup>32</sup> Berkeley and Washington are complicated cases that defy simple classification; however, our preliminary analysis treats them as conservatively as possible vis-à-vis disruption-centered theories. We discuss them in more detail below.

connection? Finally, why were some schools early adopters and other schools late adopters? Answering these questions requires a closer look at the policy-making process at individual schools within all three types of institutions. This part of our analysis begins with the Ivy League.

### The Ivy League

By the early 1960s, Ivy League schools were beginning to reconsider qualifications for admission, as they had at other moments in the twentieth century. Undergraduate education had become more academically selective through the 1950s and into the 1960s, responding to the flood of baby boomers who wanted a college education and who, unlike their counterparts in their parents' generation, applied to multiple colleges. This substantially changed the nature and organization of admissions offices (Duffy and Goldberg 1998), and it changed the way in which admissions officers approached their work. To select their freshman classes, Ivy League administrators began to rely more heavily on grades and test scores, and the academic quality of admitted students rose substantially (Duffy and Goldberg 1998, pp. 35-43, 82). But, many soon questioned the validity of standardized metrics of academic achievement, like grades and SAT scores, and raised concerns that success by these measures should not define qualification for elite college entry (Duffy and Goldberg 1998; Karabel 2005a; Lemann 1999; Wechsler 1977).

Part of this questioning of admissions standards was about race and a concern for equal educational opportunity (Gordon and Wilkerson 1966, pp. 149-150). But, administrators by the early 1960s had other concerns, as well. In 1964, the new dean of

admissions at Yale, R. Inslee (“Inky”) Clark, worried that Yale primarily admitted safe but boring WASPy candidates – “the well-rounded, pleasant, jovial, athlete type” from New England prep schools, rather than “the abrasive kid,” “the scientist,” “the egghead” or “the oddball” (Karabel 2005, pp. 349-350). Brown University admissions officials worried, in 1962, that an admissions focus solely on academic achievement without primary attention to character was problematic, writing: “one of the most unfortunate outgrowths of increasing admission competition is the rise of the ‘sleeve plucker’: the self-centered student whose concern for his own advancement makes him haggle over grades and drives him into just enough activities to give the appearance of contribution without real enthusiasm either for learning or for the well-being of the community” (Brown University 1962, p. 2). Williams College trustees worried that a sole focus on academic standards was dangerously narrowing the college’s applicant pool (Duffy and Goldberg 1998, p. 44). In response, Brown and Williams sought and received grants from the Ford Foundation, in 1962, to test alternative definitions of merit by admitting “risk” or “sleeper” students to comprise 10% of each class (Hechinger 1963; Turpin 1965).

At the same time, in the early 1960s, schools began to turn their attention to recruiting African American students, leading the New York Times to proclaim, in the summer of 1964, that “the emphasis this year on the Negro appears to have reached a new high” (Currivan 1964, p. E7). Many schools began their own recruiting efforts (Duffy and Goldberg 1998, pp. 138-139), and, by the mid-1960s, there were a few active national programs that helped with this process. First, the independent National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students (NSSFNS) which was founded in 1948, remained active in the 1960s and sponsored a new program called the College Assistance

Program. This effort worked to recruit African American high school students from around the country to substantially increase African American college enrollment (Gordon and Wilkerson 1966, p. 137). Second, the Cooperative Program for Educational Opportunity (CPEO) was a recruitment program organized in 1962 by the eight Ivy League schools, joined a year later by the Seven Sisters, and funded by the Carnegie Corporation in 1964 to improve outreach to black students (Yale University, Brewster Records, February 5, 1964, p. 1). During the early years of the decade, a number of colleges and universities – like Dartmouth, Princeton, and Yale, among the Ivies – began their own summer programs for similar purposes (Duffy and Goldberg 1998, p. 139; Gordon and Wilkerson 1966, pp. 140-141). The president of Dartmouth, John Sloan Dickey, noted in the New York Times in the summer of 1964, that the programs had a compensatory purpose, to determine “whether an intensive and highly individualized effort on a campus of higher education can help remedy the academic and cultural deprivation which stands between a promising potential and its educational fulfillment” (quoted in Currivan 1964, p. E7). Recruiting and compensatory efforts like these doubled the number of African Americans students admitted in the Ivies and Seven Sisters in just one year between 1964 and 1965 (Gordon and Wilkerson 1966, p. 136). These were primarily recruiting programs, not “hard” affirmative action programs that nominated race at the point of admission. However, these recruiting and outreach programs often began at the same time as or were shortly followed by shifts in admissions policy.

Surprisingly, Dartmouth represents one of the earliest cases of “hard” affirmative action in our sample.<sup>33</sup> This is an interesting case because it is so unexpected. Dartmouth is far from an urban area and has a reputation as one of the more conservative, cloistered Ivies.<sup>34</sup> Dartmouth began its affirmative action programs in 1962, as a collection of recruitment programs. Notably, white students associated with the Dartmouth Christian Union lobbied for the establishment of outreach programs, founding, in 1963, the student-led Negro Admission Encouragement Committee (NAEC). This program sent letters to guidance counselors and black alumni as part of its efforts. In 1962, Dartmouth also joined CPEO (The Dartmouth, May 21, 1963; The Dartmouth, November 20, 1963). A Dartmouth report on admissions, dated February 1961, articulated a rationale for a focus on recruiting as an admissions tool. With regard to admission of black students, among others, the report noted: “because recruitment is active while admissions is relatively passive, we believe that the numbers of some of the special groups on the Dartmouth campus may be influenced more by the recruitment policy and activity than by the admissions policy. . . . There are relatively few Negro applicants at the present time and if it were decided to increase that element of the cross section, pointed recruitment would be the means rather than simply including a preference in the admissions policy” (Dartmouth College, Errol G. Hill Papers, February 1961, p. 21).

In and of themselves, however, these recruitment programs do not constitute “hard” affirmative action by our definition. But, there is evidence that students recruited

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<sup>33</sup> Note that we identify Harvard as adopting affirmative action in 1961, based on a close reading of Karabel (2005) and his sources.

<sup>34</sup> Although a 1962 report noted that Dartmouth graduated its first African American student in 1828. This was 42 years before Harvard did the same, though Harvard has a reputation for being relatively open to African Americans historically (Puttkammer 1962, pp. 12, 37)

through such programs were given special consideration in admissions as a matter of policy. In a letter in March 1962, Director of Admissions, Edward T. Chamberlain, Jr. noted that it was practice to “take into account the background from which a boy comes.” He observed: “As a matter of fact, I know we bend over backward to help Negroes if they can show any capacity at all for handling the work at a place like Dartmouth College” (quoted in Dartmouth College, Dartmouth Christian Union Papers, November 6, 1963, p. 1; also see Puttkammer 1962, p. 38). Similarly, by the end of 1963, the Assistant Director of Admissions, Davis Jackson, wrote to a principal of a Chicago high school that he was seeking African American applicants and was willing to waive the ten dollar application fee and the January 1st application deadline for any promising and interesting students (Dartmouth College, Dartmouth Christian Union Papers, December 30, 1963, p. 1).

Dartmouth officials denied that standards were lowered. But they argued that standards were not applicable to students recruited through these programs. This was a fine distinction, but one that Dartmouth explicitly drew. Standards were not lowered; they were simply not appropriate and, therefore, they were overlooked in some cases. Noted a December 1968 report on equal opportunity at Dartmouth (The McLane Report) on the standards used to evaluate students recruited by the DCU and the Application Encouragement Committee: “It would be wrong to say that standards are lowered or eased for this group since most of the selection criteria used for normal applicants are not applicable. It can be said that no black, deprived white or Indian candidate who was thought to be capable of handling the work at the College has been denied admission” (Dartmouth College, Erroll G. Hill Papers, December 1968, p. 8).

These shifts in policy resulted in small but significant changes in the number of African American admits and matriculants at Dartmouth. In 1963, there were just 3 African American matriculants. This number jumped to 14 in 1964, 16 in 1965, 17 in 1966, 18 in 1967, and 29 in 1968. (The Dartmouth, May 27, 1964; Dartmouth College, Erroll G. Hill Papers, December 1968, p. 8).

Dartmouth also was the first school to sponsor the A Better Chance (ABC) program. The program provided summer training to academically talented secondary students “from culturally or educationally disadvantaged situations” to enter participating college preparatory independent schools (Dartmouth College, Project ABC Papers, November 1963, p. 1). Most of the students in the program were African American and were from low-income families. While ABC was not a direct recruiting tool for Dartmouth, the goal of the program was to increase access to college. The program did eventually provide Dartmouth with an additional pool of applicants.

Dartmouth was not the only early adopter in the Ivy League. In early 1963, Penn worked with the other Ivies to recruit black students through CPEO and NSSFNS. William G. Owen, dean of admissions, acknowledged that many students recruited through these mechanisms were judged by a different yardstick than other students. As he noted in an interview: “many Negro students do not meet the minimal qualifications solely because of the inadequate facilities for education provided by their native states. In such cases the admission office will judge the applicant on his potential ability to maintain satisfactory scholarship at the University rather than on the courses listed in his secondary high school record” (Daily Pennsylvanian, February 26, 1963). After a conference with other Ivy League Schools in 1961, Columbia formed a recruitment

program called the Talent Searching Program. In 1963, dean Henry S. Coleman acknowledged that Columbia did not hold some black students to the same standards on their College Board scores, even though it did not admit anyone who would clearly “be over his head” (Columbia Spectator, October 15, 1963). Cornell’s Committee on Special Educational Projects (COSEP) implemented a program for the recruitment, admission, and training of “culturally disadvantaged students” in 1964 (Cornell Daily Sun, January 20, 1964). This program was responsible for the admission of black students. COSEP students were admitted “without reference to any specific requirements for admission” (Cornell Daily Sun, December 15, 1967). However, academic standards for attainment of the degree were no different for the COSEP student: “by the time he graduates, he will have the same qualifications as anyone else with a degree” (Cornell Daily Sun, December 9, 1965).

