

== Chapter 1 ==

Passing the Torch: An Overview

A central theme in our culture is that “getting an education” is the key to upward mobility. Americans hold dear the belief that young people can escape from poverty or disadvantage if they persevere in school and work their way up to a college degree. We also expect that once the first generation in a family has struggled to complete a college education, succeeding generations will sustain this advantage.

Through most of the twentieth century, these popular beliefs coincided with increased access to higher education for an ever-broader swath of Americans, including racial minorities and the poor.¹ In recent decades, however, dissident voices have been raised, arguing that public universities are admitting people who are unqualified and ill suited for higher education. Colleges have been criticized for dumbing down curricula while tolerating grade inflation, which protects the academically incompetent. Access to higher education has gone too far, according to these critics, and public colleges are conferring devalued degrees upon unworthy students.

Important changes in public policy have accompanied this shift in perception. The first thing to go was a long-standing tradition of free tuition at some public colleges. This was followed by decades of reductions in state funding for public higher education, forcing state universities to hike tuition, to the detriment of students from less affluent families. Opportunity programs such as affirmative action and “second chance” policies such as remedial education and open admissions were attacked as unfair or as a waste of resources, reflecting the belief that underprepared students would not succeed in college.

The political backlash against mass higher education has undercut or eliminated many policies aimed at helping underprivileged students: affirmative action has come under a judicial cloud; in several states, women on welfare may no longer attend college while receiving public support; restrictions have been placed on remedial education; needs-based financial aid has lost ground to merit-based scholarships; and so on.

This sea change regarding educational opportunity policies reflects larger disputes over the validity of government intervention, especially the extent to which public education should attempt to ameliorate class and racial inequalities in society. These disagreements over social values and political philosophies are deep-seated and not easily resolved. At the same time, the criticisms of mass higher education are built upon allegedly factual claims—that affirmative action does not help minorities and makes them feel inferior, that degrees have become cheapened, and that university graduates lack basic work skills, among others. Researchers are well placed to adjudicate these factual matters, by investigating the outcomes of opportunity policies in the recent past.

To date, the best-known scholarship looking into these controversies has focused on affirmative action policies. For example, William Bowen and Derek Bok, in *The Shape of the River*, convincingly documented the achievements of students admitted through affirmative action, after surveying graduates from the nation's most prestigious private and public universities. The authors found that affirmative-action students in highly selective institutions were very successful in terms of degrees, earnings, and professional accomplishments.²

Selective colleges and universities are gateways to the most highly rewarded positions in the occupational world, so it is understandable that affirmative-action policies have received the scrutiny they have. Still, affirmative action in highly selective colleges is just the tip of the iceberg of educational access in America.³ The overwhelming share of the burgeoning enrollment of poorer and minority Americans has occurred in less selective institutions,⁴ places—mainly in the state colleges and universities—where the tide turned several decades ago in the direction of mass higher education. In this sector of the higher education enterprise “nontraditional students” are found in greatest numbers.

The research in this book centers on these public institutions. Our principal concern is with the many thousands of poorly prepared high school students from economically disadvantaged families who enter college and try to make their way into the American middle class. We focus on two critical issues: First, are young people from underprivileged backgrounds able to benefit from higher education, given their poor preparation in high school? Questions here concern the proportions of students who ultimately obtain a degree, and whether those credentials really pay off in terms of earnings and mobility.

Second, what is the impact of higher education upon the next generation? Do the benefits of college opportunity produce an intergenerational momentum that carries over to children in the next generation? That is, when disadvantaged young people do get into college and obtain a credential, are they able to transmit this advantage to their own offspring? Do their children fare better in school, or do they still resemble the children of

poor and working-class families? How many of the children in this second generation ultimately equal or exceed their parents' educational success, and how many fall backward into lower-class patterns of educational and occupational achievement?

We suggest that the appropriate measure of success for mass higher education should not just be the earnings and occupational attainment of those who get into college—though obviously those are important—but also whether, by going to college, students from underprivileged backgrounds break the cycle of disadvantage and lift their children into the middle class. To the extent that this transpires, a national investment in greater access to college has a higher and more permanent payoff.

