
Status-Group Struggle, Organizational Interests, and the Limits of Institutional
Autonomy: The Transformation of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, 1918-1940

Author(s): Jerome Karabel

Source: *Theory and Society*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Jan., 1984), pp. 1-40

Published by: Springer

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/657163>

Accessed: 19-10-2017 12:54 UTC

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

http://www.jstor.org/stable/657163?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



Springer is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Theory and Society*

STATUS-GROUP STRUGGLE, ORGANIZATIONAL INTERESTS, AND THE LIMITS OF INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY

The Transformation of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, 1918—1940

JEROME KARABEL

As gateways to the American elite, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton have been – and remain – unsurpassed. Their graduates massively overrepresented at the top of almost every major institutional domain of American life, the “Big Three”¹ occupy a position at the apex of America’s complex and highly stratified structure of higher education. America’s closest equivalent to Britain’s Oxbridge and France’s “grandes écoles,” their prominence as educational pathways to elite status has been a national fact of life for more than a century.²

This study focuses on the transformation of admission practices at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton between World War I and World War II. It covers a particularly critical period in their history which saw the rise of discretionary admissions and the emergence of many of the specific institutional practices (e.g. the emphasis on “character,” geographical diversity, and alumni parentage) that still characterize the admissions process today. While special emphasis will be placed on the emergence and resolution of the “Jewish problem” at the Big Three during the 1920s, the article will also examine the response of these institutions to the Great Depression. Evidence will be drawn from both primary and secondary sources; on occasion, material concerning the parallel cases of Columbia and Dartmouth will be cited as well.³

The objective of the study is at once theoretical and empirical. For apart from the topic’s intrinsic historical interest, an examination of the Big Three during a period of major transformation will, it is anticipated, provide both an illustration of, and an opportunity to further develop, a theory of institu-

Graduate School of Education and Department of Sociology, Harvard University.
Copyright © 1984 by Jerome Karabel.

tional change in education. It is to an outline of such a theory that we now turn.

Status-Group Struggle, Organizational Interests, and the Limits of Institutional Autonomy: Towards a Theory of Educational Change

In attempting to understand educational change – and, in particular, changes in the criteria governing educational selection – a crucial starting point may be found in Max Weber’s insight that cultural ideals, far from being disembodied expressions of a societal value consensus, are “stamped by the structure of domination and by the social condition of membership in the ruling stratum.”⁴ Discussing the “pedagogy of cultivation” that prevailed in Confucian China, Weber noted that the specific type of “cultivated man” produced by the educational system depended ultimately on “the decisive stratum’s respective ideal of cultivation.”⁵ As viewed from this perspective, then, the very definition of “cultivation” – or, in the modern world of bureaucracies, “merit” – that predominates in a particular society expresses underlying power relations and tends, accordingly, to reflect the particular cultural ideals of those groups that hold the power of cultural definition. By its very nature, the process of defining “cultivation” and “merit,” far from being neutral, is thus a profoundly political one.

The view that cultural ideals express underlying power relations has much in common with Bourdieu’s concept of the “cultural arbitrary.” According to Bourdieu, “In any given social formation, legitimate culture, i.e. the culture endowed with the dominant legitimacy, is nothing other than the dominant cultural arbitrary.”⁶ The dominant culture, while *arbitrary* in its content and in its imposition, is, however, not *random*; on the contrary, “In any given social formation, the cultural arbitrary which the power relations between the groups or classes making up that social formation put into the dominant position within the system of cultural arbitraries is the one which most fully, though always indirectly, expresses the objective interests (material and symbolic) of the dominant groups or classes.”⁷

To the extent that the particular cultural ideals of the dominant groups govern educational selection, this tends to have the effect – albeit not always the intent – of excluding members of subordinate groups from major pathways to elite status. In response to this exclusion, subordinate groups (or organizations claiming to represent their interests) sometimes become politically mobilized and contest the legitimacy of the criteria governing admissions.⁸ Since virtually any set of criteria will differentially affect the “life chances” of members of different groups (often systematically including

some at the same time that it excludes others), such criteria are always at least potentially objects of intense political struggle. When such struggle occurs, members of subordinate groups tend to put forward alternative criteria that, if adopted, would have the effect of increasing representation of their group. And like the established criteria they are intended to displace, such alternative criteria are almost always legitimated in terms not of “particularistic” group interests, but rather “universalistic” ideals expressing the interests of the society as a whole.

In a heterogeneous society such as the United States, conflict over cultural ideals may occur along racial, ethnic, and religious as well as class lines. Indeed, the principal actors in struggles over criteria for admission into educational institutions are frequently not antagonistic classes, but rather competing “status groups” – associational communities comprised of all who share a sense of status equality based on participation in a common culture.⁹ The basis of membership in such status groups, Weber maintains, may be any “externally identifiable characteristic” – racial, linguistic, religious, social – that may serve “as a pretext for attempting . . . exclusion”; a central purpose of such membership is “the closure of social and economic opportunities to *outsiders*”¹⁰ [emphasis his].

As Weber¹¹ himself notes – and as Marxists properly emphasize – “the class situation is by far the predominant factor” in the “way in which status groups are formed.” Nonetheless, status groups are not reducible to underlying social classes; two owners of large factories, one Protestant and one Jewish, both belong to the capitalist class, for example, but they also are members of distinct – and perhaps even antagonistic – status groups. In understanding, in particular, the process of institutional change at elite colleges such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton – institutions from which the working class is virtually excluded – it is thus crucial to look at the dynamic of what might be referred to as *status-group struggle*.¹²

In an important elaboration upon Weber, Parkin¹³ argues that social closure – “the process by which social collectivities seek to maximize rewards by restricting access to resources and opportunities to a limited circle of eligibles” – is central to the dynamics of all stratified systems. According to Parkin, there are two fundamental forms of closure: *exclusionary closure* (“the attempt by one group to secure for itself a privileged position at the expense of some other group . . . which, intentionally or otherwise gives rise to a social category of ineligibles or outsiders”) and *usurpatory closure* (“countervailing action . . . by the excluded to win a greater share of resources”). Like Weber, Parkin views struggles over exclusion as expressions of

the distribution of power; indeed, he writes that “Modes of closure can be thought of as different means of mobilizing power for the purpose of engaging in distributive struggle.”¹⁴

As a means of maintaining or enhancing their privileges, dominant groups characteristically engage in exclusionary modes of closure. In modern capitalist societies, Parkin suggests,¹⁵ the two principal modes of closure are those involving the institution of property and those surrounding academic qualifications and credentials. It is this latter form of exclusionary closure that will be the focus of the current study.

While struggles over closure are generally initiated by dominant groups, subordinate groups do not always stand by passively when denied access to scarce and highly valued resources and opportunities. Instead, those status groups that are politically and ideologically capable of challenging the cultural ideals and exclusionary institutional practices of dominant groups will frequently mobilize themselves to do so. Since, however, status groups differ substantially in their degree of control over resources (both material and symbolic), they will differ substantially in their capacity to influence institutional policies. One might, accordingly, speak of *competing status-group capacities* in much the same way that Katznelson, in another context, has spoken of competing class capacities.¹⁶

If the dynamic of group struggle – especially struggle between competing status groups attempting to impose social closure – is a key factor in explaining the process of change at elite colleges, so too is the oft-ignored character of these institutions as *organizations with their own distinct interests*. Despite their ivory-tower image as delicate vessels of cultural transmission, institutions such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton are every bit as vigorous in pursuit of their particular organizational interests as state agencies¹⁷ or for that matter, private, profit-making corporations. Such a perspective, while attentive to the constraints faced by organizations, is utterly incompatible with any formulation that sees institutional change in education as simply reflecting, in mirror-like fashion, shifts in the distribution of power among status groups in the broader society.¹⁸

Any framework that will be adequate to the task of explaining such changes must, accordingly, take into account both the dynamics of group struggle *and* organizational self-interest. As Collins points out, struggle between groups is typically carried out both *over* and *through* organizations.¹⁹ Yet it is essential to realize that heavily endowed institutions such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton may under some circumstances have considerable auto-

onomy from even the most powerful forces in their “environment”²⁰ and that demands from external sources are typically refracted through the prism of organizational self-interest. What this means concretely is that the administrators who preside over elite colleges will tend to evaluate the claims of external groups in terms of their assessment of the effects of granting such claims on the long-term interests of their institutions.

Since what is in the “interest” of the organization is, however, not a matter of objective reality, it is crucial to understand the values and perceptions of those who have the power to define what is “good” for the organization. In general, those who preside over institutions such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton will see the interests of their organizations through the lens of the particular cultural ideals of the status group to which they belong. Members of other status groups might, accordingly, define the interests of the organization differently. And in either case, administrators, like capitalists and workers, are fully capable of having misperceptions – and of pursuing policies that have the effect of undermining the very objectives that they are intended to realize.

Under normal circumstances, however, elite colleges – like other organizations – are likely to be most responsive to the claims of those external groups that control needed resources. Such a “resource dependency” perspective²¹ suggests that Harvard, Yale, and Princeton – to the extent that they are dependent on a steady flow of “paying customers” and on private donations – will be ill-situated to spurn the claims of such traditional “constituencies” as the elite private boarding schools and the alumni. To the extent, however, that they can diversify their sources of support, their autonomy vis-à-vis such groups will be increased and they will thereby be freer to pursue their own distinct organizational interests.

The framework developed here for explaining the transformation of the elite colleges – and for understanding institutional change in education more generally – is thus one that simultaneously emphasizes *organizational self-interest* and *group struggle*. It directs attention to shifts in the *cultural ideals* governing admissions, but sees these shifts as explicable primarily in terms of shifts in power relations (including the power to define “legitimate culture”) among competing social groups. There are, however, limits to the arbitrariness of the definition of “cultivation” or “merit” that may prevail in a particular society; the ideal of the cultivated man of leisure, for example, is a most unlikely candidate for cultural hegemony in a society dominated by large-scale bureaucratic organizations.

The struggles between dominant and subordinate groups – whether social classes, as is stressed by Marxists, or racially or ethnically-based status groups, as emphasized by Weberians – are viewed within this framework as fundamental sources of institutional change. The outcomes of such struggles, however, depend not only on the amount of resources controlled by the competing groups, but also on the extent to which their respective claims mesh with the institutional interests of the organization over which they are struggling. Indeed, under some circumstances, the primary impetus for a shift in policy may come not from external forces, but from forces inside the organization itself.²² But in the case of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton during the interwar years – a period in which their degree of autonomy from the dominant status group was severely limited – the impetus for change came not from within, but rather from struggles raging in the larger society. And the result of these struggles was, just as the theory of social closure would predict, the adoption of measures at the Big Three that made them even more closed to outsiders on the eve of the Second World War than they had been in the years immediately following World War I.

Status-Group Closure and the Rise of Jewish Quotas

If by “meritocracy” one means a system in which academic factors – and academic factors alone – govern processes of educational selection, then Harvard, Yale, and Princeton in the years immediately following World War I exemplified a level of meritocracy that they have never attained since. For selection during this period was by examination; with few exceptions, those who passed were admitted and those who failed were not.²³ As a consequence, the size of the freshman class sometimes fluctuated sharply from year to year with changes in the number of students who managed to pass the exam; at Yale, for example, the number of freshmen increased from 681 to 866 in the single year between 1920 and 1921.²⁴

The openness of the Big Three to talented students of modest social origins during this period should not, however, be exaggerated. Apart from the formidable financial barriers caused by the paucity of scholarships, the content of the examinations themselves – which stressed mastery of specific subject areas of the traditional curriculum such as Latin²⁵ – screened out many able students who attended secondary schools less responsive to the cultural ideals of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. Though the system was tilted strongly in favor of the elite secondary schools²⁶ (which prepared their students specifically for these exams), an increasing number of public high schools, especially in urban areas of the Northeast, provided satisfactory

preparation. To the extent that these public institutions enrolled immigrant and working-class youths,²⁷ the Big Three's examination system – which evaluated student papers with an utter disregard for the social origins of their authors – had a distinctly egalitarian aspect.

By the mid-1920s, this system of admission-by-examination had been effectively abolished. No longer would a passing grade on the entrance exam suffice to guarantee admission. As the Admissions Committee of Harvard College stated clearly in a letter it sent in March 1926 to four thousand secondary schools throughout the United States:

Each individual application for admission will be carefully reviewed by the Committee; and *much weight will be attached to character, personality and promise as well as to scholarly attainments. Satisfactory showing in the last of these qualifications alone is not of itself sufficient to guarantee admission*²⁸ (emphasis is mine).