Most of these affirmative action programs adopted before 1965 seem to have arisen largely at the initiative of administrators, with the backing of their presidents, as we discuss in more detail below. So, too, the Ivies and their staffs did not act in isolation. In fact, they worked together, through CPEO and through formal conversations and informal interaction in a small professional community, to articulate their vision for bringing more black students to their campuses and to develop institutional mechanisms to achieve this shared goal. This cooperation was not completely unprecedented. Though the schools were in competition for students, they also learned from each other, through visits and correspondence, particularly during periods of change in admissions practices and policies. For instance, Synnott (1979) reports that the incoming dean of Yale College visited twenty schools in the South and West, then Harvard and Dartmouth, in 1926,

learning about admissions at Yale's competitors during the height of selective schools' debate about Jewish admissions (p. 153). Karabel (2005a) writes that, decades later, as the Ivies were considering African American admissions, the new, reform-minded dean of admissions at Yale, "Inky" Clark, spent the spring of 1965 visiting colleges and universities across the country to gather information about admissions approaches and practices (p. 351).

These administrators were not acting solely of their own accord. They were not motivated only by their own beliefs or commitments, whatever they may have been. Many of them also were responding to alumni interest in a more racially diverse student body at their alma maters. These concerns were raised very early on, much before campus or northern urban unrest of any kind. For instance, in 1963 an alum of Brown University, Lawrence D. Ackman, wrote a letter to Brown's President, Barnaby C. Keeney, with his concerns. He noted that college presidents tended to say: "We'd like to have more Negroes attend our school, but, we cannot in good conscience accept a 'less qualified' Negro in preference to a white, just because of his race." Ackman considered this "shirking their responsibilities to the public at large." The average "well-educated Negro" makes a "disproportionately great contribution" to his community and society in general. He went on to suggest: "In order to ensure that these 'less qualified Negroes' will be able to 'fill their shoes' at Brown, I suggest that they be given an accelerated catch-up course...to make up for previous schooling deficiencies." (Brown University, Barnaby C. Keeney Papers. December 16, 1963, p. 1). Hence the establishment of

affirmative action in much of the Ivy League was led by administrators, spurred in some cases by the interest of sympathetic alumni.<sup>35</sup>

### Liberal Arts Colleges

If the early history of affirmative action in the Ivy League suggests a key role for reform-minded administrators, their influence was nowhere more visible than it was at liberal arts schools such as Swarthmore College and Wesleyan University. In 1962, Swarthmore president Courtney C. Smith hired John C. Hoy to serve as a new dean of admissions, and his arrival marked a period of experimentation in admissions (Swarthmore College, Courtney Smith Papers, Box 89, May 29, 1962; Wesleyan University, Hewlett Diversity Archives, Box 16, November 19, 1998, p. 1). Hoy had attended an integrated high school in New York City and had played football on his high school team (Wesleyan University, Hewlett Diversity Archives, Box 16, September 10, 1999, p. 1). A 1955 graduate of Wesleyan University and a former assistant director of admissions there, Hoy already had a reputation as some one who cared deeply about racial diversity on college campuses. Hoy also seemed to have a strong sense of mission with respect to admissions work, believing that universities had a central role to play in American reform, particularly during such times of tremendous social and political change as the 1960s (Swarthmore College, Courtney Smith Papers, Box 89, May 29, 1962). It was for this reputation, and the understanding that Hoy would bring his

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<sup>35</sup> There were alumni that were quite resistant to changes in admissions policies, as well. Karabel (2005a) documents this “alumni revolt” in the cases of Yale and Princeton and suggests that these alumni did have the ability to impact the pace and substance of policy changes during the 1960s (chapter 15).

commitment to diversity to Swarthmore, that President Smith hired him in 1962 (Wesleyan University, Hewlett Diversity Archives, Box 16, November 19, 1998, p. 1).

Smith himself had long been concerned with recruiting black students. In 1960, he even wrote that “leaning over backwards” in favor of black applicants was Swarthmore’s usual practice. “It should be pointed out,” he noted, “that we do frequently make concessions in matters such as Board score performance for Negro applicants if there is reason to believe, as is many times the case, that the cultural factor is causing them to test at a lower level than represents their true abilities” (Swarthmore College, Courtney Smith Papers, Box 56, December 19, 1960). Smith’s own biography is relevant to his approach to admissions, too. He had served in the Naval Reserves during World War Two, as a “liaison officer for Negro personnel” in Pensacola, Florida. In this position, he worked alongside African American sailors to “optimize the[ir] performance . . . and to help them to feel part of the navy team and not outsiders” (Stapleton and Stapleton 2004, pp. 33, 36; also see Milton 2004; Van Til 2004; Wesleyan University, Hewlett Diversity Archives, Box 16, September 10, 1999).

Smith also was aware that some white Swarthmore alumni were concerned, as well, with the lack of racial diversity on campus. For instance, in September of 1959, alum Clifford Earle wrote to Smith: “I’m writing to share with you my concern over what seems to me an important weakness in the education Swarthmore offers, namely the extremely small enrollment of American Negroes in the student body (just about ½ % during my years of enrollment.” He went on to say: “I am concerned for two reasons. First, because our own education as members of the Swarthmore community is incomplete when it fails to give us a chance to mix with Negroes who share our culture.

The experience of meeting American Negroes who are not maids, janitors, or jazz musicians but future doctors, businessmen, or teachers is, I believe, at least as important to our education as the experience of meeting alert people from other countries. I personally regret the fact that I have known only a few Negroes at all well and none intimately.” He made an appeal to institutional purpose as well, noting: “as a school with a Friends tradition, Swarthmore ought to be concerned for justice in this area as it has been in such areas as academic freedom” (Swarthmore College, Courtney Smith Papers, Box 56, September 27, 1959).

Smith responded sympathetically to alumni concerns and seemed to share them. But, it was Hoy who instituted the first affirmative action programs at Swarthmore. In 1964, Hoy stepped up his recruitment of African American students, both by inter-collegiate cooperation and by successfully soliciting external public and private support. That year, Swarthmore joined with other Philadelphia-area colleges and universities to increase African American recruitment and enrollment in area schools (Swarthmore Phoenix, February 21, 1964). More significantly, Hoy sought and received a \$275,000 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, in the spring of 1964, to recruit, support, and fund African American and “other culturally disadvantaged” students (Swarthmore Phoenix, April 14, 1964). Rockefeller provided similar support to six other schools at the time (Swarthmore College, Courtney Smith Papers, Box 2, September, 1968, note 1). Geared primarily to African American students, this program resulted in a near-tripling of the number of matriculated African American students in the fall of 1964, from five in 1963 to 14 in 1964 (Swarthmore Phoenix, September 18, 1964; Swarthmore College, Courtney

Smith Papers, Box 1, July 1, 1964, p. 38; Swarthmore College, Courtney Smith Papers, Box 2, September, 1968).

In 1964, Hoy was offered the opportunity to become the dean of admissions at his alma mater, Wesleyan. He accepted. He was recruited to Wesleyan specifically to bring changes to its admissions process that would result in a more diverse student body, and he quickly instituted a new effort to recruit and enroll black students (Wesleyan University, Hewlett Diversity Archives, Box 16, November 19, 1998, p. 2; Young 1988, p. 5). As a result of his efforts, Wesleyan admitted the “Vanguard Class” in the spring of 1965. It enrolled substantially more black students than in previous years. Hoy reported that, in 1964, before his efforts began, 2 black students enrolled, comprising 0.7 percent of the entering class. The following year, in 1965, 14 black students enrolled in the freshman class, comprising 4.5 percent of the class. The next year, in 1966, 33 black freshmen made up 8.9 percent of the incoming class, while in 1967, 39 enrolled first-year students made up 10.9 percent of their class (Rockefeller Foundation Archives, Box 106, March 7, 1968, p. 3).<sup>36</sup> There is clear evidence that affirmative action was taken in their admission. In a 1967 report to the Rockefeller Foundation, Hoy wrote of the “different criteria for admission” (p. 3): “Standard selection procedures have been found inadequate. Enough evidence was available to indicate that test scores (S.A.T. and

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<sup>36</sup> In an earlier document, from 1967, Hoy included a table with identical numbers, but indicated that these numbers applied not just to African American students, but to “Negro, Puerto Rican and American Indian” students (Rockefeller Foundation Archives, Box 106, March 1967, p. 2). It is unclear whether the table in the 1968 report should have been similarly labeled, or whether all of the students of color admitted under the program were, in fact, African American. Young (1988) indicated that one of the 14 students of color admitted in 1965 was Latino, while 13 were African American (p. 14). Regardless, it appears from the writings of Hoy and others, that most of the students of color admitted in the Vanguard Class and the years that immediately followed were African American.

A.C.T.) were not to be used in the same way for this group of candidates. Since our experience was limited we decided to ‘gamble’ on compelling candidates who presented personal evidence of motivation and ability, and to judge students without undue attention to aptitude tests, rank in class, and advanced placement information” (Rockefeller Foundation Archives, Box 106, March 1967, pp. 2-3).

Hoy was influential in expanding recruitment and admissions for African American and other “disadvantaged” students at both Wesleyan and Swarthmore. But, once he left Swarthmore, black matriculation just limped forward, expanding very slowly under the new dean of admissions, Fred Hargadon. In the decade before these new recruiting and support efforts, from 1953 to 1963, Swarthmore had enrolled a total of just 20 African American students. This number tripled in the four years following the Rockefeller grant, from 1964 to 1968, as 61 students out of approximately 1100 were African American (Swarthmore College, Courtney Smith Papers, Box 2, September, 1968, p. 4). The recruiting and admissions strategies that produced these modest gains focused largely on “non-risk” applicants, those who generally met Swarthmore’s academic criteria for admissions (Swarthmore College, Courtney Smith Papers, Box 2, September, 1968, p. 11). The admissions office seemed to place a thumb on the scale, but a relatively light one (Swarthmore College, Courtney Smith Papers, Box 2, September, 1968, p. 17).