Contrast this multigenerational focus with debates that took place over the last decade or so, as legislators undertook welfare reform. Initially much was said about the cycle of poverty, of welfare mothers raising daughters who themselves ended up on welfare. Unfortunately, policy alternatives soon became constricted to a choice between moving women off welfare directly into work, and providing them with training in basic work-life skills prior to job placement. Higher education, which was once an alternative for many welfare and poor mothers, largely disappeared from the policy agenda. By focusing on the short term, rather than on the intergenerational consequences of various policies, welfare reformers overlooked an important option for breaking the cycle of disadvantage.

To examine these issues, we investigate the extent to which children of college-educated parents who come from underprivileged backgrounds gain an advantage over their counterparts by dint of their parents' education. How much of a difference does a parental degree make? Does even a partial exposure to higher education (short of graduation) confer advantage to their children? These are questions that we pose in this book.

If the second generation does fare better in terms of its own education and occupational trajectory, then what are the mechanisms that produce this effect? Do college-educated parents from underprivileged backgrounds become more involved in their children's education? Or do they guide their children into better schools? Do they raise their children with higher expectations, or pass on some of the knowledge and cultural capital they learned in college? How much help are the greater economic resources typically associated with parents' college completion for the children? On the downside, do other aspects of people's lives such as marital disruptions undercut or vitiate the benefits that parental college education can confer on children?

Our point of departure in this study is an important experiment in opening the doors to college that took place in New York City in the early 1970s, when the eighteen-campus (with 250,000 students) City University of New York (CUNY) guaranteed all graduates of the city's

high schools admission into the university. David E. Lavin and his colleagues began tracking the fate of this generation immediately (see Lavin, Alba, and Silberstein 1981; Lavin and Hyllegard 1996). Many of the CUNY students in this cohort came from poor and near-poor families, but working- and middle-class students were also well represented.

Nearly thirty years later we launched a new follow-up study of those ex-students. With financial support from the Andrew Mellon, Ford, and Spencer foundations, we traced and interviewed a representative sample of almost two thousand women drawn from the original cohort in order to assess their current social and economic well-being and document the occupational and educational achievements of their children. The response rate for this survey was 71 percent, and the sample of women we studied in the year 2000 closely mirrored the larger cohort who entered CUNY in the 1970s.⁵

We chose to collect data from women for this thirty-year follow-up study because of our focus on how their children were doing. After marital disruptions, mothers are far more likely than fathers to have custody of their children, and therefore women tend to have more reliable information about offspring. The same is true for those women who had children outside of marriage. The data we collected on mothers and their children in the year 2000 were then merged with the historical data gathered about these same women in the 1970s.

To further validate and extend our findings, we undertook additional analyses using a different government-sponsored longitudinal survey known as the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, or NLSY. That study was begun in 1979, when several thousand young women were selected to participate. It inquired about occupation and earnings, education and marital status, both for the women and for their children. This information was updated every year or two after 1979, up to the year 2000. The NLSY allows us to determine whether various findings about the CUNY women also hold for a wider national population. In addition, it enables us to supplement certain analyses by including measures not available in the CUNY data. For example, the NLSY contains measures of women's IQ that enable us to separate the effects of having a mother who went to college from simply having a mother of high intelligence. Finally, we occasionally employ two other national sources of information as benchmarks, the Current Population Survey, produced by the U.S. Census Bureau, and the U.S. Department of Education's National Educational Longitudinal Study.

The findings that emerged from our analyses are startling and unprecedented. Other research stops short of the truly long-term picture needed to evaluate the payoff of opening the doors to college. Our long-range perspective shows that disadvantaged women ultimately complete college degrees in far greater numbers than scholars realize. Fully 71 percent of

the CUNY cohort earned a degree, and over three-fourths of these completed a bachelor's degree. Twenty-six percent completed a master's or higher degree.

These accomplishments can take a long time: 29 percent of women completed their degrees over ten years after they first entered college, and 10 percent completed them twenty or more years after entry. The nationwide NLSY survey shows a similar pattern. The low graduation rates that scandalize critics of public higher education are typically measured only four or six years after entry to college. When one takes a longer view, a much more positive picture emerges.