The Emergence of a "Jewish Problem" at the Elite Colleges

The cultural atmosphere of most American colleges during the early decades of this century was dominated not by scholarship, but by the non-academic side of campus life.²⁹ At the Big Three, what Thorstein Veblen aptly referred to as the "cultivation of the graces of gentility"³⁰ was pursued with special vigor; there the gentlemanly ideal of the well-rounded Renaissance man – sociable, athletic, cultivated – reigned supreme. At the center of campus life was thus neither the lecture hall nor the seminar room, but rather the athletic field and the social club. Indeed, scholarship was looked down upon; those who took it seriously tended, quite simply, to be those who lacked the cultural and financial resources to participate fully in the colleges' dense array of formal and informal extracurricular activities. Those able to choose between the academic and non-academic sides of campus life opted, with few exceptions, for the latter; for them, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton were places to have a good time (Veblen referred to "gentlemen's colleges" as places of "genteel dissipation") and, in the process, to gain valuable contacts for future careers in business. One indication of just how peripheral scholarship was to campus life in the period is provided by the results of a thirty-year follow-up study of 2678 students who entered Yale between 1927 and 1933 – the most successful businessmen were found among the ranks of the alumni with the *worst* scholarship records.³¹

The relatively small number of Jewish students attending the Big Three during this period frequently found themselves out of place – and unwelcome – in this cultural context. Commonly the children of immigrants, they carried with them a culture that was in many ways at odds with that of their more

genteel, old-stock classmates. The contrasts between the two groups were striking: where Jewish students looked to college as a vehicle of upward mobility, Gentile students viewed college as a means of adding a bit of polish to a status already virtually assured; where Jews took grades very seriously, their Christian counterparts opted for the “gentleman’s C”; where Jews concentrated their energy on the faculty and books, their overwhelmingly Protestant classmates³² gravitated towards sports and social clubs. There were, of course, exceptions to these patterns; some Jews, especially those of upper-class origins, fit fairly easily into the dominant gentlemanly culture, and some Gentiles scorned this culture as snobbish and frivolous. Yet exceptions aside, a discomfiting bedrock of reality lay beneath the ethnic stereotypes: Jewish students were, in fact, of more modest backgrounds than their Christian classmates; they did indeed manifest an unseemly tendency to take their studies seriously (and their superior grades showed it); and, as observers of the period noted, they were located firmly outside the mainstream of the campus culture of “genteel dissipation.”³³

Yet despite all this, it did not necessarily follow that these differences – undeniable though they were – constituted a “problem.” That they became defined as such reflected not so much anti-Semitism in the Protestant upper class – though there was no shortage of that³⁴ – as an underlying status-group struggle between Protestants and Jews that was being fought out simultaneously in cultural, political, and economic arenas.

The roots of the wave of anti-Semitism that swept America in the 1920s have been brilliantly analyzed by Higham;³⁵ for our purposes here, it suffices to note that what happened at the elite colleges was part of a broader effort to preserve sagging Protestant cultural and economic hegemony. The WASP upper class during this period was extremely active in the fight to restrict immigration; indeed the Immigration Restriction League was dominated by Harvard-educated patricians, and had as its vice-president none other than Harvard President A. Lawrence Lowell.³⁶ At the national level, the result of this struggle was the passage of the highly restrictive (for Eastern and Southern Europeans) Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1924; at the Big Three, its crowning achievement was the imposition of quotas restricting the number of Jews.

In order to understand why virtually all of the elite colleges adopted measures restricting the number of Jews,³⁷ one must grasp the central role they had come to play in the “reproduction strategies”³⁸ of the dominant groups. Especially for the national WASP upper class, elite colleges – and, above all, the Big Three³⁹ – had become crucial sites for the maintenance of status-

group cohesion.⁴⁰ For it was at the elite colleges that the scions of metropolitan elites met their counterparts from other cities, mastered the subtleties of the dominant-status culture, and accumulated contacts crucial to success in the large, WASP-dominated organizations that had come to play an ever-more strategic role in American life. In so doing, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton played a vital role both in creating and reinforcing the shared culture and personal ties that constituted the very foundation of the solidarity of America's dominant status group: the Protestant upper class.

The growing numbers of "Hebrews" (as they were then called) posed an obvious threat to the WASP quasi-monopoly on the unusual cultural and economic opportunities provided by the elite colleges. Yet the influx of Jews posed a more subtle – and perhaps more fundamental – threat as well: that, by their very presence on campus, they would undermine the upper-class atmosphere that was the cornerstone of these institutions' prominence. Such an eventuality – already perceived at the time as the source of Columbia's demise as an institution of the "first rank"⁴¹ – threatened not only the interests of the WASP upper class (which had increasingly come to rely on these institutions both to transmit their privileges intergenerationally and to solidify status-group cohesion), but also the *organizational interests* of the elite colleges themselves. In this context, the men who presided over Harvard, Yale, and Princeton made a commitment – with the example of Columbia firmly in mind – not to permit the "Jewish invasion" to "destroy" their institutions.

As early as 1918, the Association of New England Deans, at a meeting that took place at Princeton, held a frank discussion about the burgeoning "Jewish problem." At this meeting, Dean Frederick S. Jones of Yale declared:

I think we shall have to change our views in regard to the Jewish element. . . . If we do not educate them, they will overrun us. . . . A few years ago every single scholarship of any value was won by a Jew. I took it up with the Committee and said that we could not allow that to go on. We must put a ban on the Jews. We decided not to give them any scholarships but to extend aid to them in the way of tuition.

While there is no evidence that any collective resolutions were passed at this meeting, the topic of "limitation in the enrollment of Jews and negroes" was explicitly proposed for discussion at the 1920 meeting of the Association of Administrative Officers in New England. And subsequent meetings of this organization during the 1920s provided a forum for the frequent discussion of measures limiting the size of the freshman class,⁴² a policy that was, as will be shown below, inextricably intertwined with the effort to restrict the number of Jews.

While the specter of masses of “Hebrews” poised to “overrun” the elite colleges bears the imprint of the anti-Semitism of the period, there was in fact a sharp increase in the number of Jews between the 1900s and the early 1920s. At Harvard, the percentage of Jews more than tripled between 1900 and 1922; at Yale, it doubled between 1907 and 1921; at Princeton, it almost doubled between 1906 and 1922 (see table 1). Yet at none of these institutions did the proportion of Jews ever come close to submerging the WASP majority; even at Harvard, where the worry about becoming another “Columbia”⁴³ was more intense, the proportion of Jews never got much past one in four. And at rural Princeton, where fears of an impending inundation of “Hebrews” was acute, Jews never comprised more than one student in twenty.

TABLE 1
Jewish Students in Freshman Class at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, 1900–1925

Year	Harvard		Yale		Princeton	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
1900	36	7.0	18 ^b	5.0	6 ^e	2.0
1903	35	7.1	n.a.	n.a.	2	0.6
1906	42	7.5	23 ^c	6.7	8 ^f	2.4
1912	77	12.6	21	5.4	8	2.2
1913	85	14.6	22	5.6	12	3.0
1914	100	15.1	26	6.6	6	1.6
1915	91	14.0	28	6.5	19	4.9
1916	96	14.8	32	8.3	8	2.2
1917	70	13.1	28	9.0	4	1.2
1918	99	19.8	25	6.5	13	3.6
1919	90	17.9	38	8.2	16	4.4
1920	103	17.8	32	9.0	20	4.4
1921	141	19.7	71	13.4	23	4.0
1922	150	21.5	95	10.8	25	3.9
1923	n.a.	n.a.	115 ^d	13.3	21	3.3
1924	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	13	2.1
1925	285 ^a	27.6	n.a.	n.a.	11	1.7

Source: Marcia G. Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door* (Westport, CT.: The Greenwood Press, 1979) pp. 96, 107, 143, 155, 181–182.

^a Figure computed using 1033 matriculants as the base number.

^b Figure is for the year 1901.

^c Figure is for the year 1907.

^d Figure computed using 863 matriculants as the base number.

^e Class size is estimated to be 300.

^f Class size is estimated to be 325.

Note: “n.a.” stands for “not available.”

Yet if the image of an invasion was hyperbolic, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton did face a genuine “Jewish problem.” Dependent on the WASP upper class for “paying customers,” private contributors, and the maintenance of the gentlemanly tone of campus life, the elite colleges were in no position to ignore their core constituency’s strong distaste for Jews. As early as 1910, Gentile students at socially fashionable Williams College held demonstrations against the increase in the number of Jewish students in the entering class of 1914; at Columbia, the influx of Jews caused the scions of the New York upper class to abandon the metropolis altogether by 1920, sending many of them to the rural “Little Three” of Amherst, Williams, and Wesleyan.⁴⁴ In Philadelphia, where the upper class had a tradition of attending the University of Pennsylvania, the triumph of the “democracy of the street-car” at Penn led the children of the “best families” to abandon that venerable institution for the purer and more pastoral atmosphere of Princeton and other more “protected” elite colleges.⁴⁵ If the administrators of the Big Three drew from these experiences the conclusion that the presence of large numbers of Jews on campus posed a severe threat to their cherished historic relationship with the Protestant upper class, there was thus little in the historical record to suggest that they were wrong.

Big Three administrators, then, need not have been personally anti-Semitic to come to the conclusion that their institutions had a serious “Jewish problem”; it was quite sufficient that, just as a “resource dependency” model would predict, they be aware of the potential effects that a continued increase in the number of Jews could have on the flow of private funds that was the foundation of their national preeminence. Yet it is doubtful whether the rational pursuit of objective organizational interests can, in and of itself, explain the ferocity of the opposition inside the institutions themselves to the increased flow of Jewish students. For Big Three administrators were themselves members of the very status group that constituted their primary “constituency” and shared with it both cultural values and a sense of group identity. Wedded to a vision of the elite colleges as gentlemanly training grounds for future leaders who would embody the highest values of Christian – and especially Anglo-Saxon – civilization, they were unlikely to resist external demands to stem the flow of “Hebrews” not only because of the wealth and power of those clamoring for restrictive measures, but also for the simple reason that such demands resonated with their own private sentiments.⁴⁶ Thus, as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton faced the “Jewish problem,” organizational and status-group factors pointed toward the same solution: a move toward ethnic closure that would preserve opportunities for the WASP upper class at the same time that it protected vital institutional interests.

The Resolution of the "Jewish Problem": The Imposition of Quotas

As befitted its historic role as the most innovative member of the Big Three, Harvard led the way in confronting the "Jewish problem." Increasingly dissatisfied with the long-standing system of selection that admitted students solely on the basis of purely academic criteria, the men who presided over Harvard in the years after World War I set about the task of devising a new system that, whatever its specific content, would produce the desired result: a sharp reduction in the proportion of Jewish students. Directing this effort was a man as steadfast in his opposition to further Jewish incursions into Harvard as he was to the continued entry of Eastern and Southern Europeans into the United States: A. Lawrence Lowell.

Lowell's first initiative in addressing the "Jewish problem" was taken in the winter of 1922 when he prevailed upon Harvard's Committee on Scholarships to try to limit the number of awards to Jews to their percentage in the freshman class. The mechanism for putting this into effect was a clause, to be published in the university catalogue, stating that while awards would continue to be granted "primarily on the basis of high scholarship," holders also had to be "men of approved character and promise."⁴⁸ The explicit reference to "character" here is crucial; an ostensibly unimpeachable quality, its very intangibility made it an ideal instrument for restricting the number of Jews at elite colleges. For "character," everyone realized, was non-randomly distributed by ethnic group: while striving Jews suffered from a notable lack of it, high-status Protestants effortlessly exuded it. The use of diffuse criteria of "character" in the selection process thus promised to succeed in turning back the "Hebrew invasion" where exclusive reliance on academic criteria had failed.

Just how sorely deficient in "character" Jews were thought to be is indicated by the fact that Lowell personally ordered an investigation into the ethnic origins of students disciplined for offenses of a "moral nature." Expecting to find that Jews had a quasi-monopoly on such offenses – and hoping thereby to provide legitimation for quotas – Lowell dispatched the following pointed memorandum to the Dean's office upon receipt of some disappointing results:

You have basely gone back on me. Somebody told me that of the fourteen men dismissed last year for cheating and lying about it, thirteen were Jews. Now you make out that there were twelve of them, of whom only five were Jews. Please produce at once six more!⁴⁹

On another occasion, Lowell attempted to salvage the image of the Jew as

moral derelict on the basis of alternative evidence. In conversation with a distinguished alumnus, Lowell reported that fully 50 percent of the students caught stealing books from the library were Jewish. When pressed by the alumnus about the number of students apprehended, Lowell replied "Two."⁵⁰

In the spring of 1922, Lowell created a great furor when he proposed to the Harvard faculty the establishment of an explicit Jewish quota. Though the faculty initially passed a resolution calling upon the Committee on Admissions to take into account in making its decisions "the resulting proportionate size of racial and national groups in the membership of Harvard College,"⁵¹ it later reconsidered and refused, in the end, to endorse any measures specifically restricting the admission of Jews. Yet Lowell's defeat was less than total. Indeed, at the very same June 2, 1922 meeting at which the faculty rescinded its earlier vote, it passed a Lowell-sponsored resolution calling for the appointment of a committee "to consider principles and methods for more effectively sifting candidates for admission." The next day, Lowell asked that the following statement be integrated into the official minutes of the June 2 meeting: "The primary object in appointing a special Committee was to consider the question of the Jews."⁵²

Lowell's audacious decision to make the issue of Jewish quotas a public one proved to be a grave tactical error. Jewish groups and their allies mobilized to protest Harvard's allegedly discriminatory posture, and there was even a motion put forward in the Massachusetts state legislature calling for an official investigation.⁵³ It was thus in a highly charged atmosphere that the Committee on Methods of Sifting for Admissions convened. The Committee's final report, issued in the spring of 1923, was a great disappointment to Lowell, for it stated categorically that "in the administration of rules for admission Harvard College should maintain its traditional policy of freedom from discrimination on grounds of race or religion."⁵⁴

There was more in the Committee's report, however, than immediately met the eye. Steadfast in its opposition to the *principle* of restricting enrollment on ethnic or religious grounds, the Committee in fact proposed a number of specific measures that promised, *in practice*, to address Harvard's nagging "Jewish problem." Foremost among these was the proposal to admit students from the highest seventh of their graduating class without examination. The intent of this proposal, the Committee declared, was to "facilitate access to College by capable boys from schools which do not ordinarily prepare their pupils for college examination."⁵⁵

In part an attempt to democratize the opportunity to attend Harvard by making entrance possible for boys from high schools that did not prepare their students for Harvard's exams, the top-seventh plan had another purpose as well: to change the geographical composition of the College by attracting more students from outside the urban Northeast. That relatively few Jews were located outside this area could hardly have escaped the attention of the Committee; indeed, in the fall of 1922, the renowned writer Walter Lippmann⁵⁶ expressly suggested to one of its members that Harvard select its students from a wider geographical area as a way of reducing the number of Jews.