Beyond Hoy’s effort and legacy, Swarthmore clearly experienced a “second wave” of post-disruption policy changes, as well. The college represents an archetypal case in which an existing affirmative action program was “hardened” by student protests and demands. The first set of admissions policy shifts, in 1964, largely can be attributed

to a reform-minded, young, white administrator whose vision for change was supported by Swarthmore's president. The second set of policy changes, however, came just months after the King assassination, when the college found itself embroiled in a major controversy over admissions.<sup>37</sup>

In the summer of 1968, Dean Hargadon produced a report that documented the slow pace of change in African American admissions and called for this to change. This report provoked significant protest by the Swarthmore Afro-American Students' Society (SASS) on a number of grounds, including that it cited revealing data on Swarthmore's African American students and that SASS was not consulted before Hargadon's report was complete. SASS signaled its immediate displeasure with the report by staging a walk-out, of about 35 students, of an October 1968 Admissions Policy Committee meeting (Etheridge 2005). Then, SASS issued a number of demands, including active involvement of SASS in black student recruitment efforts, "the acceptance and enrollment of 10-20 'risk' Black students for next year and the provision of extensive supportive programs for them; a commitment by the College to enroll a total of 100 Black students within three years and 150 within six years; and the appointments of a Black assistant dean of admissions and a Black counselor" (Swarthmore Phoenix, January 10, 1969; Etheridge 2005). Central to SASS's demands was the provision that Swarthmore begin to admit students in the "risk" category, defined as "students with poor educational backgrounds and academic credentials far below normal Swarthmore

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<sup>37</sup> Swarthmore represents just one such example of a school in our sample with both a pre- and a post-Watts wave of affirmative action policy shifts. Others include Harvard (Karen 1990, p. 235) and possibly Wesleyan (Clark 1973; Young 1988).

standards (such applicants often also have extreme financial need)” (Swarthmore Phoenix, December 17, 1968).

When its demands had not been met by January 7, 1969, SASS staged a series of nonviolent protests (Etheridge 2005). On January 9, SASS members organized an occupation, by about 25 students, of the admissions office. They staged a walk-out of about 100 students at a campus meeting to discuss admissions, and four SASS members began a hunger strike on January 13. During this time, the student newspaper, the Swarthmore Phoenix, began to produce supplemental issues to cover this conflict, calling the stand-off between the administration and SASS “the current Black admissions crisis” (January 10, 1969). Student actions in early January were also covered on a near-daily basis in short blurbs in the New York Times and articles in other national news outlets.

The conflict ended abruptly, when President Smith suffered a heart attack and died in his office, in the building that was, at that very moment, occupied by protestors (“Dr. Courtney C. Smith” 1969; “Subversion of Reason” 1969). In response, SASS ended its occupation of the admissions office on the afternoon of January 16. After President Smith’s death, as a result of both the conflict and subsequent negotiations between SASS and the college’s administration, Swarthmore made a number of changes to its admissions practices. An Ad Hoc Black Admissions Committee was formed (Swarthmore Phoenix, February 25, 1969); two black administrators were appointed (Swarthmore Phoenix, May 10, 1969); and Swarthmore administrators articulated a “target” number of black matriculants of 25 per year in the first few years of the new program and 35 per class in the following years (Swarthmore College, Robert Cross Papers, Box 12, March 19, 1970, p. 5). As well, the Admissions Office began considering

and admitting some of the “risk” students at the heart of the admissions controversy. “Unconventionally qualified” became the new phrase for these students (Swarthmore Phoenix, January 9, 1970 and April 10, 1970). The Phoenix reported in May of 1969: “For some students, the Admissions Office weighed more potentiality over past performance, especially for less advantaged students” (May 6, 1969). These first few classes after the policy shift included the admission of approximately ten “unconventionally qualified” students per class, for which interviews and letters of recommendation were weighed more heavily in the admissions process (Swarthmore College, Robert Cross Papers, Box 12, March 19, 1970; Swarthmore Phoenix, April 10, 1970 and May 15, 1970).

The result was a relatively large increase in the number of African American students admitted to Swarthmore. In 1968, only eight African American students matriculated in the class of 1972 (Swarthmore Phoenix, September 20, 1968). By May 1969, Dean Hargadon announced that the following year’s entering class would have 31 black students of 340 entering first years (Swarthmore Phoenix, May 6, 1969). Swarthmore had started affirmative action in 1964, absent of student action, but it took a far more aggressive stance after the mobilization of black students on campus.

### Elite Public Universities

Private colleges and universities were not the only institutions of higher education to adopt affirmative action. Two of the most significant programs took root at public universities in the mid-1960s. One of the earliest was the Opportunity Awards Program at the University of Michigan. In 1963, after conversations with Francis A. Kornegay,

executive director of the Detroit Urban League, provost Roger W. Heyns formed a faculty advisory committee to evaluate Michigan's admissions policies. It concluded that existing methods of enrolling "deprived" students were inadequate, and that the university should begin formulating new approaches. President Harlan Hatcher acknowledged that some faculty had expressed concern that Michigan was "lowering standards" by admitting deprived students, but he reassured his audience that "this was not the case" and that "lowering standards of graduation would be unwise." It is true that "[t]heir preparation does not permit them to be competitive initially, but they do have the ability to do the work required once the handicaps of poor training have been corrected" (University of Michigan, Harlan Henthorne Hatcher Papers, Box 57, September 30, 1963).

Heyns and Hatcher followed up on their deliberations by establishing the Opportunity Awards Program in 1964 (University of Michigan News Service, March 5, 1964). Heyns made no secret of his own reasons for leading the effort. In a letter to a concerned faculty member, he explained why Michigan wanted to "increase the number of qualified Negro students enrolled here." The first was simply to "extend educational opportunities for academically qualified students who are presently disqualified for reasons which are largely financial." He argued that there was evidence that such students were capable of doing the academic work at Michigan. Their failure to meet all of the admissions requirements was due less to intellectual ability than a persistent lack of economic resources. At the same time, Heyns also felt morally compelled to act. As a public university, Michigan was obligated "to participate appropriately in the national movement to improve the status of the American Negro in our society" (Heyns to

Maynard, April 7, 1964, Folder: Negro, Re 1963-4, Provost Papers). Though the devastating riot in Detroit was three years away and student uprisings would not convulse campus until a year thereafter, Heyns and Michigan moved to establish affirmative action in 1964.

Affirmative action took root at the UCLA in the same year. Under the leadership of chancellor Franklin Murphy and dean of students Bryon H. Atkinson, UCLA established the Educational Opportunities Program in 1964. At a meeting with high school administrators, Atkinson noted that UCLA had long maintained an “open door” policy that admitted all students who met university requirements, but it was clear that such a policy did not lead to the enrollment of significant numbers of “disadvantaged” or minority students (Murphy Papers 1964). “The purpose of the program,” noted Ann Allen, its first administrator, “was to expand educational opportunities for environmentally and economically disadvantaged young people, many from minority groups” (Murphy Papers 1965a). It was a “compensatory” program and the “first of its kind on a University of California campus” (Murphy Papers, 1965a, p. 1, 4). The first group of 33 specially recruited students was enrolled at UCLA in the spring semester of 1965. Most students qualified for enrollment at UCLA, though it is unclear whether their test scores and high school grade point averages were lower than the average. But it was clear that UCLA was genuinely interested in trying new approaches, and it did not hesitate to give EOP students a limited amount of preferential treatment when it was necessary. Three students were not properly qualified, but they were admitted by the EOP through the utilization of a special rule at the University of California that exempted 2% of the student body from meeting university standards (Murphy Papers 1965b). The

absolute numbers were extremely small, especially at a school like UCLA, but the nature and purpose of the program was clear. No urban or campus disruptions were in sight, but UCLA was taking affirmative action, just as Michigan was doing thousands of miles to the east.

At the same time, urban and campus disruption was not entirely unimportant. Our analysis of the data suggests that urban riots did lead a limited number of public universities to adopt affirmative action programs for the first time – largely in the absence of widespread student mobilization. Berkeley provides one illustration. Here the precipitating event does seem to have been the massive riot in Watts. Of course, Berkeley was a strong candidate for change. Weeks before the riot, University of California President Clark Kerr had asked all UC campuses to “consider the advisability of increasing the percentage [of admits not meeting general University requirements] to 4% in light of the need to bring minorities and the culturally deprived into the University” (Murphy Papers 1965c). In monitoring the response to his request, Kerr surely would have paid special attention to Berkeley, his old campus. More important, Kerr’s successor at Berkeley, Roger W. Heyns, had been instrumental in starting affirmative action at the University of Michigan in 1964. Even in the absence of Kerr’s request, he might have taken the initiative to start affirmative action at Berkeley. Programs aimed at increasing minority admissions, he would later note, were a “great interest of mine and something that I thought we were obliged to work on” (Heyns 1987, pp. 21, 54). Thus it is plausible that Berkeley would have taken affirmative action without the spur of Watts. Still, Berkeley had done little in the early 1960s to expand access to higher education for racial minorities. In fact, when he became Berkeley’s chancellor in 1965, Heyns was

“astonished” by the lack of black students on the Berkeley campus (Heyns 1987, p. 54).

The only initiative of note had been a scholarship program aimed at bringing disadvantaged high school students to campus for summer enrichment and preparatory programs; it was known as the Special Opportunity Scholarship (Office of the Chancellor, University of California, Berkeley 1966a; Office of the Chancellor, University of California, Berkeley 1966b; Douglass 2007, p. 97).<sup>38</sup>

Watts broke through the inertia and accelerated the timetable of change. There is little evidence of widespread student demand for action, but Chancellor Heyns nevertheless commissioned a special advisory committee to contemplate new approaches to breaking down what amounted to the de facto segregation of the Berkeley campus (Office of the Chancellor, University of California, Berkeley 1965). The result was the Equal Opportunity Program (EOP), launched by Berkeley in 1966. William Somerville was appointed director, and he was given the responsibility of “increas[ing] the minority and low-income population on campus as significantly and as soon as possible” (Daily Californian Weekly Magazine, October 3, 1967). Somerville wasted no time, visiting over 50 predominantly minority high schools to convince more students there to submit applications (Daily Californian, May 12, 1966, p. 1). The recruiting trip proved immensely successful. Four hundred minority students applied for admission. Of these, 135 applicants were accepted after a thorough review process in which their applications were individually scrutinized by a committee comprised of Somerville, admissions

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<sup>38</sup> This program, funded by a \$100,000 allocation that Kerry requested in 1964, was called the Educational Opportunity Program, according to Douglass (2007, p. 97). Our evidence leads us to believe it was also called the Special Opportunity Scholarship, and we use this name in the main text to distinguish it from the Educational Opportunities Program at UCLA.

officials, and a faculty representative (Daily Californian Weekly Magazine, October 3, 1967, p. 1). Though they were required to make up their course deficiencies and meet other university standards, roughly 60 percent of EOP students in 1966 (68 out of 113) did not satisfy Berkeley's admissions requirements when they were first admitted (Langlois 1967, Table 4; Office of the Chancellor, University of California, Berkeley 1966c).