Community colleges or junior colleges have drawn the ire of commentators who claim that very few students who enter associate of arts (A.A.) degree programs ever make it through to bachelor's degrees. Others say that associate's degrees are worth little in terms of earnings. While it is true that community college entrants are less likely to earn B.A. degrees than comparable students who start at four-year colleges, our long-term study reveals that 31 percent of women who entered a junior college in the CUNY system ultimately completed a bachelor's degree, a much larger proportion than previously noted. Moreover, in some applied fields, the A.A. degree paid off better in the long term than some B.A. majors. Thus, community colleges provided genuine benefits to many students, both in the New York and nationwide surveys.

Mass education has not made a college degree worth less. At both the A.A. and B.A. level, the educational credentials gained by women from poor backgrounds were not devalued in earning power. Women who started at CUNY earn as much as other women of the same age and degree level in national data sets. On a national scale, greater access to higher education has been accompanied by growth in the earnings premium for a college degree, rather than a collapse in the value of this credential.

Higher education has a financial payoff even for those who begin but do not complete a degree. Women who completed some college short of a degree enjoyed an earnings premium over otherwise equivalent persons who were only high school graduates, as shown by national NLSY data.

For women who complete a given level of education, family background ceases to matter in predicting earnings and occupational prestige. In this restricted sense, higher education compensates for childhood disadvantage. However, women from the most severely disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to complete their studies and obtain a credential than women from more affluent families.

Racial differences in earnings are small, once education is taken into account. Black women had personal earnings roughly equal to those of white women with equivalent education. However, race continues to make a big difference in household income. Educated black women have lower household incomes, have less wealth, and are less likely than whites

to be homeowners, principally because of African Americans' lower rates of marriage and greater marital instability.

White and Hispanic women who come from modest backgrounds and enter college are usually able to attain upward mobility in two ways: directly, through their own credentials and earning power, and indirectly, by marrying educated men who become occupationally successful. Black women of similar background and education are often limited to the first path, because they are far less likely to marry. Furthermore, college-educated black women who do marry are less likely to have a spouse with high occupational prestige. Thus, the formation of dual-earner professional families becomes a critical point in the translation of higher education into upward mobility.

College-educated mothers pass important educational advantages on to their children. We find that a mother's level of educational attainment has a positive effect on her offspring's likelihood of educational success, net of race, mother's family or class background, her IQ, and other factors.

Although these benefits of maternal education are clearly visible among all groups, race continues to impact children's outcomes, even when mothers have "made it." College-educated black women are less likely to have academically successful children and are more likely to have downwardly mobile children than either white or Hispanic women with similar credentials. This is particularly true for young black men, who are less likely to equal their mother's achievements than young black women. Among African American mothers, 49 percent of sons and 35 percent of daughters did not attain their mother's degree level.

College enrollment changes the way women raise their children. From increased educational expectations to greater involvement in schooling to the presence of books and computers in the home—college-educated mothers from poor backgrounds invest more time and resources in the next generation. These parenting practices are in turn associated with significantly better educational outcomes for their children, from elementary school on. This effect of parenting practices on children's outcomes is separate from benefits accruing from the higher incomes of college-educated mothers.

Where does this leave us? For many Americans, college conjures up memories of young people fresh out of high school, living on campus, immersed in a liberal arts curriculum focused on great thinkers from Plato through Freud. For social commentators such as William Bennett, today's universities have forsaken that traditional model and instead offer a degraded version of a college education.⁶ While we share a respect for a classical liberal arts education, it was only accessible to a minority of Americans. Over the last half century, American universities have broadened their scope to accommodate many new students who cannot afford to attend college full-time or to live on campus, as well as students

who have an interest in more applied subjects. Today only 27 percent of undergraduates nationwide match the traditional undergraduate profile.⁷ We argue that one should not underestimate the success of today's mass higher education simply because it is different from its older and socially more restrictive counterpart.