In the delicate atmosphere created by Lowell's blunders of the previous spring, the Committee's suggestion that Harvard build up "a new group of men from the West and South, and, in general, from good high schools in towns and small cities"⁵⁷ may be seen as a means of addressing the "Jewish problem" while avoiding the imposition of the harsher measures then being considered. In adopting the objective of drawing more students from distant regions, Harvard – like Columbia before it⁵⁸ – was putting into place an eminently defensible policy that, via its neutral application, promised to have the effect of limiting the number of Jews. Little wonder, then, that "geographical diversity" utterly irrelevant to the admissions process prior to the "Hebrew invasion," became a cornerstone of the selection policies of numerous elite colleges in the 1920s.⁵⁹ Lawrence Veysey, perhaps the dean of historians of American higher education, puts the matter bluntly:

The idea of recruiting students on the basis of geographical diversity emerged as an excuse to restrict the number of students from Jewish backgrounds who came from such places as New York City. Without that peculiar impetus, the otherwise innocuous logic of gaining national appeal and support would not have gained the prominence in certain institutional strategies that it did.⁶⁰

Yet the highest-seventh plan failed to stem the flow of Jewish students to Harvard. Indeed, of the 276 top-seventh plan students who entered Harvard in 1925, 115 (44.7 percent) were Jewish. Overall, the proportion of Jews in the freshman class had actually increased – despite Lowell's best efforts – between 1922 and 1925 from 21.5 to 27.6 percent.⁶¹ Clearly, more drastic measures were needed if the increase of Jews was to be stemmed.

In the winter of 1925–1926, Lowell moved decisively to solve Harvard's "Jewish problem." Having learned from his earlier actions that "frankness" was not always a virtue,⁶² Lowell acted this time in private, concentrating his efforts not on the faculty, but on the Board of Overseers. In a letter to Henry James (son of the philosopher William James), Chairman of the Board's

Special Committee on the Limitation of the Size of the Freshman Class, Lowell was quite explicit:

To prevent a dangerous increase in the proportion of Jews, I know at present only one way which is at the same time straightforward and effective, and that is a selection by a personal estimate of character on the part of the Admission authorities, based on the probable value to the College and to the community of his admission.⁶³

The keystone of Lowell's plan was an apparently harmless provision that limited the number of freshmen to be admitted to Harvard. Under the old system, all students who met an *absolute* standard were accepted, and the size of the freshman class fluctuated from year to year. Under the new system, however, there would be a definite ceiling on the number of freshman places and competition would thus be *relative*. A seemingly reasonable and neutral response to a purely technical problem of overcrowding, the decision to limit numbers was motivated in substantial part by institutional preoccupations with the "Jewish problem." For with numbers limited and a surplus of candidates available, the admissions office could use its expanded discretionary power to produce the right "student mix." The exact composition of this mix was to be determined, but one thing was certain: it would include a smaller proportion of Jews.

In January 1926, the Board of Overseers adopted a series of measures that finally enabled Harvard to establish an effective, albeit covert, Jewish quota.⁶⁴ At the very center of the newly devised exclusionary process was the admissions office, now operating within a secure framework of limited class size and radically increased institutional discretion. Using techniques that were strikingly similar to those employed by other elite colleges⁶⁵ – including increased reliance on interviews (for the purpose of obtaining information on "character and fitness") and mandatory photographs,⁶⁶ Harvard's admissions office set about the task of identifying "undesirable" students, principally Jews. Thus was created the first – but by no means the last – of Harvard's "special consideration" categories.⁶⁷

In carrying out its policy of restricting the number of Jewish students, Harvard was able to draw critical information from changes that had been introduced in its application form in the fall of 1922 – at the height of the controversy over quotas. Questions contained in the new form included "Religious Preference," "Maiden Name of Mother," "Birthplace of Father," and "What change, if any, has been made since your birth in your own name or that of your father? (explain fully)." Should any Jews slip unidentified through this rather tightly woven net, however, there was still a good chance of detection, for the high school principal or private school head was asked to

“indicate by a check the applicant’s religious preference so far as known . . . Protestant . . . Roman Catholic . . . Hebrew . . . Unknown.”⁶⁸

Able to identify its Jewish applicants, Harvard’s admissions office used its expanded discretionary authority to limit their numbers. In part, this was accomplished through the neutral application of recently devised criteria, for these criteria were themselves replete with ethnic bias. The sudden interest in “geographical diversity” was the most obvious case, but more subtle mechanisms were at work as well. The very definition of “character,” for example, was stamped with distinctively Protestant, upper class cultural ideals. “Manliness,”⁶⁹ “leadership,” “public spirit,” “fair play” – these were virtues thought to be the very antithesis of the traits typically possessed by Jews.⁷⁰ A non-discriminatory evaluation of candidates on these criteria would, it was felt, systematically favor the Gentile candidate over the Jew. For while Jews might be academically “precocious”⁷¹ and thereby win out if competition were exclusively intellectual, a proper emphasis on soundness of body and spirit would enable Christians to demonstrate their underlying superiority.

Even criteria intended to be exclusionary, however, have the potential – if more or less evenly applied – to produce the wrong result. Harvard’s Lowell, in a letter written in the midst of the 1922 controversy, made this point meticulously clear: “any vote passed with the intent of limiting the number of Jews should not be supposed by anyone to be passed as a measurement of character really applicable to Jew and Gentile alike.”⁷² Where necessary, then, a forthrightly double standard would be used; the number of Jews could be kept down simply by requiring them to demonstrate a higher level of attainment. Other, even blunter instruments were also available: scholarships could be allocated disproportionately to Protestants, and schools with large Jewish enrollments could lose their eligibility to present candidates via the highest-seventh plan.⁷³ Yet in the end the specific mechanism used to exclude Jews was less important than the simple fact that the admissions office now had the discretion to admit whom it wanted – and to do so without having to justify, or even explain, its decisions.

The response of Yale and Princeton to the “Jewish problem” was strikingly similar to that of Harvard: limitation of numbers, revised application forms stressing family religious background, more emphasis on “character” and “geographical diversity,” required photographs, greater reliance on interviews, and, above all, radically increased institutional “discretion.”⁷⁴ That these measures were virtually identical to those adopted in Cambridge was no coincidence, for the three institutions (as well as a number of other leading private colleges) were acutely aware of one another’s actions and in constant communication.⁷⁵

As was demonstrated earlier, several elite private colleges were holding collective discussions on the “Jewish problem” as early as 1918. By 1922, Harvard’s widely publicized attempt to deal with the issue stimulated extensive private communication within the Big Three.⁷⁶ Instances of frank sharing of information abound; in 1926, for example, Yale College’s new dean (not yet formally in office), Clarence Whittlesey Mendell, visited Cambridge to gather information about Harvard’s admissions practices and was cordially received by President Lowell, Admissions Director Pennypacker, and other top administrators. In frank discussions, he learned that they were “going to reduce their 25% Hebrew total to 15% or less by simply rejecting without detailed explanation.”⁷⁷

This is not, of course, to suggest that Yale (or, for that matter, Princeton) was simply imitating Harvard’s actions on the Jewish question; in fact, institutional influence on this matter was reciprocal. Thus it was Yale that imposed a limit on the size of the freshman class in 1923; Harvard did not do so until 1926. And it was Yale that was first to establish a policy of preference for the children of alumni. This policy, still in effect (albeit in varying degrees) at all elite colleges, was approved by Yale in 1925 to reassure concerned alumni “that the limitation of numbers shall not operate to exclude any son of a Yale graduate who has satisfied all the requirements for admission.”⁷⁸

Though the mechanisms used to restrict Jewish enrollment at Harvard and Yale were virtually identical, there were nonetheless some important differences between the institutions in their response to the “Jewish problem.” Particularly noteworthy was the greater enthusiasm among the Yale College faculty (which did not tenure a Jew until 1940) for measures limiting the number of Jews. Administrators at Yale, however, seemed no more harsh in their attitudes towards “Hebrews” than their Harvard counterparts; Dean Corwin’s statement that “the local Jew . . . graduates into the world as naked of all attributes of refinement and honor as when born into it” might well have been made in Cambridge. Yet Yale students and alumni were perhaps even more disturbed by the influx of Jews than their Harvard confreres. An editorial in the March 30, 1926 *Yale Daily News*, while hardly providing definitive evidence, was perhaps expressive of the more hostile attitude towards Jews among Yale undergraduates: according to the editorial writer, unless greater emphasis was placed on the “character, personality, promise, and background of men who wish to enter the University,” the day would be “fast dawning”:

when potential captains of industry must absent themselves from the groves of academe and take up their unpurposeful studies elsewhere, while the intelligentsia of the approaching

renaissance Americanize even such an isolated province as Yale in a merciless competition for seats in the University. If this era is admitted, Yale will no longer be a heterogeneous group of average citizens, but will be essentially a brain plant.

Harvard, the editorial noted, was to be praised for making the submission of personal photographs by applicants mandatory. But Yale, the *Daily News* urged, “might go them one better and require applicants to submit photographs of their fathers also.”⁷⁹

Like Harvard and Yale, Princeton responded to the influx of Jews with strong measures to restrict their numbers. Yet Princeton’s “Jewish problem” was much less severe than that of its sister institutions; indeed, available evidence indicates that the proportion of Jews at no point rose above 5 percent during this period (see table I). A rural, club-dominated institution⁸⁰ whose long anti-Semitic tradition was well known, Princeton made Jews feel unwelcome, and relatively few of them even tried to get in.⁸¹ In contrast, then, to Harvard and even Yale, Princeton faced nothing approaching a “Hebrew invasion.” As a consequence, its relationship with its traditional upper class constituency was – unlike the situation in Cambridge and perhaps New Haven – in no real danger in the years after World War I.

Yet though “WASP flight”⁸² was not a genuine threat at Princeton, a highly restrictive Jewish quota was adopted nonetheless. In explaining this, an exclusive emphasis on “objective” organizational interests will simply not suffice, for there is no evidence that the tiny number of Jews on campus threatened to cost Princeton any strategic “resources,” whether in the form of large private donations or fee-paying, upper class “customers.” There is, however, an abundance of evidence that Princeton’s key administrators harbored intensely antagonistic feelings toward Jews⁸³ – feelings not uncommon at this particular historical moment among members of their status group. The stringent measures they adopted to limit the number of Jews embodied what might be referred to as *surplus exclusion* (i.e. exclusion above and beyond that explained by the pursuit of organizational interests).

Thus in 1924, when Princeton adopted a policy of restricting the Jewish proportion of the student body to 3 percent,⁸⁴ it did so as much out of sheer cultural antagonism as institutional self-interest. At both Harvard and Yale, WASP antipathy towards Jews was also no doubt an important force behind the administrative decision to limit the number of Jews. But these institutions – in contrast to Princeton – faced a “Jewish problem” of a magnitude sufficient to pose a genuine, albeit still potential, threat to vital organizational interests. With the chilling example of massive “WASP flight” from Columbia close at hand, even an administration composed of men utterly

free of personal anti-Semitic prejudice had to realize that an institution could reach an ethnic “tipping point” beyond which irreparable harm might be done to its historic ties to the Protestant upper class – and to its claims to preeminence.