Watts was clearly a source of motivation and legitimation for Somerville himself. A profile in the Daily Californian noted one of his most prominent rationales for backing the EOP: it would bring to Berkeley students who would have the "greatest talent for resolving the social problems of Watts, and other ghettos" (Daily Californian, May 16, 1966, p. 1). In fact, Somerville, would repeatedly link the mission of EOP to Watts throughout his tenure at the EOP. "In some places we're producing inter-racial illiterates," he said in a typical pronouncement. "I'm surprised there aren't more blow-ups like in Watts" (Daily Californian, November 8, 1966, pp. 1, 18).

But cases such as Berkeley were uncommon among the schools in our sample. In fact, what concerned most administrators was not actual or potential disorder in central cities, where, it should be pointed out, few of their institutions were actually located. Apart from schools like Yale and Princeton, which thought of themselves as national institutions and therefore self-consciously responded to national events (Karabel 2005a), there is little evidence to indicate that urban riots were more than a convenient post-hoc justification for experimentation. Rather, a form of disruption that was more commonly a factor was, instead, collective protest by black students and their supporters on their own campuses. Campus protests led a small number of the selective colleges and universities

in our sample to change their admissions policies. Here the precipitating event was not Detroit or Newark but the assassination of Dr. King on April 4, 1968.

The effect of the King assassination on admissions policy was nowhere clearer than the University of Washington, where the mobilization of black students led to the establishment of affirmative action for the very first time. To be sure, Washington was a strong candidate for change, just as Berkeley was. Few schools could boast of a stronger and earlier commitment to racial equality. In 1959, president Charles Odegaard had signed a university directive, Memorandum No. 22, which announced that “educational opportunities” at UW were “open to all qualified applicants without distinction or preference on account of race, creed, or color” (University of Washington President Records 1959). The formal adoption of a school-wide policy of non-discrimination made Washington fairly unique among American institutions of higher education.

Still, black students did not matriculate in greater numbers than before. By 1963, four years after officially proclaiming a commitment to formal equality, Odegaard began to wonder why there were so few African American students participating in a commencement ceremony over which he was presiding; it was then that he remembered being struck by the “thinness of the stream of black students coming to the University” (University of Washington Senate 1965; University of Washington Daily, October 30, 1968). Odegaard soon concluded that the “merely open door policy of neutrality is not sufficient to effect the remedy needed to meet our purpose, that is, to help blacks in any reasonable proportion to use University opportunities” (University of Washington Daily, October 30, 1968). In response, he convened an informal group of faculty and staff to “develop positive programs to encourage the enrollment of more persons from culturally

and economically deprived areas of our community and state and to assure their success after admission” (University of Washington President Records 1965a). The group took more formal shape in 1965 as a standing administrative committee known as the Committee on Special Educational Programs (CSEP) (University of Washington Senate 1965; University of Washington President Records 1965; University of Washington President Records 1966b). After nearly six years of official non-discrimination, Washington seemed poised to take more aggressive steps.

Nevertheless, the steps it took did not amount to “hard” affirmative action. That summer, Watts came and went – clearing the way for Berkeley to establish the EOP – but the riot did not lead Washington to start any analogous programs. Through the CSEP, it did contemplate a variety of other options, from improving financial aid packages, to forging ties with historically Black colleges in the South, to reaching out to minority neighborhoods in the greater Seattle area (University of Washington President Records 1965c). In 1966, it increased the number of students enrolled in its Upward Bound Program (University of Washington President Records 1966a). Yet it did not take the next and decisive step of adopting affirmative action in admissions – until 1968.

King’s assassination dealt a heavy blow to everyone on campus and quickened the pace of change. Odegaard canceled afternoon classes on April 5 to honor King’s memory (University of Washington President Records 1968). A memorial for King was held three days later at Edmonson Pavilion. Odegaard naturally spoke, and he urged everyone on campus to “be brothers to one another” (Alumnus, Summer 1968, pp. 4-5). Charles A. Evans, a distinguished and well-respected professor of microbiology, gave a particularly moving eulogy. It was clear that he had been personally affected by the tragedy, but his

words also reflected a broader sentiment among the faculty and administration – a profound and genuine sense of grief tempered by a renewed sense of purpose. “In our sorrow at the loss of Dr. King,” he said to the 5,000 men and women in attendance, “it is appropriate that we dedicate ourselves to the cause for which he died” (Evans 1968b). He continued: “Let us...strive step by step to create in our University and in Seattle, conditions where racism shrivels and dies and leadership in the fight against racism can flourish” (Evans 1968b). The speech struck a responsive chord throughout campus. A memorandum signed by scores of faculty indicated that they were prepared to accept to the idea that “special steps must be taken in order to insure equal opportunity” (Evans 1968c).

But it remained unclear what specific form the special steps would eventually take. King’s assassination was felt most deeply by Washington’s black students, and it was their collective mobilization that finally pushed the administration to address admissions policies. A little over a month after King’s death – and only a few days after police stormed Columbia’s campus in New York’s Morningside Heights – members of the Black Student Union (BSU) presented Odegaard with a series of demands. Central among them was increasing the number of minority students on campus. The BSU went so far as to specifically enumerate the numbers of African Americans, Native Americans, and Mexican Americans they wished to recruit (Odegaard 1968, p. 3). Odegaard responded by letter on May 10, inviting the BSU to advise the university as it contemplated specific policy reforms. Ten days later, at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Senate, thirty black students marched unannounced into the room. A heated exchange of views ensued. The students then occupied the president’s office and a

bank of office suites nearby. A prolonged sit-in was averted only when Odegaard and the Executive Committee agreed to sign a statement that pledged them to take concrete steps at the next Senate meeting “to fund an expanded recruitment of minority-group students” (Odegaard 1968). The next meeting proved extraordinarily productive, with all sides converging on a similar position. Shortly after the Senate meeting, Washington announced the establishment of the Special Education Program (SEP), which was meant to “increase the number of minority students from ethnic groups [that] have a substantial disadvantage in our society” (University of Washington Office of Minority Affairs, December 3, 1968; University of Washington Office of Minority Affairs, September 1971).

There could be little doubt about the impetus for change. In a report to the University Senate, Evans made it perfectly clear that it was the “pressure exerted by the Black Student Union” that “generated a substantially increased commitment by the University to recruit more of these students” (Evans 1968ba, p. 1). There could be even less doubt that the SEP represented a major departure in admissions policy rather than simply a vigorous “soft” recruiting program. In the fall quarter of 1968, 257 black students enrolled at the University of Washington, most of them under the auspices of the SEP (Evans 1968a). These students had been admitted under a different policy than previous cohorts. Washington had traditionally regarded a high school grade point average of 2.5 or above as minimal evidence of the “ability to progress satisfactorily toward a degree program.” A limited number of students who did not meet the requirement were admitted on the “basis of individual evaluation of their qualifications.” By contrast, over ninety percent of students in the SEP were “accepted on the basis of an

individual evaluation of their qualifications” (Evans 1968a, pp. 2-3). In speaking of the new policy, Odegaard was careful to make a distinction between entrance and exit requirements. “We have not changed the exit requirements from the University,” he said. “The requirements for degrees remain the same” (University of Washington Daily, October 30, 1968). But he acknowledged that most SEP students were “admitted by discretionary action” (University of Washington Daily, October 30, 1968). The years of affirmative action at Washington had unquestionably begun.

## **DISCUSSION**

Based on a broad chronology of policy change for the seventeen schools in our sample, as well as a close-up analysis of selected institutions over time, our findings suggest mixed support for disruption-centered theories of affirmative action in undergraduate admissions. Disruption clearly is related to the initial adoption of affirmative action in undergraduate admissions, but not in ways currently anticipated by the literature. A substantial number of schools in our sample were “early adopters” of affirmative action and started such programs before Watts. Leading the way were administrators who were inspired by the collective mobilization of the southern civil rights movement. A smaller number of schools were “late adopters” who launched affirmative action programs after Watts, primarily in response to the combined disruption of urban riots and campus protests – that is, disruption in the sense implied by the existing literature.

This finding nevertheless leaves us with a curious puzzle. What accounts for the temporal pattern of adoptions in our data? Why were some schools “early adopters” and

other schools “late adopters”? Why did the mobilization of southern civil rights movement inspire affirmative action among some schools in our sample but not other schools?

Our explanation of this pattern hinges on two theoretical insights. The first concerns policy-making elites and the crucial role that their perceptions (Karen 1991; Skrentny 2002; 2006) can play in shaping institutional change. As argued by Skrentny in his study of affirmative action in employment (Skrentny 2006), how policy elites perceive the claims of ethnic and racial groups can determine whether and how policy change occurs. Is the group worthy or unworthy of government intervention? Does the group pose a genuine threat of disorder or not? In the context of higher education, formal authority over admissions policy at most schools resides primarily though not exclusively in the hands of top administrators, including presidents or chancellors, provosts, deans, and admissions directors. Though the structure of decision-making varies across schools, these administrators often enjoy enormous discretion in setting admissions policy. Few policy changes can occur without their explicit or implicit approval. The key question therefore concerns whether the perceptions of top administrators was somehow associated with institutional change. As discussed in the previous section, our analysis of the data indicates that the adoption of affirmative action at Michigan, UCLA, Swarthmore, Wesleyan, and other early adopters was indeed strongly linked to the racial sympathies of top administrators, whose policy innovations were evidently not responses to the “disruption” of urban riots or campus protests, but rather responses to the “disruption” of the southern-based movement to dismantle Jim Crow. Early adopters were usually led by administrators who were inspired by the moral imperative of the

southern civil rights movement and made a commitment to racially integrating their own institutions in the North, even if they had been operating under a color-blind, “open door” policy for years. The most salient example is perhaps the University of Michigan, where Roger Heyns specifically invoked the “national movement to improve the status of the American Negro in our society” as a justification for the establishment of Michigan’s Opportunity Awards Program. But the presence of sympathetic administrators is so consistent among early adopters, it seems reasonable to consider it a necessary condition for the adoption of affirmative action.

Yet the presence of a sympathetic administrator was not always enough. Some schools did not become early adopters, despite the presence of certain officials who were sympathetic to the cause of civil rights. Perhaps the clearest example is Yale, which did not adopt affirmative action until after Watts, even though its president and top admissions officials all had a strong interest in making Old Blue more socioeconomically inclusive (Kabaservice 2004; Karabel 2005a; Soares 2007). The same may be said of Washington, where Charles Odegaard began to take positive steps toward increasing the number of black students as early as 1963 or 1964.