A tiny proportion of our nation's minority and economically disadvantaged college students are enrolled in America's most selective universities; public universities and the community college system serve most of these kinds of students. A broad population of students, including those with poor high school preparation, enters the doors of public colleges. In response, these institutions have extended remedial courses—which were always offered to wealthy students in Ivy League colleges—to any students who need them. Is that remediation a bad investment? Contrary to critics' contentions, our analyses suggest that remedial courses do not depress graduation rates for most students, and that remediation may reduce college dropout rates in the short term.

Taken as a whole, the evidence presented in this book indicates that the democratization of public higher education has not generated hordes of unemployable graduates or worthless degrees. Those who graduate with a college degree from public universities earn significantly more than high school graduates, net of background characteristics. For hundreds of thousands of underprivileged students, a college education is the first step up the ladder of social mobility, and their college attendance generates an upward momentum for most of their children. Yet higher education cannot rest on these laurels—the effects of poverty and race still reach across the generations. Access to four years of higher education does not eradicate those disadvantages, but it substantially reduces their influence and facilitates upward mobility for many in the second generation. That is no small accomplishment.

The majority of the evidence in this book comes from sample surveys involving thousands of respondents, so our analyses are predominantly statistical. That makes sense, because we want to make well-grounded generalizations about the outcomes of increased access to higher education for large parts of our population. Nevertheless, we do not forget that our numbers are distilled from the lives of thousands of people, and that our statistics represent in barest outline the complex struggles of many individuals, each with their own particularities. In pursuing hard numbers we risk losing the human drama and fascinating details of individual cases, which some find the most compelling of evidence. In partial remedy, we devote the remainder of this chapter to the stories of two women who entered college at CUNY in the early 1970s. Their accounts illustrate many of the themes that will reappear in the later

analytical chapters of this book. (The names of these women and a few personal details have been changed to protect their privacy.)

Ramona Rodriguez

If you phone Ramona Rodriguez nowadays, her assistant intercepts the call and informs you that you have reached the offices of Counselor Rodriguez. With a law degree and a six-figure salary in a prestigious law firm, Ramona has come a very long way from her hardscrabble childhood in New York City. The oldest of four girls, she was raised almost completely by her mother, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic. Her father had left the family several times while she was very young, abandoning the family for good when she was eight.

Watching her mother come home exhausted from a day of doing piecework in the garment district is a childhood memory that still resonates with Ramona. Life was a constant struggle for her mother, with five mouths to feed, and Ramona, as the oldest child, shouldered part of the burden, beginning a part-time job at age twelve to help support the family.

Ramona's mother's schooling ended at the third grade and she could read and write only a little in Spanish and not at all in English. So she rarely discussed school matters and never helped her daughter with her homework. "But we were all expected to do our work," says Ramona. "Even though she didn't help us, I think she taught us to be more independent and make sure we got our work done."

Schoolwork proved difficult for Ramona. "I really had a problem with education. I was able to get away with certain tricks. I was able to fool my teachers for many years. It wasn't until I was in seventh grade that my teachers realized I couldn't read," she recalls. "I was what you might call now learning disabled." After this discovery, Ramona was put in an intensive after-school reading program. It worked: by the time she got to high school, she was reading above grade level.

After graduating from high school in 1970, Ramona enrolled at one of the four-year colleges of the City University of New York. "With open enrollment they couldn't turn me down, so once I got the application, I was in college, as far as I was concerned. . . . I was encouraged to apply to other colleges, but to me there was no real alternative. I lived in the neighborhood. I could walk to school. I didn't have to worry about carfare. It was very convenient."

Though she was still living at home, college expanded her world far beyond the five-block radius that had constituted her world for the first eighteen years of her life. "My exposure to different people, different cultures and goals—it broadened me." Because she still found reading arduous, Ramona became attracted to mathematics and subjects that

involved numbers and logic. A first-semester economics course drove her career aspirations sharply upward: "I thought I was going to be the economics adviser to the President of the United States. I was going to go to Washington and solve all our national problems," she reminisces.