Since Harvard and Yale did not, however, have prejudice-free administrations when the “Jewish problem” peaked, it is impossible to know whether such administrations could have resisted the very real organizational pressures they would doubtless have faced. But the case of Princeton – where organizational interests were much less threatened by an influx of Jews than at Harvard and Yale yet, paradoxically, the measures taken were much more harsh – is highly suggestive nonetheless. For though it is not a “counter-factual” in the strict sense of the term, the example of “surplus exclusion” at Princeton suggests, at the very least, that more was at work in the move toward ethnic closure than the maximization of organizational self-interest.⁸⁵

The Big Three During the Great Depression

Having decisively turned back the “Hebrew invasion” by the mid-1920s, the Big Three were to move even further down the road towards social closure during the years leading up to World War II. The sharp increase in the number of alumni children was perhaps the most revealing indicator of this trend; at Princeton, between 1930 and 1940, their proportion in the freshman class rose from 11.3 percent to 22.7 percent.⁸⁶ At Yale, which had played a pioneering role in the creation of a special and preferred category for alumni children, the pattern was even more dramatic; from 13.5 percent in 1924 and 21 percent in 1930, the proportion of “legacies” rose to 29.6 percent in 1936.⁸⁷ With direct inheritance of position so widespread, it is little wonder that the institutions of the Big Three came to be perceived as having many of the attributes of a private club.⁸⁸

As the Great Depression swept over America, competition for places at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton – which had been only moderately keen even in the boom years of the 1920s – took a sharp downturn. At Harvard, for example, 75.5 percent of all applicants were accepted in 1926; by 1930, this had climbed to 79.7 percent, and by 1940 it had reached 85.5 percent.⁸⁹ At Yale, where a large surplus of applicants in the 1920s would have permitted the College to at least double its size,⁹⁰ the proportion of candidates admitted in 1932 was 72.9 percent. And at Princeton, which in the 1920s typically selected a class of about six hundred from approximately 1200 applicants, 79 percent of all applicants were accepted in 1931.⁹¹

Despite their reputation for selectivity, then, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton were taking the overwhelming majority of those who applied during the Great Depression. For the students whom they most wished to attract – above all, the scions of the WASP upper class who had attended major boarding schools (with a leavening of clean-cut, hard-working Protestant boys from outside the Northeast) – competition among the institutions of the Big Three could actually be quite ferocious.⁹² For those deemed undesirable, however, the situation was quite different. These candidates, most of them Jewish, found the competition for admission very intense indeed; at Princeton, for example, only five of twenty-eight Jewish applicants were accepted in 1931 despite an overall acceptance of 79 percent.⁹³ Desperate though they may have been for qualified students, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton were not so desperate as to relax their covert Jewish quotas. Thus it was not surprising that the proportion of Jews at the Big Three remained constant during the 1930s: at Princeton around 3 percent, at Yale around 10 percent, and at Harvard in the vicinity of 15 percent.⁹⁴

While Jews were generally unwelcome at the Big Three during the Great Depression, the situation faced by the overwhelmingly Protestant graduates of the leading prep schools was quite the opposite. Faced with a declining pool of potential “paying customers” in the 1930s, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton were more dependent than ever on their traditional “feeder” schools. As a consequence, efforts were made to strengthen the already close ties that they enjoyed with elite boarding schools. At Yale, a tradition of annual visits to the most prominent private schools by the Director of Admissions was begun in 1933–1934. By 1937, according to historian George W. Pierson, “Yale’s relations with the leading prep schools were in better shape than anyone could remember.”⁹⁵

Though they educated only a tiny proportion of all high school graduates during the Depression, private schools provided Harvard, Yale, and Princeton with the great majority of their students. At Yale, the nation’s public high schools graduated between 18.4 and 26.1 percent of the freshmen during the 1930–1939 period;⁹⁶ at Princeton, the public schools provided only between 14 and 18 percent of all freshmen during the years between 1928 and 1935.⁹⁷ At Harvard, where commuters comprised over 20 percent of the freshman class, public schools played a markedly greater role, educating between 40 and 50 percent of all students during the Depression.⁹⁸ But life in Harvard’s House system – the unquestioned center of campus life in the 1930s – had a distinctly prep-school dominated character; from 1933 to 1939, those educated in “independent” schools ranged from 62 to 72 percent of all House applicants.⁹⁹

Among the large contingent of private-school students at the elite colleges, those who were graduates of a handful of the most prestigious boarding schools¹⁰⁰ had been courted most actively by the Big Three. Attracting these students – who were typically from well-to-do WASP families from New England and the Middle Atlantic states – was crucial to the organizational interests of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. For among these students were almost certain to be found the future major donors and distinguished alumni crucial to the maintenance of institutional preeminence.¹⁰¹ Admission to the Big Three was thus very close to automatic for the select few who attended these schools: in 1930 and 1940, of all applicants to Harvard from the top twelve prep schools, an astonishing 93.8 and 98.6 percent, respectively, were accepted (see table 2). Overall, a solid majority of the graduates of these schools attended the Big Three: in 1930, 66.4 percent and in 1940, 60.2 percent. And collectively, though the dozen most prestigious schools graduated no more students than a pair of middle-sized urban public high schools, they provided Harvard, Yale, and Princeton with a very substantial proportion of their incoming class: 27.0 percent of their freshman class in 1930 and 28.1 percent in 1940¹⁰² (see table 3).

TABLE 2

Applications and Acceptances to Harvard from Leading Preparatory Schools, Entering Classes of 1930 and 1940

School	1930			1940		
	<i>N</i> Applied	<i>N</i> Accepted	% Accepted	<i>N</i> Applied	<i>N</i> Accepted	% Accepted
Choate	9	8	88.9	11	11	100.0
Groton	19	19	100.0	17	17	100.0
Hill	2	1	50.0	3	3	100.0
Hotchkiss	3	3	100.0	7	7	100.0
Kent	3	3	100.0	6	5	83.3
Lawrenceville	2	2	100.0	4	3	75.0
Middlesex	21	21	100.0	9	9	100.0
Phillips Andover	28	26	92.9	43	42	97.7
Phillips Exeter	52	48	92.3	68	68	100.0
Saint George's	11	11	100.0	4	4	100.0
Saint Mark's	19	16	84.2	12	12	100.0
Saint Paul's	<u>26</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>96.2</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Total	195	183	93.8*	213	210	98.6**
Compare with rates for the class as a whole:						
All applicants	1237	982	79.7*	1234	1055	85.5**

Sources: For preparatory schools, Harvard Admissions Office; for all applicants, *Reports of the President of Harvard College* for given years. The figures are for applicants for admission as freshmen from secondary schools only.

* $Z = 4.89$, $p < 0.0001$

** $Z = 5.43$, $p < 0.0001$

TABLE 3
 Matriculants to Harvard, Yale, and Princeton from Top 12 Preparatory Schools, 1930 and 1940

School	1930						1940					
	H	Y	P	T	N entering college	% Big 3	H	Y	P	T	N entering college	% Big 3
Choate	10	19	21	50	90	55.6	10	34	16	60	120	50.0
Groton	19	6	1	26	29	89.7	16	6	0	22	26	84.6
Hill	1	17	18	36	60	60.0	3	9	25	37	121	30.6
Hotchkiss	2	42	21	65	76	85.5	6	59	5	70	90	77.8
Kent	3	14	18	35	42	83.3	4	14	9	27	62	43.5
Lawrenceville	2	19	59	80	110	72.7	3	19 ^b	54	76	145	52.4
Middlesex	20	1	1	22	24	91.7	7	4	4	15	23	65.2
Phillips Andover	26	74	14	114	190	60.0	39	67	23	129	214	60.3
Phillips Exeter	45	54	34	133	270	49.3	71	49	44	164	252	65.1
Saint George's	11	8	2	21	24	87.5	4	1	8	13	31	41.9
Saint Mark's	16	6	2	24	28	85.7	12	6	11	29	31	93.5
Saint Paul's	26	24 ^a	15	65	68	95.6	32	34	14	80	86	94.1
Total	181	284	206	671	1011	66.4	207	302	193	722	1200	60.2
Freshmen total	1001	850	631	2482			1067	861	645	2573		
% of freshmen	18.1	33.4	32.6	27.0			19.4	35.1	29.9	28.1		

Sources: Data on number of matriculants from individual prep schools are from the Harvard Admissions Office, *The Old Campus* (Yale), and "Preliminary Analysis of Freshman Class" (Princeton). Data on number of college entrants are from Porter Sargent, *Handbook of Private Schools* (Boston: Porter Sargent Publishers, 1931 and 1941). Data on the total number of freshmen are from the *Official Register of Harvard University*, George Wilson Pierson, Yale: *The University College, 1921-1937* (New Haven, CT.: Yale Univ. Press, 1955), and the *Official Register of Princeton University*.

^a Actual figure may differ slightly as several schools of this name sent students to Yale.

^b This figure is the average for 1930 and 1950.

Note: "T" stands for "total."

Outside of the graduates of the major boarding schools, the students most sought after by the Big Three were often from secondary schools in the Midwest, the South, and the West. The recipients of a disproportionately large chunk of the limited scholarship funds available, these students were crucial to Harvard, Yale, and Princeton's efforts to establish themselves as "national" institutions and hence received preferential treatment in the admissions process. That the regions from which they came were relatively free of Jews was hardly a coincidence; indeed as was shown earlier, the search for a solution to the "Jewish problem" and the search for a geographically diverse student body were historically inseparable.¹⁰³

Though Princeton and especially Yale made serious attempts to attract these students, it was Harvard, which under Conant established a program of generous "national scholarships" in 1934, that led the way in recruiting promising young men from the "provinces."¹⁰⁴ At the same time, however, that a small number of Harvard students benefited from "national scholarships," many more were admitted but effectively deprived of the chance to attend by being denied aid; in 1935, for example, of 189 students from the Midwest who applied for national scholarships, eleven were offered awards, another twenty-nine were offered other forms of aid, and 140 were admitted with no financial assistance whatsoever.¹⁰⁵

Since some of the national scholarship recipients were not poor – in 1936, ten of thirty-one recipients nationwide were from private schools¹⁰⁶ – the effect of these highly publicized awards in socially as opposed to geographically diversifying Harvard is open to serious question. Indeed as Levine notes, the most national of America's institutions of higher education tended to have the nation's most socially homogeneous student bodies.¹⁰⁷ In this context, it is possible to see national scholarship programs as, at least in part, attempts by the elite colleges to substitute predominantly Protestant students from distant regions for poor ethnic students, many of them Jewish, from closer to home.

Even with the prestigious national and regional awards included, the proportion of students at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton on scholarship during the Great Depression was quite small. At Yale, for example, only 21.5 percent of the 1935 freshman class was on scholarship, of whom fewer than one-fifth were on "regional scholarships."¹⁰⁸ Since awards at the Big Three during the 1930s were granted on the basis of "character" as well as academic performance, the institutions had considerable latitude in choosing recipients; if the pattern that prevailed at Columbia¹⁰⁹ was any indication, this latitude was used to award scholarships disproportionately to the children of native-born

TABLE 4
Occupational Distribution (by Percentage) of Students' Fathers: Harvard and Princeton,
1935 and 1936

Occupation	Harvard 1935	Princeton 1936	Male Labor Force 1940
Professionals: Total	39.7	40.7	5.8
Doctor/Dentist	9.1	6.2	
Lawyer/Judge	10.6	11.6	
College Prof./ Administrator	1.5	1.3	
Engineer	4.1	4.8	
Architect	1.0	1.7	
Science research	2.1	1.8	
Writer/ Artist/ Musician	3.7	1.8	
Journalist/ Publisher	—	1.8	
Secondary School	3.7	2.6	
Clergy	2.2	2.9	
Armed forces	0.6	1.1	
Government/ Diplomat	0.4	1.1	
Accountant	0.7	2.2	
Business: Total	45.2	51.4	8.6
Business executive	21.5	34.1	
Manager	1.8	2.0	
Self-employed: Non-store	10.4	1.1	
Advert./ Insur./ Real Estate	5.4	9.9	
Store owner	4.6	2.6	
Contractors	1.6	1.7	
Lower White-Collar: Total	6.7	4.8	12.2
Salesman/employee	5.4	3.5	
Clerical/office	1.3	1.2	
Blue Collar: Total	8.1	2.0	51.7
Public worker	2.5	0.2	
Skilled technician/ Craftsman	2.8	1.7	
Foreman/ Supervisor	0.7	—	
Laborer	2.1	0.2	
Farmer	0.5	1.1	21.7
Total percent	100.2 ^a	100.0	100.0
<i>N</i> of respondents	857	545	
<i>N</i> in class	1012	635	
Response rate percent	84.7	85.8	

^a Figures add to 100.2 percent because of rounding error.

Sources: National data computed from U.S. Department of Commerce, *National Statistics of the U.S.* (Government Printing Office, 1975), 139; Harvard, Freshman registration cards, 1935; Princeton, *The Freshman Herald*, 1936.

Protestant families.¹¹⁰ Overall, the elite colleges during the interwar period were, of course, far from being able to award scholarships to all qualified students with financial need. What the limited, but nonetheless considerable, resources at their disposal did permit them to do, however, was to use scholarship policy to shape the ethnic, social, and regional composition of their student body to bring it more closely into line with the contours of perceived organizational interests.

The net result of the admissions and scholarship policies pursued by the Big Three during the 1930s was a striking degree of social class closure. Access was effectively monopolized by the children of those engaged in business and professional occupations; at Harvard and Princeton in the mid-1930s, these groups provided well over four-fifths of the student body¹¹¹ (see table 4). Conversely, children of manual workers and farmers (who comprised almost three-fourths of the male labor force) were virtually excluded, providing under 9 percent of the students at Harvard and less than 5 percent at Princeton. Thus the Big Three during the Depression, despite the considerable talk about the importance of maintaining an economically diverse student body,¹¹² were in reality not at all far from being the private preserves of the nation's privileged classes.