To make better sense of what distinguishes early adopters from late adopters, we invoke a second theoretical insight, drawing from Karabel’s theory of status-group struggle and organizational self-interest (1984, 2005a). Institutional change in higher education, he argues, reflects the struggle of dominant status groups to achieve social closure, often by winning the authority to define certain cultural ideals, such as the conceptions of “merit” embedded in admissions policy (Karabel 1984, pp. 3-5). More specifically, dominant groups attempt to retain control over the valuable cultural and

economic opportunities that are afforded by elite colleges. They do so by defining “merit” (within limits) in ways that favor them. At the same time, Karabel insists on the central importance of organizational self-interest. As he notes, elite colleges and universities are “organizations with their own distinct interests” (Karabel 1984, p. 4. Emphasis in original). But under “normal circumstances,” they are “likely to be most responsive to the claims of external groups that control needed resources” (Karabel 1984, pp. 4-5). “To the extent that [they are] dependent on a single such group for such needed resources,” he concludes, elite colleges and universities are “likely to be effectively under the control of that group” (Karabel 1984, p. 28). Both factors taken together explain why Harvard, Yale, and Princeton imposed Jewish quotas during the interwar period. A dominant faction of the Protestant upper class wished to exclude Jews from tapping into the opportunities that elite education offered, and the Big Three – all of which were dependent on the WASP upper class for financial resources – obliged with little hesitation.

We see a similar logic at work in the advent of affirmative action in undergraduate admissions during the 1960s. In much the same way that members of the WASP elite feared that ending quotas against Jews would reduce opportunities available to Protestant sons, they feared that affirmative action would have the effect of channeling away valuable educational opportunities. It should thus come as no surprise that the pace of initial adoptions appears to correspond inversely with the overall status hierarchy of American higher education: The most prestigious and exclusive schools were the slowest to take affirmative action in undergraduate admissions.

It is true that the Protestant upper class began gradually declining in strength and coherence almost immediately after the Second World War. By 1963, it had lost the battle to exclude Jews at most schools. A liberal wing of the WASP elite, dubbed the “liberal establishment by Kabaservice (2004), began to rise in influence throughout the decade. But the conservative wing remained influential and fought vigorously to maintain the social closure that continued to give it preferential, class-wide access to the valuable educational and occupational opportunities afforded by elite education. Few issues were more hotly contested than undergraduate admissions, as the debate around admissions tapped into “status anxieties produced by the cultural and political turmoil of the 1960s” (Karabel 2005a, p. 472). Some alumni, for instance, at schools such as Princeton and Yale, believed they were losing a zero-sum game, and spots in freshman classes that were going to African American students or public school graduates or women were no longer available for their own sons – quite literally. It was hard for them to imagine a greater threat to the intergenerational reproduction of privilege that had enabled them to maintain their ascendancy for so long. At the same time, “the revolt of the alumni was not simply about defending the interests of a beleaguered WASP elite” (Karabel 2005a, p. 481). There was something even more elemental at stake. The admission of students from non-traditional groups posed a fundamental threat to the whole Protestant elite worldview and appeared to them a tragic inversion of the sacred and profane. Thus the defense of traditional admissions must also be understood as a concerted “attempt to defend the manners, mores, and morals to which the members of this elite had dedicated their lives” (Karabel 2005a, p. 481). This is what was precisely most anxiety-provoking about the battle over admissions. As Karabel (2005a) writes: “By elevating ‘brains’ over character,

narrow specialists over ‘the all-around man,’ public school boys over boarding school graduates, political activists over gentlemanly clubmen, and (in their view) Jews over Protestants, blacks over whites, and women over men, the new admission policies of Yale and Princeton were creating a world turned upside down” (p. 481).

Though it was forced to launch a spirited defense of tradition in public, the WASP elite was most successful in beating back affirmative action and maintaining the status quo at the schools with which it had become historically linked over the course of the twentieth century. Such schools continued to confer exceptional opportunities, and they continued to depend heavily on the Protestant establishment for financial resources. The identity of such schools is not difficult to pin down. Among the major private universities, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton remained the most socially exclusive for Protestant boys from rich families of old stock. Amherst and Williams were the two most socially exclusive liberal arts colleges. Among public universities, the University of Virginia was most socially exclusive. The precise exclusivity of these schools and their link to the Protestant upper class can be made evident by reviewing the alma maters of the men listed in the 1963 New York Social Register. Table 4 displays the top five alma maters by type of institution. In order of popularity, Yale, Harvard, and Princeton are clearly the most favored private universities, outstripping the fourth place school (Columbia) by at least a factor of four. Of the liberal arts colleges, it appears that Williams, Amherst, and Trinity were the most preferred. The fourth most commonly listed alma mater was Colgate, which had less than half as many as Trinity. Men with degrees from public universities listed the University of Virginia with the greatest frequency. No other public school came close. Berkeley was a distant second. It would

thus seem that Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Williams, Amherst, Trinity, and possibly Virginia were the schools most central to the social reproduction of the waning Protestant elite during the 1960s. With the exception of Harvard and Trinity (for which we have no data), all of the remaining schools in the North were “late adopters” of affirmative action. Karabel’s theory of status-group struggle and organizational self-interest thus helps point us to the final step in explaining what distinguishes early adopters from late adopters: Affirmative action took root most slowly at the most socially exclusive schools.

The basis of our overall inference is summarized in Table 5, which lists all seventeen schools in our sample and indicates whether each of following four explanatory factors is present: urban riots, campus protests, sympathetic administrators, and WASP elite. The schools are divided into early and late adopters depending on whether they initially adopted affirmative action before or after the Watts riots. Occurring in 1965, Watts was the first major “commodity riot” of the period (Grimshaw 1969; Janowitz 1979; U.S. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 1969), and it preceded all campus protests about black admissions. Moreover, it is specifically identified in the literature as a watershed (Karabel 2005a). If the Watts riots contributed significantly to the adoption of affirmative action, it seems only reasonable to think that schools adopting affirmative action before Watts are somehow categorically different from schools adopting affirmative action after Watts. The question then becomes what systematically distinguishes early adopting schools (pre-Watts) from late adopting schools (post-Watts).

Initial inspection of Table 5 may seem to indicate that none of the four factors possesses much explanatory validity. But the inference becomes much simpler when it is

borne in mind that our criteria for defining affirmative action are conservative, and Berkeley and Washington are extremely difficult cases to classify. Recall that both schools were actually strong candidates for institutional change. In the case of Berkeley, Clark Kerr had already ordered all campuses at the UC system in 1965 (before Watts) to explore the possibility of admitting more minority students by doubling the percentage of admits not meeting general admission requirements. Furthermore, incoming chancellor Roger W. Heyns had pioneered affirmative action at Michigan out of a sense of commitment to the civil rights movement. Lastly, due to outbreak of the Free Speech Movement in 1964, Berkeley administrators had little opportunity to take early initiative on civil rights; their attention was occupied elsewhere. For all these reasons, it seems reasonable to think that Berkeley easily could have been an early adopter, or may have adopted affirmative action even if Watts had not occurred.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, it seems reasonable to think that Washington may very have adopted affirmative action without the round of student protests after the King assassination. Under the leadership of president Charles Odegaard, Washington aggressively explored options for going beyond the “open door” policy that it had formally announced in 1959. In fact, it formed the Committee on Special Educational Programs in 1965 before Watts. Just like Berkeley, it is reasonable to think of Washington as a borderline case in which affirmative action (under a less stringent definition) is being taken as early as 1965 or could easily have been taken before the student protests of 1968.

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<sup>39</sup> In the alternative, Berkeley does rank as the second most socially exclusive public school, with a third more men in the 1963 Social Register listing it as their alma mater than the third most exclusive public school, Michigan (see Table 4). This would render it consistent with the analysis that we outline below.

If the Berkeley and Washington cases are either excluded or coded as early adopters – for the reasons outlined above – then a clear picture emerges. Urban riots – as Karabel (2005a) finds – help explain why late-adopting Yale and Princeton altered their admissions policy, but they do not appear relevant to the adoption of affirmative action by late-adopting Williams and Amherst. Campus protests seem relevant to the initial establishment of affirmative action at Williams, but no other school. The two critical factors that most consistently distinguish early from late adopters are the presence of administrators who were sympathetic to the cause of the southern civil rights movement and the centrality of the school to the social reproduction of the WASP elite. In fact, it seems highly plausible that the two factors are related. Less prestigious schools were more likely to have administrators who were sympathetic to the idea of making their campuses more socioeconomically inclusive, since their prestige did not derive primarily from exclusion. Furthermore, administrators had relatively more freedom to experiment with new admissions policies, as their institutions did not depend to heavily on the Protestant upper class for financial support. On the other hand, more prestigious schools were not only less likely to have sympathetic administrators, since their status was based on exclusion, but administrators there had less latitude for experimentation since their institutions were highly dependent on the WASP elite for financial resources.

The key exception to our analysis is Harvard. It is clearly an elite and socially exclusive institution, but it was also the earliest adopter of affirmative action in our sample. Its willingness to buck WASP convention on the issue of racial inclusion may be partly explained by a strong tradition of openness toward African Americans. Located near Boston, for many years the epicenter of the abolitionist movement, Harvard had

admitted African Americans since 1865. More than 150 black students matriculated there between the Civil War and Second World War and more than 100 did so between the Second World War and the 1960s (Karabel 2005a, p. 400). Moreover, Harvard enjoyed a uniquely “favored status within the Negro community,” in the words of a 1962 analysis of African Americans in the Ivy League (Puttkamer 1962, p. 17 , quoted in Karabel 2005a, p. 400). None of the Big Three, in Karabel’s view, “enjoyed a better reputation in the African-American community in 1960 than Harvard” (Karabel 2005a: 400). It seems perfectly reasonable to us that Harvard is an exception to our analysis of affirmative action because it was exceptionally welcoming to African Americans.