All that changed during her junior year of college, when at age twenty she became pregnant. Once it became apparent that Ramona was not going to marry the child's father, her mother decided that she was a bad influence on her younger sisters, and asked her to leave home. "I felt like I lost my mobility, so I had to change my goals." Ramona began considering stereotypically female careers such as social work, and she took on a work-study job in New York's family court system. After taking one semester off when her daughter was born, she returned to college and graduated a year or so later with a B.A. degree in mathematics and economics.

Working in the courts had made a strong impression on Ramona, and she started thinking about becoming a lawyer, but her family was far from encouraging. "What do you want to do that for?" her mother asked. "My sisters told me I was going to fail: 'You? A lawyer?' " Looking back, Ramona explains: "I can see my mother was trying to insulate me from disappointment—the disappointment that *she* had felt, trying to get ahead. She didn't think that her daughter, you know, would be able to go to law school, be an attorney. So that was her way. But that motivated me more."

As a single mother on public assistance with a two-year-old daughter in tow, Ramona dove into the first-year grind at law school. "It was rough. Looking back at that now, I don't know if I could ever do that again," she says. "I only had two things, my daughter and my school; there wasn't room for much of anything else." But she persisted. Twenty-some years later, Ramona has had six children, two marriages, and a successful career as an attorney.

Contrasting her own upbringing with the ways she raised her children, Ramona emphasizes that the main thing she wanted to do differently from her mother was "to encourage [my children] to be all they can be and let them know that they have options, and that through hard work and sacrifice, anything is possible." She deliberately "exposed them to a lot more, culturally. As they were growing up, I took them to museums, the zoo, and the aquarium. On weekends we would go out and explore things. The Bronx Zoo was a big thing for us, the botanical gardens. When they were little I took them to real plays where they could see actors. Those were things I was never exposed to."

When it came to getting directly involved in her children's school-work, though, matters proved complicated. "I left that to them because I always had a big problem reading. To this day, because my frustration level and the pain I went through in the past, I cannot help my children

with their homework without feeling all those old feelings all over again. . . . My oldest [adult] daughter talks about that today, how I never helped her with her homework.”

Although Ramona didn't help with her children's studying, she did become heavily involved with their schools. “I am one of those parents who's there all the time. If necessary, I am there every day. They all know me at the school as a concerned parent. I get involved with the PTA. . . . One of my sons, he's always getting into problems at school. I'm always having to go to school to smooth things over for him. In some aspects, I may have become an enabler, if you know what I mean. I try not to do that, but I stick up for them.”

In other areas, Ramona has taken a more hands-off approach, allowing her children to make their own decisions. They chose their own courses, for example: “It's up to them; it's up to their interests. . . . With their peers and friends, I try to give them advice without getting too much involved . . . [but] one of my big sons does. He decided that some of my younger son's friends are not acceptable in the apartment. I guess because he's young and he sees the interaction between them, whereas I'm so busy that I don't notice it. It's good I have someone looking over my shoulder and helping me with that.”

Ramona has very consciously taught her kids about the process of getting ahead: “That's a process that's foreign to a lot of the people who grow up in the ghetto. I know, a lot of my peers, when I graduated high school—they thought you go to college just by showing up, just like you go to grammar school or junior high. I was familiar with the application process. I was able to help my children with that. I showed them how to write a résumé, how to look for a job. I had these how-to's, and I was able to pass on some strategies, basically.”

Raising her kids in the same city neighborhood where she grew up meant that violence and crime were among Ramona's greatest fears. “I live in a very drug-infested neighborhood. The drugs, the crime—they call out to our children.” It would have been costly to send her six children to private school, but in any event she rejected that idea on principle: “I insist that my children stay in public school because the problem with our community is the brain drain. All our talent moves away. It's important for us to remain here to make sure not only our kids get a good education, but the community kids, too.”

That strong commitment to the local community has its limits. “I remember there being a drive-by shooting in my neighborhood and an innocent child being shot in the leg.” That same year, Ramona sent her older sons to the South to live with their father during junior high and high school, while keeping her oldest daughter and two youngest children in the city. “Especially young black men are hard to discipline. I just thought that they would have a much better foundation if they

grew up in the South, in a suburban, slower environment. That decision has haunted me for years because the flip side is that they weren't with me."