Those who attended Harvard, Yale, or Princeton in the years before World War II were from families well endowed with cultural as well as economic capital. Perhaps the best indicator of the cultural level of families that sent their children to the Big Three during the Depression is their level of education – a level that was almost certainly far above average even among the well-to-do. Thus at Harvard in 1935, over 60 percent of the freshmen had fathers who had attended college, with over half of these having gone to Ivy League institutions (see table 5). At Princeton in 1936, over 68 percent of the fathers of entering students had attended college; of these, more than half had gone to Princeton or another of the Ivy League colleges. The frequency of college attendance among the fathers of Big Three students – who entered higher education at a time when well under 10 percent of the male population did so¹¹³ – indicates unmistakably that these students came from exceptionally well-educated families. But it is the *type* of college attended that is most revealing, for the extraordinary overrepresentation of fathers from a handful of Ivy League colleges is exactly what one would expect in a situation characterized by strong status-group closure.

TABLE 5
Educational Backgrounds of Fathers: Harvard and Princeton, 1935 and 1936

Entering class	Ivy League	Other college	No college	Total
Harvard (1935) % ^a	37.1	23.3	39.2	99.6 ^f
Princeton (1936) %	38.1 ^c	30.1	31.8	100.0
National rate for males in 1940 ^b	0.3 ^d	10.7 ^e	89.0	100.0

Sources: Harvard, freshman registration cards, 1935; Princeton, *The Freshman Herald*, 1936; National data, John K. Folger and Charles B. Nam, *Education of the American Population* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1967), 167.

^a Harvard statistics are drawn from a one-in-four sample.

^b Rates are for men aged 25 to 64 in 1940.

^c Of the 38.1% whose fathers attended an Ivy League college, more than half (22.7% of the entire freshman class) attended Princeton.

^d This figure is an estimate; the actual figure could be slightly lower.

^e The actual figure drawn from Folger and Nam is 11.0%; the 10.7% figure is reached by subtracting the maximal estimate of Ivy League alumni, 0.3%, from 11.0%.

^f Contains 0.4% missing data.

Harvard, Yale, and Princeton between the Wars and the Problem of Educational Change: Concluding Discussion

Open to all who could pass their entrance examinations in the years immediately after World War I, the Big Three had, by the mid-1920s, closed their doors to those scholastically qualified students who did not meet their newly instituted non-academic criteria. The force behind this major shift was clear: the traditional system of admission-by-examination, long a fixture of institutional policy, was now permitting socially “undesirable” students – many of them Jews – to enter in distressingly large numbers. Harvard, Yale, and Princeton were thus faced with a fundamental choice: to maintain time-honored admissions procedures governed by exclusively academic criteria and to live with the unwelcome results, or to abandon these procedures. That the latter alternative triumphed decisively at all at the Big Three institutions points strongly towards a generalization that might be called the “iron law” of admissions practices: an institution will retain a particular *process* of selection¹⁴ only so long as it produces *outcomes* that correspond to perceived organizational interests.

The new process of selection introduced at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton in the 1920s greatly expanded the discretionary power of their admissions offices and thereby made possible a considerably greater degree of status-group closure than existed in the years immediately after World War I. Religious origin, in particular, came to play a critical role in determining who

would be permitted to enter the gates of the Big Three, and by the end of the decade quotas restricting the number of Jews were firmly in place. The arrival of the Great Depression, if anything, accelerated already powerful trends towards closure; thus, on the eve of American entry into World War II, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton were in many ways even more exclusive socially than they had been two decades before.

What happened at the Big Three during the period between World War I and World War II cannot, therefore, be understood in terms of functionalist theories postulating an inherent trend in industrial societies away from “particularism” and “ascription” towards “universalism” and “achievement.”¹¹⁵ On the contrary, the very timing of ethnically exclusionary measures points to the inadequacy of such formulations, for it was in the 1920s – a time of enormous business expansion and rapid rationalization of industry which should, according to functionalist theory, have been accompanied by a trend toward greater openness – that the decisive measures towards increased social closure were put into effect. A functionalist framework is, moreover, unable to explain why a time span of over twenty years saw a growth rather than a decline in the prerogatives of birth at the nation’s three most prestigious educational institutions. Instead, by seeing a trend toward “meritocracy” as built into the very logic of “industrialism,” such a framework directs attention away from precisely those concrete historical processes that can lead to sharp reversals in the supposedly inevitable march towards “universalism.”

The framework proposed here, in contrast, focuses upon group struggle – whether between contending classes or status groups – as a major source of educational change. Frequently, such struggles occur, as a Marxist model would predict, between antagonistic social classes; educational policy in Chicago during the first quarter of this century, to take but one example, was to a large extent a product of the conflict between capital and labor.¹¹⁶ But in other cases, especially in an ethnically and racially heterogeneous society such as the United States, struggles are often, as a Weberian framework would suggest, along status-group rather than class lines. In the particular case under study here – the transformation of the Big Three during the interwar years – a simple Marxist model clearly does not suffice; among other things, it cannot explain why the central movement of the period – the move towards greater social closure – erected barriers against even upper-class Jews at the same time that it facilitated the entry of middle-class Protestants. Instead, what is needed to understand this transformation is an approach that does not reduce ethnic and religious struggles to underlying class antagonisms.¹¹⁷

In addition to group struggle, the framework proposed here emphasizes shifting organizational interests as a major source of educational change. Viewed from this angle, institutions such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton are seen as organizations with their own distinct institutional interests. They pursue these interests, however, within a context of external constraints – constraints that, depending upon their severity, can lead to radically differing amounts of institutional autonomy.

Competing status groups and social classes, for their part, often carry out their struggles through – and sometimes over – organizations. Attempts to monopolize valued social and economic opportunities are, as Weber noted, characteristic features of status groups; institutions such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton – which regulate, to a considerable degree, access to elite segments of the labor market – are, therefore, natural objects of struggle between rival groups. Generally speaking, an organization is unlikely to maintain a neutral stance during such struggles; instead, it will typically tilt towards whichever group controls more of the resources that it needs to pursue its own institutional interests.¹¹⁸ And to the extent that it is ultimately dependent on a single such group for needed resources, it is likely to be effectively under the control of that group.

An understanding of the constraints faced by the Big Three goes a long way towards explaining their response to the “Jewish problem.” As organizations largely dependent upon a single source – the Protestant upper class – for indispensable resources, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton were very poorly situated indeed to remain apart from the broader status-group struggle then raging between WASPs and Jews for access to scarce and highly valued educational and occupational opportunities. On the contrary, the Big Three institutions, especially Harvard and Yale, were a crucial site of this struggle, and the entry into them in the years immediately after World War I of substantial numbers of Jews posed a genuine threat to fundamental organizational interests. For the truth of the matter was that a rapid influx of Jews really did threaten to produce “WASP flight”; indeed, such an exodus had already occurred at Columbia – and with devastating consequences for that institution’s standing in higher education’s pecking order.

Faced with the specter of a similar eventuality at their own institutions, it is hardly surprising that Harvard and Yale moved decisively to limit the enrollment of Jews; given their dependency on the Protestant upper class, there was considerable logic to their choice. The decision to impose quotas was, to be sure, made in the very midst of an atmosphere rife with ethnic and religious prejudice. At the same time, however, it is essential to realize that

the constraints were such that even prejudice-free administrators whose sole concern was to maximize organizational interests would have been under enormous pressure to do the same thing.¹¹⁹

Yet organizational factors, critical though they may be, do not explain the sheer magnitude of the exclusionary measures adopted by the Big Three in the interwar years. The pursuit of organizational interests, it might well be argued, pointed strongly in the direction of not permitting the number of Jews to reach a “tipping point” beyond which “WASP flight” would occur; it is difficult to see, however, how organizational factors impelled Princeton, where the proportion of Jews had never reached even 5 percent of the student body and where an exodus of upper-class Protestants was hardly imminent, to fix the Jewish quota at 3 percent. Yet if the case of Princeton suggests the existence of “surplus exclusion” at the Big Three, this is not to say that such exclusion was a random phenomenon. For a degree of social closure that may be “excessive” from an organizational point of view may be quite rational from a status-group perspective; indeed, to the extent that status groups characteristically operate so as to restrict opportunities to members of their own group, no amount of exclusion can be excessive.

Status-group struggle was thus a central force behind the movement toward greater social closure at the Big Three between the wars. Organizational interests did, to be sure, play a crucial role in the process, but these interests were themselves bounded by – and partially defined in terms of – status-group conflict. Unlike in later periods,¹²⁰ when a multiplicity of sources – the federal government, private foundations, and an expanding suburban upper-middle class – supplied needed resources,¹²¹ Harvard, Yale, and Princeton were at this time utterly dependent on the Protestant upper class. As a consequence of this radical lack of institutional autonomy, the line between organizational interests and status-group interests was difficult to draw; to a considerable extent, what was good for the Protestant Establishment really was good for the Big Three.

The fact that the administrations of the elite colleges were not only dependent upon, but actually staffed by members of the dominant status group gave added impetus to the trend towards increased social closure. It would thus be a gross violation of the historical record to depict Harvard, Yale, and Princeton as reluctant participants in a broader movement of ethnic exclusion, forced by external pressures too difficult to withstand into implementing policies that they did not favor. Instead, a more accurate portrait would paint them as organizations so tied at that historical moment to the outlook and interests of the Protestant upper class that they readily volunteered for service on behalf of its interests and eagerly embraced its fundamental goals.

The legacy of this period of intense status-group struggle is with us still. A remarkable number of the features of elite college selection familiar today – the emphasis on “character” and “geographical diversity,” the widespread use of interviews and photos, the preference for alumni sons and athletes, and the constant creation of new categories of inclusion and exclusion – have their roots in this period. Though the procedures and criteria developed at that time are used differently today, their most fundamental feature remains the same: institutional discretion is wielded within the confines of a definition of “merit” that, albeit now stripped of its more overtly ascriptive trappings, effectively ensures that dominant groups will continue to be its main beneficiaries.

NOTES

1. The term “Big Three” originated in the mid-1880s in reference not to Harvard, Yale and Princeton’s academic or social prestige, but rather their renowned football teams. Throughout the current paper, the term “Big Three” will be used interchangeably with “Harvard, Yale and Princeton.”
2. George W. Pierson, *The Education of American Leaders: Comparative Contributions of U.S. Colleges and Universities* (New York: Praeger: 1969).
3. While the current study presents considerable new evidence on the admissions practices of the elite colleges between the wars, it has also benefited enormously from the labors of other scholars working in this area. Of the existing literature, three works are worthy of particular mention: Marcia Graham Synnott’s *The Half-Opened Door: Discrimination and Admissions at Harvard, Yale and Princeton, 1900–1970* (Westport, CT: The Greenwood Press, 1979), based on her meticulous 1974 doctoral dissertation “A History of Admissions Policies at Harvard, Yale and Princeton, 1900–1930,” Department of History, University of Massachusetts; Harold Wechsler’s *The Qualified Student: A History of Selective College Admission in America* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1977), a general history of admissions in American higher education that includes an excellent account of the imposition of Jewish quotas at Columbia; David Levine’s doctoral dissertation “The Functions of Higher Education in American Society Between World War I and World War II,” Department of History, Harvard University, 1981 – a work of broad sweep on American colleges between World War I and World War II that includes an illuminating analysis of the rise of Jewish quotas at Dartmouth. Together, these works suggest that the policies adopted by the Big Three during this period, far from being aberrant, were generally similar to those of a far larger group of elite private colleges.
4. Max Weber, “On Education,” in B. R. Cosin, ed., *Education: Structure and Society* (London: The Open University Press, 1972), 28.
5. *Ibid.*, 234.
6. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London & Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1977), 9.
7. *Ibid.*, 9. Bourdieu’s concept of the “cultural arbitrary,” while informing the framework developed in this paper, nonetheless has several serious limitations. First – and perhaps foremost – it makes the implicit assumption that dominant groups are incapable of misperceiving their “objective interests” (a term which itself tends to reify a complex process of cultural construction). Yet such an assumption seems as untenable in the cultural realm as it is in the political and economic domains. Second, the concept of the “cultural arbitrary” – and the larger theory of reproduction of which it is a part – grossly underestimates the capacity of subordinate groups to resist the cultural impositions (and “symbolic violence”) of dominant groups. And thirdly, in contrast to Weber, it one-sidedly emphasizes the apparently boundless character of cultural arbitrariness. Yet as Weber’s writings on political sociology make clear, particular “structures of domination” have characteristic “modes of legitimation.” For illuminating assessments of Bourdieu’s massive *oeuvre*, see Paul DiMaggio, “Review Essay On Pierre Bourdieu,” *American Journal of Sociology* 84 (May 1979): 1460–1474 and David Swartz, “Pierre Bourdieu: The Cultural Transformation of Social Inequality,” *Harvard Educational Review* 47 (November 1977):