We also concede that our analysis necessarily simplifies the complicated dynamics of change at each individual school. For instance, certain admissions officials at relatively late-adopting schools took their own initiative to change admissions plans, often at the urging of supportive administrators. At these schools, where incremental change was afoot, disruption may have simply strengthened the hand of the reformers. For example, Yale had a reputation as being “an exceptionally insular institution” (Karabel 2005a, p. 321) and hung on doggedly as a bastion of the WASP elite. Karabel (2005a) writes, for instance, that Yale did not remove its Jewish quota until the first years of the 1960s and retained a culture of anti-Semitism within the admissions office during this time (p. 331). This impression is confirmed in Soares (2007, pp. 78-82). One estimate for the 1961-1962 year placed Yale at the absolute bottom of the Ivies with respect to Jewish enrollment (Oren 2000, p. 211). Yet Yale, while a relatively late adopter, embraced race-based affirmative action as part of a broader shift in admissions policies and practices. Kingman Brewster, Yale’s new president, promoted “Inky” Clark,

who had witnessed the racial and religious bias of his colleagues as an admissions committee member in the early 1960s (Kabaservice 2004; Karabel 2005a, p. 331; Oren 2000, p. 215), to bring deliberate change to Yale's admissions office. Clark brought in new staff members who he believed would bring a fresh approach to admissions and a new focus on a more diverse student body (Kabaservice 2004; Karabel, 2005a; Oren 2000; Soares 2007). The university also proved to be a leader in "soft" affirmative action practices, heading the national CPEO recruitment program under the direction of Yale's Charles McCarthy, Jr. (Oren 2000, pp. 225-226; "Yale to Share" 1964). These are crucial and meaningful details that are unfortunately submerged in our effort to systematically identify a broader pattern in the initial adoption of affirmative action.

Nevertheless, our analysis of the broad pattern exhibited by the seventeen schools in our sample suggests that the most socially exclusive schools were slowest to implement race-based affirmative action in undergraduate admissions. This inference depends on excluding Berkeley and Washington from the analysis or coding them as early adopters. But we believe there are reasonable grounds for either choice, given the historical circumstances and the stringency of our approach to coding the dependent variable. Affirmative action took root at numerous schools in the 1960s, often in response to the inspiring mobilization of the southern civil rights movement, but it was slowest to emerge at American's most prestigious institutions, where it took the disruption of urban riots and campus protest to dislodge their commitment to exclusion.

## CONCLUSION

What explains the origins of affirmative action in undergraduate admissions? Our analysis of newly collected data for a sample of seventeen schools has yielded evidence that contradicts disruption-centered theories as they are currently formulated. We find for a majority of schools in our sample that a “first wave” of affirmative action (1961-1965) arose largely at the initiative of administrators who were often emotionally, morally, and politically moved by the nonviolent civil rights movement of the 1950s and early 1960s – from the early efforts to desegregate schools and lunch counters, to the 1963 March on Washington and King’s electrifying “I Have a Dream” speech, to the violent and widely-televised reaction of southern segregationists to peaceful civil rights demonstrators in Birmingham and elsewhere.<sup>40</sup> This first wave was a response to a kind of “disruption,” but not the urban riots or campus protests indicated by the literature. The impact of the southern civil rights movement on southern life is increasingly well-understood (Andrews 2004; McAdam 1982; Button 1989; Morris 1984; Polletta 2002), but our research indicates that the southern civil rights movement impacted important aspects of “northern” life as well.

A “second wave” of affirmative action took root after Watts. This wave consisted of two distinct parts. Among the subset of schools that had already launched affirmative action plans, King’s assassination led college administrators to expand existing programs, primarily in response to nonviolent, direct action campaigns by black college students and their allies on northern campuses. Among the small subset of schools that did not participate at all in the first wave, urban riots and campus protests led to the initial

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<sup>40</sup> Thank you to Caroline Hodges Persell for underscoring this point to us.

adoption of affirmative action for the very first time. These lagging institutions were bastions of social exclusion that historically had been central to the reproduction of the Protestant upper class. It took the threat of urban riots and campus protests for such institutions to take affirmative action.

Our findings have significant implications for scholars interested in the political and social history of affirmative action in higher education. First, they reveal that the working assumption of many authors writing on affirmative action in higher education is not empirically valid. Affirmative action did not begin in the late-1960s as either a steam-valve meant to quell mass discontent, or as a hard-won benefit of collective mobilization against racial exclusion, or as the policy payoff of “racial blackmail” (Traub 2005) by black militants. Instead, it began by northern whites in the early- to mid-1960s who were inspired by another form of “disruption” at this time: the civil rights movement in the South. As civil rights activists marched on Washington and Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, college and university administrators in the North were taking affirmative action – injecting racial considerations into their admissions process – in a clear effort to actively integrate their own campuses. The usual periodization is highly misleading.

Second, our research has uncovered a number of unexpected and important continuities in the political history of affirmative action. We find that critics of the policy consistently tried to equate affirmative action with a disastrous lowering of academic standards, even during the first wave when the degree of racial consideration seemed quite small. While race eventually became heavily weighted during the second wave – which witnessed the invention of quotas, set-asides, and other “harder” forms of affirmative action that Bakke would strike down as unconstitutional – race seems to have

been weighted modestly during the first wave. When evaluating minority applicants during the first wave, college and university administrators took many steps to ensure that admitted students were capable of succeeding academically at their institution. This is why academic leaders stressed that they were trying to identify minority students who were capable of qualifying to graduate. If some of the students did not meet all of the traditional admissions criteria, there was nevertheless sufficient evidence that they had the kind of ability and motivation that would enable them to reach the academic finish-line. Indeed, many first-wave affirmative action programs seem analogous in spirit to the kind of limited, “plus-factor” programs that have been ruled constitutional under Bakke (1978) and Grutter (2003). However, beginning with the first wave of affirmative action, critics of the policy never ceased to castigate it as a dreaded assault on meritocracy. This remarkable continuity in the rhetoric of opposition suggests that critics will inevitably charge that affirmative action unacceptably lowers standards, regardless of how such programs are designed or what motivates their adoption.<sup>41</sup> Even the smallest thumb on the scale – placed there at a time when the southern-based civil rights movement was still striving to break down Jim Crow – still elicited overwrought rhetoric about the demise of merit.

Our study also has significant implications for the sociology of institutional change in higher education. First, it confirms the significance of two key aspects of Karen’s theoretical framework (Karen 1991). On the one hand, our findings support his general argument that “traditional selection criteria [in undergraduate admissions] may be

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<sup>41</sup> Our finding is consistent with Chen’s (2006) finding that the accusation of “racial quotas” was leveled against fair employment practices legislation in the 1940s and 1950s, even though the proposed legislation simply mandated non-discrimination in public and private employment.

amended to allow for the admission of previously excluded groups” when there is “strong and pervasive” mobilization “from below” (Karen 1991, p. 228). To be sure, Karen argues that the effect of mobilization comes from the “threat” that it poses, and our findings indicate that “threat” is not always necessary. Recall that our analysis distinguishes between different types of collective mobilization –violent and nonviolent forms– and we find evidence that the “disruption” created by the nonviolent mobilization of the southern civil rights movement led to the first wave of affirmative action. This mobilization in the South did not pose a direct (or even indirect) threat to the leaders of the “northern” institutions, yet administrators living and working in such far-flung places as Ithaca, Ann Arbor, and Westwood took affirmative action. Nevertheless, our findings lend broad support to bottom-up theories of the kind formulated by Karen. Whether it was the southern civil rights movement or the campaign of nonviolent protest by black students after King’s assassination, collective mobilization from below mattered. On the other hand, our findings underscore the importance of Karen’s suggestion that the perceptions of university elites (Karen 1991, p. 228) are crucially relevant as well. This suggestion shares the same intuition as Skrentny’s argument that the perceptions of policy elites are crucial to policy change (Skrentny 2006). Particularly at moments when admissions policy is not highly visible or heavily politicized, university officials enjoy considerable discretion to set its parameters. How they perceive different racial and ethnic groups can determine whether formal selection criteria are defended, amended or altogether jettisoned. Indeed, collective mobilization from below shaped policy change precisely because it heightened the moral commitment of college and university administrators to desegregation and integration. Our findings hence underscore the way

in which institutional change in higher education comes from the bottom-up as well as the top-down.

In this regard, our study links the literature on institutional change in higher education with a growing body of sociological research on the impact of social movements (Amenta 2006; Andrews 2004; Giugni, McAdams, and Tilly 1999; Soule and Olzak 2004). Just as Amenta (2006) shows how the effect of social movements is politically mediated by the orientation of the regime in power – and particularly the stance of elected officials and government bureaucrats – our findings suggest that the tempo and character of policy change in undergraduate admissions is shaped by the way in which disruption, broadly defined, is mediated by the orientation of university officials.

Second, our study confirms and broadens Karabel's argument that status-group struggle and organizational self-interest (Karabel 1984; Karabel 2005a) are crucial to institutional change in higher education. If his argument illuminates some of the fundamental reasons driving the imposition of Jewish quotas in the interwar United States, it also seems highly relevant for understanding the advent of affirmative action in the 1960s. In point of fact, both cases involve the same status group – the Protestant upper class – striving to maintain social closure at its gateway institutions. The main difference is that the WASP elite was demanding change in the case of Jewish quotas, whereas it was blocking change in the case of affirmative action. Our study suggests that sociologists of higher education in the United States – where social conflict plays out on not only class but also racial, ethnic, and religious lines – would do well to remain mindful that understanding patterns of institutional change requires identifying the

competing status groups that are involved, determining the extent to which their conflict intersects with the self-interest of organizations in the field.

Of course, the advent of affirmative action is a complex problem, and research on the topic is only beginning to get underway. The possibilities are far from exhausted by our consideration of how collective mobilization, policy elites, and status-group struggle drove the initial adoption of affirmative action among schools in our sample. Other empirical puzzles and theoretical alternatives are certainly worth further research before it will be possible to make a definitive pronouncement about which theories best fit the data.

One theoretical approach that could be potentially fruitful is that of neoinstitutionalism. Market dynamics have begun to pervade higher education in recent years, making the field increasingly subject to competitive isomorphism. But college and universities were somewhat further removed from the market in the 1960s, making higher education a prime field for exploring the dynamics of institutional isomorphism and related cultural processes. The data we have collected so far do not point strongly to a neoinstitutionalist account for the diffusion of affirmative action, but it seems quite plausible that such evidence of isomorphic processes may exist in the historical record. Students of neoinstitutionalism would do well to explore the possibility that late adopters of affirmative action programs simply copied early adopters that were widely perceived as successful, despite the lack of evidence that such programs led to the outcomes desired (mimetic isomorphism); that colleges and universities adopted highly similar types of affirmative action programs largely as a result of pressure from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare as well as the federal courts (coercive isomorphism); or that

admissions officers were the main force behind the adoption of affirmative action programs (normative isomorphism) (see, e.g., Clemens 1999; DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Dobbin forthcoming; Edelman 1992; Skrentny 1996; Stevens 2007).