Ramona's parental efforts and involvement seem to have paid off, though not in every respect. Her two oldest children have graduated from college and are well on their way to professional jobs. One other son won a scholarship to an out-of-state college, but dropped out after his freshman year and has come back to live at home. She has three children still in school; two of them are doing well academically, but her youngest boy has been held back to repeat a grade.

Ramona Rodriguez's story is one of great personal success, and she has raised several very accomplished children as a single parent. But despite her extraordinary endeavors, it has not been straightforward to pass her advantages on to her offspring. The children clearly benefited from their mother's school involvement, her career advice, and her efforts at cultural enrichment, but they also had to grow up with a busy professional single mother, and negotiate their way in a dangerous neighborhood. In a pattern that seems especially common among the minority families in our surveys, Ramona's children went in educationally divergent directions, some able to use their parent's success as a springboard for upward mobility, while others struggled unsuccessfully to equal her level of education.

Janet Swallow

Janet Swallow, an African American woman in her forties, provides a contrasting story of marriage and deferred career. Like Ramona, Janet's parents, who both moved to New York City from the South, had received little formal education. Her dad had a fourth-grade education and was, according to his daughter, "a functional illiterate." Janet's mother had left school after eighth grade. Nevertheless, Janet grew up in a church-going family where education was valued and parental expectations were very high. Her parents wouldn't accept an average grade from Janet or her five siblings; they insisted on superior grades. They wouldn't tolerate idle time at home, either. Janet and her brother and sisters had to find something to read, or to work on a project, once homework was finished

Even though her parents weren't able to help her with schoolwork themselves, it was understood that homework was done first, before everything else. Fortunately, Janet as the youngest child could turn for help to her older sisters, one of whom was "quite the student." Not only was academic success a priority in her family, but Janet's mother had strong views about what kind of schooling Janet should get: "My mother wouldn't let me be on the general track, or commercial track.

My mother wouldn't even let me take a typing class. She said you'll either be a teacher or a nurse—a professional. That's what you'll be."

Janet was the kind of child who loved school, enjoyed studying, and devoured books. She is still nostalgic about her high school: "I cried my way through graduation because I loved it so much," she told us. "High school was the best time of my life. . . . I met a lot of teachers whom I admired so much because they pushed me. They saw things in me that I didn't see in myself and they pushed me to be better than I was. They pushed me to desire, to want more, to go for it."

After her tearful graduation, Janet dreamed of leaving New York and going away to college: "I wanted to go elsewhere and see the world. But it wasn't feasible, financially." Once again, it was her mother who decided what Janet would do, and that fall, Janet enrolled in the local community college, a branch of CUNY. To her surprise, the academic work proved quite difficult at first. In her first semester, Janet recalled, "I had an English professor who was really tough, and I got my first D. I was devastated." It took time to adapt to the greater challenge of college, but she persevered and steadily improved her grade point average.

Two years later Janet graduated with an associate's degree and transferred immediately to the nearest public four-year college to work toward a B.A. in English. Finally completing that bachelor's degree gave Janet an enormous sense of accomplishment: "I had gotten myself through four years of college, and everything else that went with it—the papers, the projects. I felt empowered, not only as a woman but as an educated woman. I realized that I didn't just have to settle for a place for me that was decided by someone else. I could make changes and move on to areas that people didn't expect me to. I knew that anything I really wanted to do, I could do."

Those feminist sentiments notwithstanding, Janet decided to start a family with the man she had married in the spring of her senior year in college. She had three children over the course of the next seven years. "I stayed home for twelve years raising kids because I didn't want anyone else raising them," she explained. "I knew that I could help my children, that I could be actively involved in their education. I knew if there was a conflict that I could go and reason with the teacher. My parents never went to [my] school. I always felt I was out there by myself. I wanted [my children] to know that I would go to bat for them for whatever reason, and they did know that." When one of Janet's oldest child's teachers humiliated him in front of the class, Janet immediately went to school and talked both with the teacher and with the school principal.