- 544–555, and “Classes, Educational Systems and Labor Markets,” *European Journal of Sociology* XXII (1981): 325–353; for critiques of his theory of reproduction, see Paul Willis “Cultural Production is Different From Cultural Reproduction is Different From Social Reproduction is Different From Reproduction,” *Interchange* 12 (1981), Michael W. Apple, *Education and Power* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982) and Henry A. Giroux, “Theories of Reproduction and Resistance in the New Sociology of Education: A Critical Analysis,” *Harvard Educational Review* 53 (August 1983): 257–293.
8. A particularly dramatic example of such a challenge to the cultural ideals and institutional practices of dominant groups was the mobilization of blacks in the 1960s against the admissions policies of the elite colleges. The result of the mobilization – which occurred in a broader context of political and ideological struggle – was a sharp increase in the number of blacks and the creation of a new category of inclusion: that of the “minority student.” For an official account of these changes at Harvard and a discussion of some of the problems they posed inside the institution, see Office of the Dean of Students, “A Study of Race Relations at Harvard College,” Harvard University, May 1980.
 9. Randall Collins, “Functional and Conflict Theories of Educational Stratification,” *American Sociological Review* 36 (December 1971): 1009.
 10. Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, eds., (University of California Press, 1978), 342.
 11. *Ibid.*, 935.
 12. Randall Collins, “Functional and Conflict Theories”; Randall Collins, *The Credential Society: An Historical Sociology of Education and Stratification* (New York: Academic, 1979).
 13. Frank Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 49.
 14. *Ibid.*, 44–45. 15. *Ibid.*, 46.
 16. Ira Katznelson, “Considerations on Social Democracy in the United States,” *Comparative Politics* 11 (October 1978): 77–99.
 17. See Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).
 18. Such an error is structurally homologous to the error made by analysts of the state – Marxist and pluralist alike – who see state policy as reflecting nothing more than the distribution of power among competing groups in civil society. For penetrating critiques of such views, which fail to see the state as having autonomous interests and as frequently acting as an “organization in itself,” see Fred Block, “The Ruling Class Does Not Rule: Notes on the Marxist Theory of the State,” *Socialist Revolution* 7 (May–June 1977): 6–28 and Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), and “Bringing the State Back In: False Leads and Promising Starts In Current Theories and Research,” in *Bringing the State Back In*, eds. Peter Evans, Theda Skocpol and Dietrich Rueschmeyer (New York: Cambridge University Press; forthcoming).
 19. Collins, “Functional and Conflict Theories of Educational Stratification,” and *The Credential Society*.
 20. See Howard Aldrich, *Organizations and Environments* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1979).
 21. See Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald R. Salancik, *The External Control of Organizations: A Resource Dependence Perspective* (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1978).
 22. For an example of such a case, see the analysis of the processes leading to the adoption of admissions at the City University of New York by Jerome Karabel, “The Politics of Structural Change in American Higher Education: The Case of Open Admissions at the City University of New York,” in *The “Compleat” University: Break from Tradition in Three Countries*, eds. Harry Hermanns et al. (Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1984), 21–58.
 23. Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977), Steven B. Levine, “The Rise of American Boarding Schools and the Development of a National Upper Class,” *Social Problems* 28 (October 1980): 64–94, and Marcia Graham Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*.
 24. George W. Pierson, *Yale: The University College, 1921–1937* (New Haven, CT.: Yale Univ. Press, 1955), 670.
 25. See Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636* and Steven B. Levine, “The Rise of the American Boarding Schools: A Study in the Influence of Elite Education on the Structure of the Upper Class” (Senior Honors Thesis, Department of Social Studies, Harvard University, 1978).
 26. Even at Harvard, the member of the Big Three most open to graduates of public high schools, prep-school students were in the majority; between 1919 and 1921, for example, they fluctuated between 53.5 to 56.5 percent of the freshman class (Henry Pennypacker, “Report of the Chairman of the Committee on Admission,” *Official Register of Harvard University* XIX (1922), 304). At Yale, the figures for first-time freshmen during the same pe-

- riod varied from 69.6 to 75.8 percent. And at Princeton, the most prep-school oriented of the three, the proportion of private-school students fluctuated between 70 and 90 percent from the turn of the century all the way until the 1940s (see Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 5).
27. In general, the class composition of public high schools during this period was overwhelmingly non-manual (see G. S. Counts, *The Selective Character of American Secondary Education* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1922)). There were, however, important exceptions: Boston Latin, an important Harvard “feeder” school, was one such case and apparently enrolled a substantial number of students from immigrant, working-class backgrounds (see Philip Marson, *Breeder of Democracy* (Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing, Inc., 1963)).
 28. Henry Pennypacker, “The Committee on Admission,” *Official Register of Harvard University XXIV* (1927), 297–304.
 29. See Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History*, (N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1962); Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1965); Paula S. Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1977); and Stephen Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity and Class in America* (N.Y.: Atheneum, 1981).
 30. Thorstein Veblen, *The Higher Learning in America: A Memorandum on the Conduct of Universities by Business Men* (N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 1957), 88.
 31. Paul S. Burnham and Benjamin A. Hewitt, “Thirty-Year Follow-Up of Male College Students” (Washington, D.C.: Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare, May 1967).
 32. The proportion of Catholics at the Big Three during this period was small: at Yale, the class of 1912 enrolled 30 Catholics out of 357 students; at Princeton, the number of Catholic freshmen did not reach 30 until 1913 and 40 until 1924 (out of a freshman class of 629). Harvard apparently enrolled a somewhat greater number of Catholics (250 students were in the campus St. Paul’s Club in 1911–1912). The exclusion of blacks during this period was virtually total; indeed, at Princeton, the member of the Big Three with the closest historic ties to the Southern upper class, the first black student did not enroll until 1945 (see Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 219). And at Yale and Harvard the situation was not very different; perusals of photos in the freshman facebooks and senior yearbooks during the interwar period reveal that well under one percent of the student body at both institutions was black.
 33. These generalizations are based on the results of studies conducted by Yale and Harvard in the early 1920s on the backgrounds and behavior patterns of their Jewish students. One of the most interesting findings of these studies, which were carried out by campus authorities as part of a larger inquiry into the “Jewish problem” at their institutions, concerned the “nationality” of the Jewish students; at Yale, 135 of the Jews who entered between 1907 and 1918 were “Russian” compared to only 82 “Americans” and 33 “Germans.” At Harvard in 1908, of those Jews who were either foreign-born or the children of immigrants, “Russian” Jews outnumbered “German” Jews 71 to 11 (see Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 39, 144).
 34. See E. Digby Baltzell, *The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy and Caste in America* (N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1964).
 35. John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860–1925*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955) and *Send These to Me: Jews and Other Immigrants in Urban America* (N.Y.: Atheneum, 1975).
 36. Higham, *Strangers in the Land*; Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 35.
 37. Levine, “The Functions of Higher Education.”
 38. Pierre Bourdieu, Luc Boltanski, and Monique de Saint Martin, “Les stratégies de reconversion: les classes sociales et la système d’enseignement,” *Social Science Information* 12 (1973): 61–113, and Pierre Bourdieu and Luc Boltanski, “Changes in Social Structure and Changes in the Demand for Education,” in *Contemporary Europe: Social Structure and Cultural Patterns*, eds. Salvador Giner and Margaret Scotford Archer (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).
 39. E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen* (New York: Free Press, 1958) and *The Protestant Establishment*, 1964; Steven B. Levine, “The Rise of American Boarding Schools and the Development of a National Upper Class,” *Social Problems* 28 (October 1980): 64–94.
 40. See also Collins, “Functional and Conflict Theories” and *The Credential Society*.
 41. Harold S. Wessler, *The Qualified Student* and Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*. According to Wechsler’s meticulous account of the matter, the heavy influx of Jews at Columbia between 1900 and 1920 was, in fact, an important source of that institution’s precipitously declining ability to attract the children of the New York upper-class – and of its corresponding decline in status (see 131–185 and also Gene R. Hawes, “The Colleges of America’s Upper Class,” *Saturday Review* (Nov. 16, 1963): 68–71). During the period in which this decline occurred, President Lowell of Harvard echoed this analysis; in a letter to some members of the Harvard faculty, he likened the situation at Columbia to the case of a hotel where the arrival of a large number of Jewish guests had the effect of driving the Gentiles away (Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 62–63).

42. Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*.
43. According to Wechsler, Jews constituted 40 percent or more of the student body prior to the imposition of quotas, *The Qualified Student*, 63.
44. Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, and Wechsler, *The Qualified Student*. During the academic year 1915–1916, Amherst's and Wesleyan's Jewish enrollment were, respectively, 3.2 and 1.7 percent (*American Jewish Yearbook 5678: September 1917–1918* ed. Samohn Oppenheim (Jewish Publication Society of America, 1917), 407–408); at Williams in 1917–1918, 1.4 percent of the students were Jews (*American Jewish Yearbook 5681: September 1919–September 1920*, ed. Schneiderman (Jewish Publishing Society of America, 1920), 389). A revealing indication of Williams' upper class character is its extraordinary over-representation among men listed in the 1963 New York Social Register; despite its tiny size, it trailed only Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, and placed ahead of much larger – but more Jewish – institutions such as Columbia and the University of Pennsylvania (Hawes, "The Colleges of America's Upper Class," 69).
45. Levine, "The Functions of Higher Education." A similar pattern – an increase in the number of Jews followed by a decline in the number of students from the local upper class – was also manifest at University of Chicago and Western Reserve, though at a somewhat later date. For an account of these cases, see Levine, "The Functions of Higher Education," 193–194.
46. There were, to be sure, some notable exceptions to this pattern. Former Harvard President Charles W. Eliot, a man of unimpeachable Brahmin background, vigorously opposed his successor A. Lawrence Lowell's attempts to impose a Jewish quota at Harvard and fought vigorously at the national level against attempts to restrict immigration (see Hugh Hawkins, *Between Harvard and America: The Educational Leadership of Charles W. Eliot* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972)). That Lowell triumphed on both matters may testify to the "rapports de force" on such issues within the dominant status group.
47. Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 59.
48. Alfred Kazin, in his lyrical autobiographical memoir, *A Walker in the City* (N.Y.: Harvest, 1951), 19–20, offers a telling portrait of the terror that evaluations of "character" could arouse among children of Eastern European Jews in the 1920s: "It was not just our quickness and memory that were always being tested. Above all, in that word I could never hear without automatically seeing it raised before me in gold-plated letters, it was our character. I always felt anxious when I heard the word pronounced. Satisfactory as my "character" was, on the whole, except when I stayed too long in the playground reading; outrageously satisfactory, as I can see now, the very sound of the word as our teachers coldly gave it out from the end of their teeth, with a solemn weight on each dark syllable, immediately struck my heart cold with fear – they could not believe I really had it. Character was never something you had; it had to be trained in you, like a technique. I was never very clear about it. On our side character meant demonstrative obedience; but teachers already had it – how else could they have become teachers? They had it; the aloof Anglo-Saxon principal whom we remotely saw only on ceremonial occasions in the assembly was positively encased in it; it glittered off his bald head in spokes of triumphant light. . . . Thus someday the hallowed diploma, passport to further advancement in high school, but there – I could already feel it in my bones – they would put me through even more doubting tests of character; and after that, if I should be good enough and bright enough, there would be still more. Character was a bitter thing, racked with endless striving to please."
49. Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 60.
50. Seymour Martin Lipset, "Political Controversies at Harvard, 1636 to 1974," in *Education and Politics at Harvard*, eds. Seymour Martin Lipset and David Riesman (McGraw Hill, 1975), 146. Cheating and theft apparently did not, however, exhaust the possibilities for Jewish moral violation, for information was also gathered on the ethnic distribution of "sexual offenses." Here, it seems, Jews were guilty as charged. According to the results of a comprehensive statistical report, the Jewish student was "more prone" to "sexual offenses." More likely to be "dishonest" as well, the Jewish student was, however, "much less addicted to intemperance" (Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 85).
51. Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 65.
52. *Ibid.*, 69.
53. No investigation followed, perhaps because more than 150 Harvard graduates had seats in the state legislature (Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 77). Yet protests continued unabated, and the Harvard affair was the object of extensive coverage in *The New York Times*, *The Nation*, *Literary Digest*, and other media organs. For an illuminating account of the storm of controversy that followed the deliberation of the Harvard faculty in the spring of 1922, see Steinberg (*The Ethnic Myth*, 238–246).
54. "No Racial Discrimination at Harvard," *Harvard Bulletin* XXV (April 12, 1923), 826.
55. *Ibid.*, 829–830.