Other students may wish to consider patterns of path dependency that the advent of affirmative action seems to exhibit. The literature on path dependence is well developed now (e.g., Abbott 2001; Pierson 2004), but it has yet to see widespread application in the sociology of institutional change in higher education, despite the fact that much of the field takes a historical approach. It seems particularly worthwhile to focus on analyzing the connection between the response of elite schools to Jewish applicants in the interwar period and their adoption of race-based affirmative action a little more than a generation later.<sup>42</sup> While we do not pursue this question systematically, our evidence suggests that some early adopters of affirmative action may have been primed to subsequently take affirmative action because of their early openness to Jews.

There is a strong need for additional research on college administrators, even though we have focused on one aspect of their importance in this study. We need more studies in the mold of Lipson's analysis of admissions policies at Michigan, Texas, and Wisconsin (2007). More specifically, we need to understand whether, how, and why the legitimating rationale for affirmative action began to shift in the years after it first took root. For instance, as early the mid-1960s, some administrators began to invoke nascent ideas about the value of diversity. In 1966, Hampshire College founders were already observing that a "[d]iversity of student population has become one of the ten commandments of the admission policy of most private colleges" (quoted in Duffy and

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<sup>42</sup> Thank you to Howard Wechsler for urging us to examine this connection.

Goldberg 1998, p. 181). By 1967, a New York Times article implied that there was essentially a de facto “diversity” goal shared by the Ivies: “Yesterday, when the schools sent out their 12,354 highly prized letters of acceptance, one, undoubtedly, went to the archetypal Episcopalian from Greenwich and another to the farmer’s son from Montana, for balance. But increasingly letters also are going to the promising Negro from Newark and to the public high school student from the Bronx” (Borders 1967, p. 1). Did the rationale for affirmative action among university officials truly begin to shift over time? If so, how? When and for what reasons? If not, what kinds of continuities may exist?

The role of status competition among different schools deserves further attention from future researchers, as it may have been a key factor driving the diffusion of affirmative action. Prestigious schools faced stiffer competition for all types of students from their peers, but competition for a small pool of minority students that was deemed qualified grew especially intense. Having minority students on campus quite nearly became a marker of status.<sup>43</sup> In 1967, Eugene Wilson, Amherst’s admissions director, explicitly pointed out the dynamic in a Time article entitled, “Courting the Negro.” “Admissions people used to talk about what the average College Board score of their entering class was,” he was quoted as saying. “Now the status symbol is how many Negroes you get” (“Courting the Negro” 1967, n.p.).<sup>44</sup> It is unclear whether the timing of

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<sup>43</sup> Students were applying to multiple schools (Duffy and Goldberg 1998, p. 37) because the College Board was no longer requiring them to indicate their first-choice school (Duffy and Goldberg 1998, p. 38; Karabel 2005a, p. 294).

<sup>44</sup> Other examples of the competition for black students abound. In 1966, Gordon and Wilkerson wrote that “the quest for Negro students. . . by prestige institutions in the East. . . has become ‘the thing’ to do” (p. 136). Of the same period, Duffy and Goldberg (1998) wrote that “competition for the best black students was intense” and had become somewhat of an “obsession” (p. 141). In a September 1968 report, Swarthmore’s Dean Hargadon wrote that “the competition for enrolling qualified Negro students is keen, and

this new competition for students of color led to the adoption of affirmative action, though there is evidence that the dynamic was in place by 1964.<sup>45</sup> In contrast to neoinstitutional theories of mimetic isomorphism, it may be that the schools that were not at the absolute top of their peer group may have taken an earlier and more aggressive approach to race-based affirmative action in an attempt to win the competition for the small pool of minority (particularly African American) students. This could help to explain why many Ivies that were not part of the Big Three were generally quicker to adopt affirmative action, and why Wesleyan and Swarthmore adopted affirmative action plans before Amherst and Williams. In any case, more empirical research is needed before the validity of such a possibility can be assessed.

The role of federal policy is worth more research as well. For instance, the Higher Education Act of 1965 substantially expanded access to higher education for students who could not afford it, through grant, loan, and work-study programs (Duffy and Goldberg 1998, pp. 173-174). We found no evidence in our data that the initial adoption of affirmative action at the schools in our study was directly related to the 1965 legislation. It seems unlikely that the Higher Education Act, though it became law

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an exceptionally able Negro student has more colleges sitting on his doorstep than an all-state quarterback with an 800 verbal” (Swarthmore College, Courtney Smith Papers, Box 2, September 1968, p. 1).

<sup>45</sup> For example, Charles McCarthy proposed a pre-freshman summer program at Yale, designed as a preparatory program for a select group of admitted students. He wrote to President Kingman Brewster that this program could increase the number of African American students that Yale could admit. Writing of Yale’s strenuous five-class courseload, McCarthy urged: “Harvard, which provides a freshman program of four courses, has thirty-one American Negroes in its entering class this year: Yale has only twelve, and last spring four Yale negro [sic] rejects were eagerly admitted by Harvard.” He continued: “The solution we propose is a special summer program to be held as a transition from high school to Yale for certain candidates.” (Yale University, Brewster Records, October 5, 1964, p. 1).

months after the Watts riots, impacted the introduction of affirmative action at any of the late adopters in our sample. But, Duffy and Goldberg (1998) write that the conversations among college administrators by the late 1960s and early 1970s about how to attract and enroll students of color were clearly tied to financial aid policy and decision-making (pp. 180-183). The relationship between financial aid policy and affirmative action in admissions would be another fruitful area of study.

There is surely a need for case studies of individual schools that comprise our sample. Our comparative research design precludes us from giving a full-fledged treatment to any one school, and further studies might uncover new material that would shed valuable light on our claims. Case studies of other schools would be worthwhile as well. The case of Trinity College, which is a common alma mater among men listed in the 1963 Social Register, seems especially appropriate for further exploration. If our conclusions are correct, it should have adopted affirmative action rather late. Engineering schools and southern colleges and universities remain almost entirely unexamined in the literature. Although any analysis of the South would be complicated by desegregation, it would provide a fine opportunity to further explore institutional change in a vastly different context, involving different status-groups and conceptions of organizational self-interest. In a related vein, carefully constructed comparisons of a smaller number of schools could help to refine our understanding. For instance, a comparison of two different schools within the same metropolitan region – Harvard versus Boston University, or Princeton versus Rutgers, for instance – might prove useful for tracing how different schools respond in divergent ways to similar social and political events.

Lastly, we need more research that goes beyond the initial adoption of affirmative action and situates the case of affirmative action more broadly among studies of institutional change in higher education. How did affirmative action develop over time? What explains why it took the specific forms it did at different institutions? Why did it begin to come under fire in the 1970s, and why did some institutions remain committed to it more strongly than other institutions? How and why did it persist after the Bakke ruling, and what explains why it began to falter during the Clinton administration? Why did the effort to roll back affirmative action take the form of state referenda, and not legislative repeal? At a broader level, how typical is affirmative action of institutional change in higher education? Are the conclusions of sociological research based on affirmative action widely applicable to other types of policy in higher education? The research agenda is wide open, and much work remains to be done.

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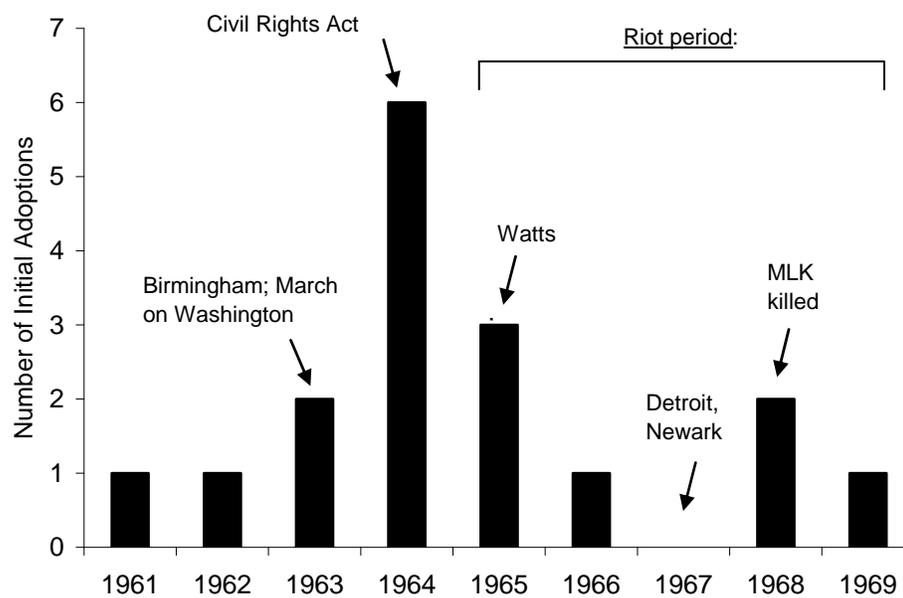


FIG. 1—National, race-related events and the initial adoption of affirmative action among seventeen American colleges and universities, 1961-1969

TABLE 1  
SCHOOLS IN SAMPLE BY TYPE OF INSTITUTION

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*Private Universities*

Brown  
Columbia  
Cornell  
Dartmouth  
Harvard  
Northwestern  
University of Pennsylvania  
Princeton  
Yale

*Public Universities*

University of California at Berkeley  
University of California, Los Angeles  
University of Michigan  
University of Washington

*Liberal Arts Colleges*

Amherst  
Swarthmore  
Wesleyan  
Williams

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NOTE.—Sample includes only schools outside the South. N=17.

TABLE 2  
TYPES OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Type	Description	Example
<u>“Soft” Affirmative Action</u>		
Recruitment	“Talent searching” or training/bridge programs designed to expand and/or enhance the pool of qualified candidates of a particular group (e.g., minority, “disadvantaged,” or women students) applying to a college or university.	National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students (NSSFNS), 1948 - ; Berkeley Pledge, 1995-1996
<u>“Hard” Affirmative Action</u>		
Set aside	A specific number of slots in the admissions pool that are set aside or reserved for members of a particular group (e.g., minority, “disadvantaged,” or women students).	UC Davis Medical School, 1973-1974
Quota	A ceiling on the maximum number or percentage of students from a particular group that may be admitted in a given year, or a floor on the minimum number or percentage of students from a particular group that must be admitted.	No confirmed examples
Separate track	A program in which applicants of a particular group are evaluated only in comparison to each other and not with the general pool of applicants.	University of Washington Law School, 1971
Point system	A policy whereby applicants are assigned points for various qualifications, and applicants from particular groups are automatically awarded a specified number of points based solely on their membership in those groups.	University of Michigan undergraduate college, 2001-2003
Plus factor	A system in which membership in particular groups counts as a “plus-factor” that admissions officers have the option of considering, so long as all applicants are compared to each other.	University of Michigan Law School, 2001 - present

NOTE.—“Soft” affirmative action refers to programs that use racial considerations to expand the pool of applicants considered for admission. “Hard” affirmative action programs are implemented at the time of admissions decisions, and they involve putting a metaphorical thumb on the scale for applicants belonging to selected groups. Dates are not meant to be exclusive.