She adopted a very different stance from that of her parents toward education: "The main objective of my parents was to put food on the table and a roof over our heads. I wanted to raise little individuals who had personalities and could develop into responsible adults. . . . I wanted

to instill in them a love for learning about the simplest things. I wanted them to be inquisitive. I made trips to the library, to museums, all the things that I knew would make them question the world around them." Janet helped her children with schoolwork, running all over town to get materials for projects.

"I was really concerned about public schools because I had heard all the press about them: how dangerous, inadequate, that private schools were much better. I bought into it." . . . "The two oldest kids went to parochial schools . . . and I was very involved because I wasn't working. The PTA, chaperone, reading partner—I did all that."

Despite her extensive involvement in her children's education, Janet tried to respect her children's autonomy and avoid the authoritarian approach of her own parents. "I don't do advice," she explained. "I listen, I might throw out a question, but advice, no. I was not given advice as a child. I was told what to do and when to do it. I didn't want to do that [to my kids]. I wanted them to think for themselves. . . . I really didn't have any influence [over their choice of friends]. They made good choices, no problem with the wrong crowd. There were bad characters, but [my kids] somehow just internalized my value system."

Two things marred what otherwise appears to be a strikingly successful example of a mother putting her own career on hold in order to invest in the next generation. First, Janet's husband was far less of a partner in these efforts than she had hoped. "He was there physically, but anything that had to do with kids was my responsibility. I hope that my boys looked at him and saw an example of what they shouldn't be like, and I know my daughter will be very careful when she chooses a mate. . . . Giving [my kids] a normal home life because there were issues with their dad, that was very hard. I wanted them to have a sense of a normal family in spite of all the controversies in the home." Janet and her husband split up when the youngest child was a teenager.

A second disappointment was the racial composition of the schools. "The problem was that we were in a predominantly Caucasian area and my kids were the only African Americans in the school. I wasn't happy about that, having them so isolated. . . . There wasn't a choice at first. We had to go where we could afford to. I didn't purchase a house till ten years ago. Then it mattered . . . in a place where the kids could be with their own."

Janet's decisions paid off for the children, and ultimately for her. "After twelve years of being at home with *Mr. Rogers* and *Sesame Street*," when her children were grown, Janet returned to college, earned a master's degree, and now works as an educator. Two of her three children have graduated from college and begun professional careers. However, "the youngest child is not a scholar, which was a bitter pill to swallow. He wasn't interested in reading or studying." Yet this son proved to be

an enormous emotional support to Janet during her divorce, and has begun training in a technical field.

Janet celebrates her choices and her children. "I am proud of all three of them. They have grown into very sensitive and caring young people. They are focused, know what they want, and how to achieve it. . . . We all have a destiny to fulfill, and this was mine. I often wonder what the future of my family will be like. Will my children instill this in their children? I look at my children as better versions of myself, and hope this continues through the generations."

Ramona Rodriguez and Janet Swallow exemplify several issues that are important for this book. Ramona had children before her educational career was completed, a common pattern among college women from less affluent backgrounds. Being a mother and a student typically affects the time it takes to attain a degree and the final amount of education that a woman completes, important issues that we examine in the following chapter, using survey data. Whether a woman finds a husband or partner while in college, and whether that person sticks by her, was a pivotal issue for both women. In chapter 6, we discuss how much the presence of a father affects the educational prospects of his children. Finally, both women expressed strong views about parenting and the kinds of cultural stimulation that mothers should provide to their children. This belief proves to be an important reason why maternal education pays off for the next generation.

In the following chapters we will examine each of these issues, drawing on our survey data, generated from following the lives of several thousands of women from youth to middle age. Although certain technical aspects of these analyses become fairly complicated, we have aimed our discussion at the general reader, and have tried to minimize technical discussions in the text. Instead, we have provided a methodological appendix at the end of this book (appendix A), where we provide details on the statistical methods we used in our study and the samples and expand on issues of response rates. Our social scientist colleagues will no doubt scrutinize that appendix, but other readers who do not care about technical aspects can ignore it. Similarly, our chapters are sprinkled with tables that display the statistical evidence for our conclusions, but we have been careful to provide a thorough discussion of each finding in the text of each chapter, so readers will not lose the thread of our argument nor miss the evidence behind our claims if they choose to skip over the tables.