56. Like many, but by no means all, German Jews of the period, Lippmann was deeply worried that the entry of large numbers of East European Jews in the elite colleges threaten to engulf all Jews, however assimilated and upper class, in a wave of anti-Semitism. Such attitudes were not unique to Lippmann; at Williams and Dartmouth, for example, upper-class Jewish alumni played an active role in screening out “undesirable” (i.e. East European) Jewish candidates. Indeed, at Dartmouth, Jewish alumni actually volunteered to work with the Dean of Admissions to weed out inappropriate Jewish applicants and expressed satisfaction that, by 1933, Dartmouth was attracting the better type of Jews rather than “. . . the Brooklyn and Flatbush crowd” (Levine, “The Functions of American Higher Education,” 189). Lippmann’s own attitudes toward his lower-status Polish and Russian brethren is indicated in a published remark: “I worry about upper Broadway on a Sunday afternoon where everything that is feverish and unventilated in the congestion of a city rises up as a warning that you cannot build up a decent civilization among people who, when they are at last, after centuries of denial, free to go to the land and cleanse their bodies, now huddle together in a steam-heated slum.” (Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1980), 192). Ironically, Lippmann himself had been a victim of anti-Semitism when he was at Harvard. A member of the class of 1910 and the son of an impeccably upper-class German-Jewish family, Lippmann was – like his Jewish classmates – totally excluded from Harvard’s elaborate system of “finals’ clubs” (Steel, *Walter Lippmann*).
57. Quoted in Steven Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth*, 247.
58. Wechsler, *The Qualified Student*.
59. Levine, “The Functions of Higher Education,” 145–196.
60. Lawrence Veysey, “Undergraduate Admissions: Past and Future,” in *Marketing in College Admissions: A Broadening of Perspectives* ed. The College Board (CEEB, 1980), 9.
61. Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 107.
62. In a December 1925 letter to an alumnus, Lowell wrote that he “was not wholly wrong in trying to limit the proportion of Jews.” In a postscript, however, he added: “My plan was crude, and its method very probably unwise” (quoted in Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 106).
63. Quoted in Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth*, 248.
64. *The Half-Opened Door*, 106–110.
65. Wechsler, *The Qualified Student*; Levine, “The Functions of Higher Education.”
66. The utility of photos was apparently not limited to ethnic identification; at Dartmouth, according to Dean of Admissions E. G. Bill, they were helpful in weeding out Jewish applicants “of a physical type that is unattractive to the average Dartmouth student” (Levine, “The Functions of Higher Education,” 187).
67. Within the framework of this paper, the very categories used to classify candidates for admission should be viewed as products of both group struggle and changing organizational interests. Classificatory schema are never neutral; they may, for example, create special admission categories with “target numbers” for alumni children and prep-school students at the same time that they fail to do so for disadvantaged whites. Frequently, changes in systems of classification follow the mobilization of previously excluded groups – the incorporation of blacks and Hispanics in the 1960s and 1970s by Big-Three institutions are cases-in-point. For illuminating theoretical discussions of systems of classification as objects of group struggle that, in turn, exert important effects on the distribution of power and privilege (and on the capacity of groups to mobilize to defend or advance their interests), see Pierre Bourdieu and Luc Boltanski’s “Formal Qualifications and Occupational Hierarchies: The Relationship Between the Production System and the Reproduction System” in *Reorganizing Education* Volume 1, ed. Edward Sage (London & Beverly Hills: Sage, 1977), Adam Przeworski’s “Proletariat into A Class: The Process of Class Formation from Karl Kautsky’s *The Class Struggle* to Recent Controversies,” *Politics and Society* 7 (1977): 343–400, Luc Boltanski “Taxonomies sociales et luttes de classes: la mobilisation de ‘la classe moyenne’ et l’invention des ‘cadres,’” *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* (September 1979), 75–105, and Boltanski *Les cadres: la formation d’un groupe social* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1982); for a revealing discussion on the role of “categorical advantage” in Harvard admissions in recent years, see David Karen’s “Social Closure in Education: The Case of Harvard Admissions,” presented September 1, 1983 at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Detroit.
68. Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 258.
69. In emphasizing “manliness” and athletic prowess, the elite colleges were doing more than adding considerations to the admissions process likely to affect Jews adversely; they were borrowing a distinctly Anglo-Saxon ideal of character development through sports. This notion, utterly alien to continental universities, was quite central to British educational institutions, especially those dominated by the upper class. For sport, it was widely believed, was the ideal instrument for imbuing in young patricians a strong sense of “fair play” and instilling in them qualities of “leadership.”

70. Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth*, 231.
71. Writing to a disheartened New York alumnus, concerned that his children, who were “taught to be good rather than clever,” would be unable to “compete with the new element,” Lowell assured him that “the Americans” could “compete with the Hebrews . . . and win when they choose to do so; but a great part of our American boys from well-to-do families are brought up to believe that in their early years they should not work hard, but play rather than labor” (quoted in Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 79–80). Interestingly, however, the image of the brilliant and precocious Jewish student co-existed with another, quite different stereotype: that of the relentless Jewish “grind.” It was this latter image that led Columbia University to turn in 1919 to the newly devised “intelligence tests” then sweeping America as a means of limiting the number of Jews. The superior academic performance of Jewish students, university officials suspected, reflected not native intelligence, but rather a low-grade capacity to memorize material after long hours of study and then to regurgitate it; intelligence tests, they reasoned, would therefore show Jews to be lacking in native aptitude (as had seemingly been demonstrated by the low scores of “Russians,” overwhelmingly Jewish, on the famous Army Alpha tests administered during World War I). Columbia’s apparently ingenious plan for restricting Jewish enrollment foundered, however, on the unanticipated equality of Jewish and Gentile performances on these tests. Other means were, accordingly, found to stem the “Hebrew invasion,” and by 1921 the proportion of Jews had been reduced to 22 percent from a high of about 40 percent just a few years before (Wechsler, *The Qualified Student*, 158–168). It is an enduring irony that standardized tests of “aptitude,” now so vigorously defended by Jewish organizations, were first used at the elite colleges with the intent of ethnic exclusion.
72. Quoted in Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 63.
73. By 1936 – and probably as early as 1927 – Harvard specifically excluded from its highest seventh plan applicants from Long Island, eastern New York, and New Jersey. Harvard’s Dean of Admissions, Richard Gummere, in response to a letter requesting information about the highest seventh plan from Princeton’s Director of Admissions, Radcliffe Heermance, explained the pattern of exclusion clearly, albeit euphemistically: “if we seem to be getting a preponderance of an undesirable type from any particular locality, we cut out the whole locality. There are times, consequently, when we are not very popular in certain quarters, and there is much wailing and gnashing of teeth, but we stand to our guns” (quoted in Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 193).
74. Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 125–198.
75. To cite but one example of such communication among the elite colleges, Yale’s Chairman of Admissions Robert N. Corwin, in obtaining information for Yale’s Committee on Limitation of Numbers, wrote letters to Brown, Columbia, Dartmouth, Princeton, Vassar, and Williams. (Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 151).
76. Communication among elite college administrators was facilitated by shared status-group membership. The men who presided over Harvard, Yale, and Princeton not only made common cultural assumptions; they frequently traveled in the same social circles. Thus in 1922, in the midst of Harvard’s great controversy about Jewish enrollment, Yale’s Chairman of Admissions, Robert N. Corwin, asked his colleague Frederick Scheetz Jones, Dean of Yale College, to convey to Harvard’s Dean of Admissions, Henry Pennypacker, his “hope that the Hebraic question is not interfering with his summer’s rest.” Both Jones and Pennypacker, it seems, were summering on Cape Cod, in or near the town of Chatham. As for Jones’s own sentiments on matters ethnic, his note to Corwin written later that same summer, speaks for itself: “Yours rec’s. *Too many Freshmen!* How many Jews among them? and are there any *Coons?* Pennypacker is here & much disturbed over the Jew problem at Harvard. *Don’t let any colored transfers get rooms in College. I am having a big rest*” (quoted in Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 141–142, emphasis in the original).
77. Quoted in Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 110, 153–154.
78. Quoted in Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 152.
79. Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 147–159.
80. F. Scott Fitzgerald (who had himself entered Princeton in 1913) captures its atmosphere brilliantly in his novel, *This Side of Paradise* (New York: Scribner’s, 1920). Its protagonist, Amory Blaine, explains his choice of Princeton after attending the exclusive prep school, St. Regis (a thinly veiled pseudonym for St. Paul’s), as follows: “Princeton drew him most, with its atmosphere of bright colors and its alluring reputation as the pleasantest country club in America.”
81. Edwin E. Slosson, *Great American Universities* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1910); Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 160–198.
82. “WASP flight” may be defined as the proclivity of upper-class Protestants to abandon an institution (e.g. a college, club, neighborhood, or vacation resort) in the face of entry into it by members of a low-status ethnic group. Structurally, it is strikingly similar to “white flight” – a term that has been used to describe the tendency of whites to flee public schools facing large-scale integration. In the cases of both “WASP flight” and “white

- flight," there is evidence that institutions may reach a "tipping point" beyond which the further entry of members of the "outgroup" (typically Jews in the first case and blacks in the second) will cause members of the dominant group to abandon them.
83. Princeton's Radcliffe Heermance, who presided over that institution's office of admissions from 1922 until 1950, had a strong antipathy towards Jews. An old-stock Protestant who had graduated from Williams College, he championed the virtues of "manliness," "character," and athletic prowess and on several occasions expressed dislike and distrust of Jewish students. During the almost three decades of Heermance's tenure as Director of Admissions, the proportion of Jews at Princeton hovered around 3 percent and did not rise above 5 percent until 1948 (Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 7–8, 181–182, 195–197, 222).
 84. As was the case at Harvard and Yale, there was a sharp divergence at Princeton between a public posture of non-discrimination towards Jews and a private institutional reality of a quota. Sometimes this posture was maintained even in private conversations with fellow college administrators. Thus, in the early 1930s, when University of Chicago President Robert M. Hutchins was lunching with Princeton President John Grier Hibben and asked about the number of Jewish students, Hibben replied that about 200 were enrolled. When a clearly skeptical Hutchins asked about the number the previous year, Hibben replied: "About two hundred." I asked how many there were the year before that. He said, "About two hundred." I said that was very odd and asked how it happened. He said he didn't know; it just happened. Mrs. Hibben was outraged and said, "Jack Hibben, I don't see how you can sit there and lie to this young man. You know very well that you and Dean Eisenhart get together every year and fix the quota" (quoted in Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 196). At the moment when this conversation took place, the actual number of Jews at Princeton was about 65 (computed from Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 195).
 85. The inadequacy of formulations that exclusively stress the pursuit of organizational interest is perhaps demonstrated most vividly by an incident that occurred at Dartmouth in 1933. In March of that year Dartmouth faced a clear choice: either fail to fill the freshman class of 650 (presumably a clear violation of organizational interest) or waive the Jewish quota (set the previous year at under 6 percent). Dartmouth president Ernest M. Hopkins did not hesitate in making a decision; better, he declared, not to accept a class of 650 than to violate the quota. The solution, Hopkins suggested to Director of Admissions E. G. Bill, was for Dartmouth to consider admitting a number of "just the plain, ordinary bohunks such as it used to do" to meet the target figure. But Bill, alas, had already tried this; every Gentile applicant who had been judged capable of surviving academically had been admitted, yet the 650 mark could still only be reached with the inclusion of 90 Jews (13.8 percent of the class). In the end, only 38 Jews entered Dartmouth in the fall of 1933; this figure was to remain constant for the remainder of the decade. That Hopkins's decision may have reflected status group-based cultural antipathy rather than the cool pursuit of organizational interest is suggested by a number of comments that he made about Jewish students during his tenure as president. Responding in 1939 to a Jewish father who had inquired whether his son had been rejected because of his religion, Hopkins replied: "It probably is a fact that a boy of Jewish heritage has to have outstanding characteristics in general that are not required of racial stocks a little less aggressive." As president of a distinctive institution, Hopkins expressed concern in 1936 that "unhappiness of soul and the destructive spirit of revolt . . . characteristic of the Jewish race at all times under all conditions," would destroy the unique Dartmouth spirit. The "specious and superficial radicalism" of some Jewish students particularly incensed Hopkins: "the jaundiced mulling of that small portion of our undergraduate body which loves to line up against the wailing wall," he insisted, "is little indicative of the spirit which education is supposed to produce and is little representative of the traditions of the American college." Better, then, as he had already suggested in 1933, for Dartmouth to "take the hazards of what appears to be a group of less scholastic promise, distributed among Anglo-Saxons, Hibernians, Scandinavians, and those from other outlying districts, than to let the Jewish proportion again rise" (Levine, "The Functions of Higher Education," 187–192, 315–317).
 86. *The Freshman Herald*, Princeton University, 1930 and 1940.
 87. Pierson, *Yale*, 146.
 88. At Columbia College, President Nicholas Murray Butler had made the club analogy explicit. Candidates for graduation, he suggested, should be "favorably recommended by the College's Committee on Instruction on the basis of character, personality, and general bearing while in College residence." The procedure used, Butler continued, should be analogous to that submitted by "a candidate for admission to a club, that is, having personal qualifications examined" (quoted in Wechsler, *The Qualified Student*, 162–163).
 89. Henry Pennypacker, "The Committee on Admission Report to the President of Harvard University," *Official Register of Harvard University* XXIV (March 1927), 297–304; Henry Pennypacker, "The Committee on Admission Report to the President of Harvard University," *Official Register of Harvard University* XXVIII (February 24, 1931), 332–339; Richard M. Gummere, "Committee on Admission, Report to the President of Harvard University," (1939–40), 161–171.