SOURCES.—Kell 1996; Wilkinson 1979, p. 254; Posner 1974, pp. 1-2.

TABLE 3  
THE INITIAL ADOPTION OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AMONG SEVENTEEN AMERICAN  
COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES, 1961-1969

Date	School
1961	Harvard
1962	Dartmouth
1963	Columbia, Pennsylvania
1964	Brown, Cornell, UCLA, University of Michigan, Swarthmore, Wesleyan
1965	Northwestern, Princeton, Yale
1966	University of California at Berkeley
1967	
1968	Amherst, University of Washington
1969	Williams

SOURCES.—Authors' research in the primary sources. See Appendix B for sources on individual schools.

NOTES.—Northwestern adopted affirmative action in 1965 before Watts. N=17.

TABLE 4  
TOP FIVE ALMA MATERS OF MEN LISTED IN THE 1963 NEW YORK SOCIAL REGISTER BY  
INSTITUTIONAL TYPE

Private Universities	No.	Liberal Arts College	No.	Public Universities	No.
Yale	2234	Williams	325	Virginia	160
Harvard	1746	Amherst	94	California (Berkeley)	36
Princeton	1422	Trinity	82	North Carolina	33
Columbia	311	Colgate	34	Michigan	24
Cornell	144	Hamilton	32	Wisconsin	22

SOURCES.—Adapted from Hawes (1963).

NOTES.—Public universities exclude the Naval Academy and West Point, which would have ranked between Berkeley and North Carolina.

TABLE 5  
FACTORS EXPLAINING TEMPORAL VARIATION IN THE INITIAL ADOPTION OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

School	Urban Riot	Campus Protest	Sympa- thetic Official	WASP Elite
<u>Early (pre-Watts):</u>				
Harvard (1961)			✓	✓
Dartmouth (1962)			✓	
Columbia (1963)			✓	
University of Pennsylvania (1963)			✓	
Brown (1964)			✓	
Cornell (1964)			✓	
UCLA (1964)			✓	
University of Michigan (1964)			✓	
Swarthmore (1964)			✓	
Wesleyan (1964)			✓	
Northwestern (1965)			✓	
<u>Late (post-Watts):</u>				
Princeton (1965)	✓			✓
Yale (1965)	✓		✓	✓
UC Berkeley (1966)	✓		✓	
Amherst (1968)				✓
University of Washington (1968)		✓	✓	
Williams (1969)		✓		✓

APPENDIX A  
SCHOOL NEWSPAPERS EXAMINED, 1960-1980

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*The Amherst Student*, Amherst College  
*The Brown Daily Herald*, Brown University  
*The Columbia Daily Spectator*, Columbia University  
*The Cornell Daily Sun*, Cornell University  
*The Dartmouth*, Dartmouth College  
*The Daily Bruin*, University of California, Los Angeles  
*The Daily Californian*, University of California at Berkeley  
*The Daily Northwestern*, Northwestern University  
*The Daily Pennsylvanian*, University of Pennsylvania  
*The Michigan Daily*, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor  
*The Swarthmore Phoenix*, Swarthmore College  
*The Daily*, University of Washington  
*The Wesleyan Argus*, Wesleyan Argus  
*The Williams Record*, Williams College

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APPENDIX B  
THE INITIAL ADOPTION OF “HARD” AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS  
FOR SELECTED U.S. COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES, 1961-1969

Year	School	Description and Source
1961	Harvard	Harvard’s incoming director of admissions, Fred Glimp, decides to seek greater social and racial diversity and to “give less weight to the so-called objective factors (rank in class and test scores)” (“Report on the Admission and Scholarship Committee,” 1960-1961, p. 197, quoted in Karabel 2005a, p. 401; Puttkammer 1962, p. 19)
1962	Dartmouth	Dartmouth begins a number of outreach programs, notably led by the Dartmouth Christian Union as well as CPEO ( <u>The Dartmouth</u> , May 21, 1963; <u>The Dartmouth</u> , November 20, 1963). For students recruited through these programs and mechanisms, “most of the selection criteria used for normal applicants are not applicable.” Dartmouth instead looks for other evidence that the student would have “a reasonable chance of being able to cope with Dartmouth’s academic rigor” (Dartmouth Christian Union Papers, November 6, 1963; Papers of Erroll G. Hill, December 1968, p. 8)
1963	Pennsylvania	Penn joins with the other Ivies in recruiting black students through CPEO and NSSFNS. Of applicants recruited through such channels, Dean of Admissions, William G. Owen, acknowledges that the “admission office will judge the applicant on his potential ability to maintain satisfactory scholarship at the University rather than on the courses lists in his secondary high school record” ( <u>Daily Pennsylvanian</u> , February 26, 1963).
1963	Columbia	Columbia begins to recruit black students aggressively in the early 1960s. In 1963, Dean Henry S. Coleman acknowledges that Columbia does not hold some black students to the same standards on their College Board scores, even though it does not admit anyone who would clearly “be over his head” ( <u>Columbia Spectator</u> , October 15, 1963).
1964	Michigan	The Opportunity Awards Program targeting Detroit youth (University of Michigan News Service, March 4, 1964) is established at Michigan. It arises after year-long discussions about how to include “deprived” students whose academic “preparation does not permit them to be competitive initially” (University of Michigan, Harlan Henthorne Hatcher Papers, September 30, 1963).
1964	UCLA	The Educational Opportunities Program is established by UCLA’s administration for “environmentally and economically disadvantaged young people.” It is a “compensatory educational effort” (UCLA Office of the Chancellor—Administrative Subject Files of Franklin D. Murphy, 1935-1971, June 30, 1965).
1964	Cornell	Cornell’s Committee on Special Educational Projects (COSEP) implements a program for the recruitment, admission, and training of “culturally disadvantaged students” in 1964 ( <u>Cornell Daily Sun</u> , January 20, 1964). This program is responsible for the admission of black students. COSEP students are admitted “without reference to any specific requirements for admission” ( <u>Cornell Daily Sun</u> , December 15, 1967). However, academic standards for attainment of the degree are no different for the COSEP student: “by the time he graduates, he will have the same qualifications as anyone else with a degree” ( <u>Cornell Daily Sun</u> , December 9, 1965).
1964	Swarthmore	Dean of Admissions John Hoy aggressively begins to recruit black students in the early 1960s. In the spring of 1964, Swarthmore receives a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, of \$275,000, to recruit, support, and fund African American “and other culturally disadvantaged” applicants to the college (geared primarily toward African American students) ( <u>Swarthmore Phoenix</u> , April 14, 1964).

1964	Wesleyan	Wesleyan hires Admissions Director John Hoy from Swarthmore. The following year, in 1965, Wesleyan admits the Vanguard Class after a recruiting surge. In an article in the <u>Wesleyan University Alumnus</u> in May 1965, Hoy notes that 60 students “from deprived backgrounds,” most of whom were African American, had applied and 30 had been admitted in April 1965, up very substantially from previous years. Hoy notes that the test scores of these students were generally lower than others admitted to Wesleyan: “[M]ost had modest scores. However, the spunk and motivation were there” (Wesleyan University, Subject Files, May 1965, pp. 8-9).
1964	Brown	In the early 1960s, Brown begins aggressively recruiting African Americans. In 1964, the Director of Admissions, Charles V. Doebler, writes that some degree of “special consideration” is given to African American applicants, but “no student is admitted if it is absolutely clear that he has no chance for success at Brown” (Doebler, n.d., pp. 1-2).
1965	Northwestern	Northwestern begins a small recruitment program called Northwestern University’s Chicago Action Project. This program recruits “disadvantaged,” mainly African American, students from predominantly minority high schools in Chicago. According to a grant proposal for the project: “Under the conventional admission requirements of the University few of these students would qualify for entrance” (Northwestern University, Subject Files, n.d., p. 2).
1965	Yale	Yale’s admissions office adopts a new flexibility in its admission criteria and begins to “seriously consider the possibility that SAT scores [especially for African Americans] might reflect cultural deprivation rather than lack of intelligence” (Karabel 2005a, p. 384).
1965	Princeton	Princeton’s Admissions Committee begins giving black applicants additional consideration in admissions “by giving them a special category (and round in the admissions process)” (Karabel 2005a, p. 394).
1966	Berkeley	Berkeley establishes the Educational Opportunity Program, which seeks to “increase the minority and low-income population” on campus ( <u>Daily Californian Weekly Magazine</u> , October 3, 1967, p. 1). Sixty percent of the students do not satisfy Berkeley’s admissions requirements (Langlois 1967).
1968	Amherst	Amherst steps up recruiting efforts ( <u>Amherst Student</u> , April 15, 1968). President Eugene S. Wilson later notes that “black students have been favored above all other groups” ( <u>Amherst Student</u> , March 9, 1970).
1968	Washington	After the assassination of Dr. King, Washington establishes the Special Education Program (SEP), which is meant to “increase the number of minority students from ethnic groups have a substantial disadvantage in our society” (University of Washington Office of Minority Affairs, December 3, 1968; University of Washington Office of Minority Affairs, September 1971). This program uses a separate track of admissions (University of Washington Office of Minority Affairs, March 27, 1970).
1969	Williams	In response to mobilization from the Williams Afro-American Society (WAAS), the college’s admissions committee begins to work with the WAAS on black admissions. Curtis Manns is appointed Assistant Dean and given the special responsibility for admission of African American students (Agreement Reached Between the Provost of the College and the Williams Afro-American Society 1969).

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NOTE.— See main text for description of the criteria by which affirmative action is identified. For some Ivy League schools, it appears that such programs may have been adopted in earlier years, but the primary sources do not contain definitive evidence, and we have chosen to date such programs more conservatively, in later years.