90. Pierson, *Yale*, 477.
91. Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 155, 192, 196.
92. Pierson, *Yale*, 475–504; James Bryant Conant, “The Future of Our Higher Education,” *Harper’s Magazine* 176 (May 1938): 567; Levine, “The Functions of Higher Education,” 210.
93. Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 196. That the Princeton case was not an isolated one among elite colleges is suggested by evidence from Dartmouth and Columbia. At Dartmouth in 1939, about 10 percent of Jewish applicants were admitted compared to almost 75 percent of non-Jewish candidates (Levine, “The Functions of Higher Education,” 188); at Columbia in 1934, when competition for admission among Gentiles was at most moderate (though no precise figures are available), only one Jewish applicant in seven was admitted (Wechsler, *The Qualified Student*, 167–168). And these figures, it is worth noting, tell only part of the story, for the very presence of quotas – even covert ones – no doubt reduced the number of Jewish applicants. As Bourdieu has noted, patterns of selection are in part products of previous institutional practices; over time, he argues, members of excluded groups, tend to internalize their “objective chances” and to aspire only to what is attainable (Pierre Bourdieu, “Avenir de classe et causalité du probable,” *Revue Française de Sociologie* XV (1974): 3–42).
94. Interestingly, the proportion of Jews at Harvard hardly changed at all during the 1930s despite the retirement of the anti-Semitic Lowell and his replacement by the putatively meritocratic James Bryant Conant. Among freshman applicants to Harvard houses in 1933, Lowell’s last year in office, 12.4 percent were Jews; under Conant, during the period 1935–1939, this proportion rose only to 13.9 percent (computed from Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 115). While these figures strongly suggest the existence of a quota under Conant (after all, the proportion of Jews at Harvard had exceeded 20 percent in the early 1920s), recent documentary evidence leaves little room for doubt; indeed, in 1942, a Committee on Admission memorandum discussing those “eliminated by the Admission office” makes explicit reference to “about 100” non-scholarship applicants who “will be lost on account of the ‘quota’” (quoted in Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 112). Surprisingly, however, Conant’s image as a great democratic figure (see, for example, David Riesman, “Educational Reform at Harvard College: Meritocracy and its Adversaries,” in *Education and Politics at Harvard*, eds. Seymour Martin Lipset and David Riesman (N.Y.: McGraw Hill, 1974)) remains untarnished – perhaps because historians have looked more closely at his voluminous writings (which include a famous 1940 essay on “Education for a Classless Society”) than at the policies he actually pursued.
95. Pierson, *Yale*, 489.
96. *Ibid.*, 670–671.
97. Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 194.
98. Harvard University, Reports to the President of Harvard College, 1931–1941.
99. Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 115.
100. Following F. Digby Baltzell’s *The Philadelphia Gentlemen* and Levine’s “The Rise of the American Boarding Schools,” twelve institutions have been identified as the leading boarding schools: Groton, St. Mark’s, St. Paul’s, Middlesex, St. George’s, Kent, Lawrenceville, Hotchkiss, Choate, Hill, Phillips Academy (Andover), and Phillips Exeter Academy. In terms of their relationship to the class structure, these schools can be roughly divided into three categories: 1) the most socially exclusive institutions, commonly referred to collectively as the “St. Grottlesex” schools (the first six institutions listed above, all Episcopalian except for Middlesex); 2) Andover and Exeter, which enjoyed a reputation as the most academically rigorous and least socially exclusive of the dozen; and 3) the “intermediate schools” (Hill, Choate, Lawrenceville, and Hotchkiss), which occupied a social location between Andover and Exeter, on the one side, and the St. Grottlesex schools on the other (see *Fortune*, “Twelve of the Best American Schools,” (January 1936): 109 and also Levine, “The Rise of the American Boarding Schools,” 74–78). Three other prep schools that commonly appear on lists of the leading institutions are Deerfield, Milton Academy, and Taft.
- Historically, the leading prep schools have frequently enjoyed particularly strong relationships with one or another member of the Big Three. In general, the St. Grottlesex Schools (with the exception of Kent) served as strong “feeders” to Harvard while Yale had its closest ties to Choate, Hotchkiss, and Kent. Princeton’s strongest “feeders” were the two major Middle Atlantic institutions, Lawrenceville and Hill. Andover, Exeter, and St. Paul’s were distinctive among the top dozen private schools in that they maintained strong linkages with all of the Big Three institutions.
101. Attracting a large contingent of students from the top boarding schools was also critical for the maintenance of the traditional upper-class atmosphere of campus life at the Big Three. Harvard, Yale, and Princeton had a vital institutional interest in the perpetuation of this atmosphere, for it was the prospect of participating in a genteel life outside of the classroom – and of acquiring valuable social contacts – that attracted many of the students whom they most wanted. Once on campus, the students from the top prep schools tended

- to spend much of their time in exclusive private clubs. The most prestigious among them, which occupied a position at the very apex of campus social life, almost always excluded students who had attended public high schools: indeed at Harvard, the most exclusive clubs were virtually closed to anyone who had not attended a "St. Grottlesex institution" (Samuel Elliot Morison, *Three Centuries of Harvard, 1636-1936* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936); Cleveland Amory, *The Proper Bostonians* (N.Y.: E.P. Dutton, 1947); Levine, "The Rise of the American Boarding Schools"). Typically, the highest status of the clubs excluded all Jews, regardless of background (see Baltzell, *The Protestant Establishment*; and Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*); indeed, a study (Louise Karen Epstein, "Elitism, Diversity, and Meritocracy at Harvard: Changing Patterns of Achievement in College and Career" (Senior Honors Thesis, Department of Sociology, Harvard University, 1982), 57) of the Harvard graduating class of 1939 found not a single Jew who was a member of either Hasty Pudding or a final club. Though their influence does not lend itself to precise measurement, it seems quite clear that the clubs at the Big Three played an important role in the maintenance of status-group cohesion within the Protestant upper class. Indeed, by their composition, the clubs provided their members with the most valuable "social capital" that one could have: a network of intimate and trusting relationships with members of the dominant status group. And if fragmentary evidence on the career trajectories of club members reported in Levine's "The Rise of the American Boarding Schools" is correct, this social capital was frequently used in just the way that a Weberian theory of social closure would lead one to suggest: for the exclusion of "outsiders" and thereby the monopolization of access to some of the most lucrative and strategic positions in the social structure.
102. With the inclusion of two additional major private schools, Deerfield and Milton, the figures are even more striking; thus, in 1930 and 1940, 14 leading prep schools provided, respectively, 29.2 and 30.9 percent of all the freshman in the Big Three.
 103. The fanfare that accompanied the quest for geographical diversity was much more impressive than the actual result. There was, to be sure, a fairly substantial increase between 1920 and 1940 in the number of students in the Big Three from outside the Northeast. But on the eve of World War II, despite well over a decade of efforts to attract more students from the West, Midwest, and South, the Big Three remained fundamentally Northeastern institutions. Thus in 1940, Harvard drew over 70 percent of its freshmen from New England, New York, New Jersey, and Eastern Pennsylvania, with only 3.7 percent from the South and 4.3 from the West (Report of the President, Harvard University, 1941-1942). And Yale, probably the most national of the Big Three colleges, drew 54.8 percent of its entering students in 1940 from New England and New York State alone, with a mere 9.6 percent hailing from the West and Midwest combined (Pierson, *Yale*, 670).
 104. Pierson, *Yale*; Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*.
 105. Epstein, "Elitism, Diversity, and Meritocracy," 27-28.
 106. Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 203.
 107. Levine, "The Functions of Higher Education," 178, 180.
 108. Computed from Pierson, *Yale*, 490, 685.
 109. Wechsler, *The Qualified Student*, 164.
 110. At Columbia in 1937, Protestants received 88 percent of all scholarships and Catholics most of the rest (Wechsler, *The Qualified Student*, 164). Yale apparently followed a similar policy as far back as 1922, for in that year only 40 percent of Jewish financial aid applicants were granted awards compared to 72 to 75 percent of Gentile applicants (Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door*, 142-143).
 111. Data on father's occupation collected from the Yale freshman facebook of 1929 (the last year that such information was included) reveal that Yale was perhaps even more socially exclusive than Harvard and Princeton, drawing 67.5 percent of its entering class from business families (of whom more than 5 in 6 were "executives") and an additional 27.1 percent from professional families. Since information on father's occupation was not available for 33.6 percent of the entering students (280 of 834), one should be very careful in interpreting these figures, for they may well underestimate the proportion of Yale students coming from more modest social backgrounds.
 112. Princeton's president Harold W. Dodds, for example, stated publicly sometime before World War II that "we shall strive always to maintain the University as a national institution whose student body represents an accurate cross-section, both geographically and in respect to economic circumstance, of the best in American life." (The Graduate Council of Princeton University, 1948, 8). The reality of the Big-Three policy towards students from different "economic circumstances" during the Great Depression, however, is better captured by Harvard President James B. Conant ("The Future of Our Higher Education," 567) who deplored the ferocious competition among them for students from the "less than 3 percent of the families of this country [that] receive an annual income of \$5000 or more."

113. Martin Trow, "The Second Transformation of American Secondary Education" in *Class Status and Power* eds. Reinhard Bendix and Seymour Martin Lipset (New York: The Free Press, 1966), 437-449.
114. As used here "process of selection" refers to two separate, but related factors: the criteria (e.g. academic, cultural) that govern decisions of inclusion and exclusion, and the procedures used to see that the criteria are actually put into effect. An emphasis on religious origin would be an example of an admissions criterion; an application form asking numerous questions about family religious background is an example of a procedure set up to make possible the enforcement of a specific criterion.
115. Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (The Free Press, 1951) and *The System of Modern Societies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971); Burton R. Clark, *Educating the Expert Society* (San Francisco: Chandler: 1962); Peter M. Blau and Otis D. Duncan, *The American Occupational Structure* (John Wiley and Sons, 1967).
116. Julia Wrigley, "Class Politics and Social Reform in Chicago," in *Classes, Class Conflict and the State*, ed. Maurice Zeitlin (Cambridge: Winthrop, 1980) and *Class Politics and Public Schools: Chicago, 1900-1950* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1982).
117. This is *not*, however, to suggest that the WASP-Jewish conflict of this period was devoid of class content nor is it to deny the salience of class cleavages *within* these groups. But it is to say that in this particular instance neo-Weberian closure theory is better able to explain the changes that took place at the Big Three than is an orthodox Marxist model. On the larger question of the relationship of the neo-Weberian closure perspective to Marxist theory, Murphy has argued convincingly that these two frameworks have far more in common than some of the proponents of closure theory have acknowledged (Raymond Murphy, "The Struggle for Scholarly Recognition: The Development of the Closure Problematic in Sociology," *Theory and Society*, 12 (September 1983), 631-658. While neo-Weberians differ in the extent to which they see status-group cleavages as corresponding to underlying class divisions, all of them emphasize - as do Marxists - the material basis of ethnic, religious, and racial divisions and the centrality of group struggle as a source of institutional change. Moreover, as Murphy points out, even Parkin - perhaps closure theory's leading exponent - adheres to a position that, when stripped of its brilliant polemical rhetoric, is heavily indebted to classical Marxist theory.
118. Such a tilt is, of course, likely to be even more pronounced if, as is not uncommon, members of the status group that controls the more strategic resources occupy key positions *inside* of the organization.
119. Lest there be any confusion, this is *not* to say that external pressures were so overwhelming that they had no choice but to impose a Jewish quota. In truth, a principled refusal to limit the number of Jews (such as that favored by Harvard's former president Eliot) would hardly have caused the demise of their institutions; indeed, in all likelihood, it would not even have caused them to fall from the top tier of American higher education. Nonetheless, such a decision would almost certainly have had considerable costs, especially in terms of access to critical external resources; accordingly, rational administrators need not have been anti-Semitic to conclude that, beyond a certain point, there was a genuine conflict between the principle of open access, on the one hand, and the maximization of organizational interests on the other.
120. In the years since World War II, diverse new sources of support have greatly expanded the relative autonomy of the Big Three from the Protestant upper class. In this changed context, the distinction between status-group and organizational interests has taken on even greater importance than in the period covered in this paper, for the Big Three - no longer under the effective control of the dominant status group - have been freer to pursue their institutional interests as they themselves defined them. One consequence of this radical increase in institutional autonomy has been a decline in the proportion of the student body from prep schools and the old upper class and an increase in reliance on "meritocratic" criteria (Riesman, "Educational Reform at Harvard College"). Since "cultural capital" is non-randomly distributed by social class, however, a decline in overt ascription need not be accompanied by an increase in the number of students from working-class backgrounds. Indeed, on theoretical grounds, one might well predict that the prime beneficiaries of the rise of meritocracy have been the offspring of the highly credentialed professionals and managers discussed by Alvin W. Gouldner (*The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979)), the Ehrenreichs (Barbara Ehrenreich and John Ehrenreich, "The Professional-Managerial Class," *Radical America* (March-April 1977): 7-22), and other "new class" theorists. For some evidence that this may in fact be the case, at least at Harvard, see Gerald Kenneth LeTendre, "The Working-Class Student at Harvard: A Study of Socialization and Adaptation in the University," Senior Honors Thesis, Department of Sociology, Harvard University, 1983.
121. Seymour E. Harris, *Economics of Harvard* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1970); Brooks Mather Kelley, *Yale: A History* (New Haven, CT.: Yale U. Press, 1974).

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Steven Brint, Paul DiMaggio, Anne Hornsby, Steven Levine, Katherine McClelland, David Swartz, and Michael Useem for their extremely helpful comments on various drafts of this article. Special thanks go to David Karen, with whom I have had countless discussions about the issue of elite college admissions and whose dissertation-in-progress on Harvard admissions in recent years promises to be a major contribution.