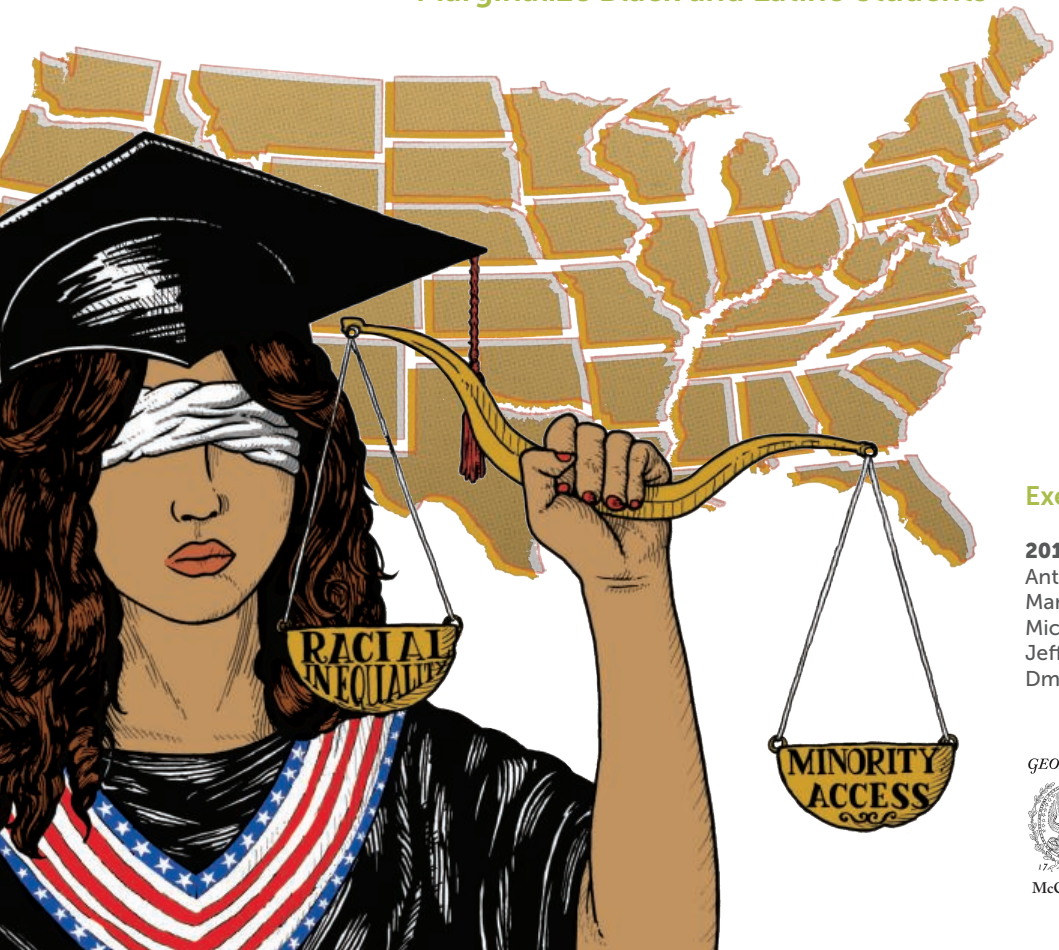
# OUR SEPARATE & UNEQUAL PUBLIC COLLEGES

## How Public Colleges Reinforce White Racial Privilege and Marginalize Black and Latino Students




Executive Summary

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

America's selective public colleges should be among the great equalizers in our society. Funded primarily by taxpayers and carrying a relatively low price tag, these colleges are meant to be engines of opportunity for all.

In reality, however, the doors of these colleges are open wider to White students than to their Black and Latino peers. Whites have almost two-thirds (64%) of the seats in selective public colleges even though Whites make up barely half (54%) of the nation's college-age population. Blacks and Latinos are making unprecedented gains in college-going, but the vast majority of Black and Latino students enroll in overcrowded and underfunded open-access colleges, primarily community colleges. Consequently, fewer Black and Latino students receive a bachelor's degree.

Leaders of selective public colleges justify the disparity in the racial makeup of their student bodies by citing the fact that Black and Latino students don't score as high on standardized admissions tests (the SAT and ACT) as White students do. The average test score of incoming students is an important factor in college rankings, and colleges have long set prestige as their highest pursuit rather than a commitment to upward mobility for all.

The result is we are left with a taxpayer-funded postsecondary system that does not reflect the public it supposedly is serving. Selective public colleges reflect the Latino college-age population (18-to-24-year-olds) in just one state: Florida. Meanwhile, other states are far from parity: for example, in California, 48 percent of the college-age population is Latino, but only 25 percent of students in selective public colleges are Latino. Blacks are not proportionately represented in selective public colleges in any state. Only Kentucky comes close. Other states are egregiously unbalanced. In Alabama, for example, 32 of every 100 college-age residents are Black, but only seven of every 100 students at the state's selective public colleges are Black.

The SAT and ACT are given more weight than they actually deserve as predictors of completion and success after college. The tests reflect the earlier schooling and upbringing of the test-takers far more than they reflect their ability and potential. The use of test results as arbitrary qualifications for entry into selective colleges has made a mockery of educational opportunity. Admission test scores are a dodge: a means of laundering race and class inequality behind a scientific façade of quantitative metrics. In 2014, for example, 341,000 Black and Latino high school seniors scored above average on standardized college-entrance examinations, such as the SAT, but only 19 percent of them attended a selective college. Meanwhile, 31 percent of White students who scored above average on a standardized test attended a selective college. So, like many factors in college admissions, the argument favoring academic merit is just another name for affirmative action for already-privileged Whites.

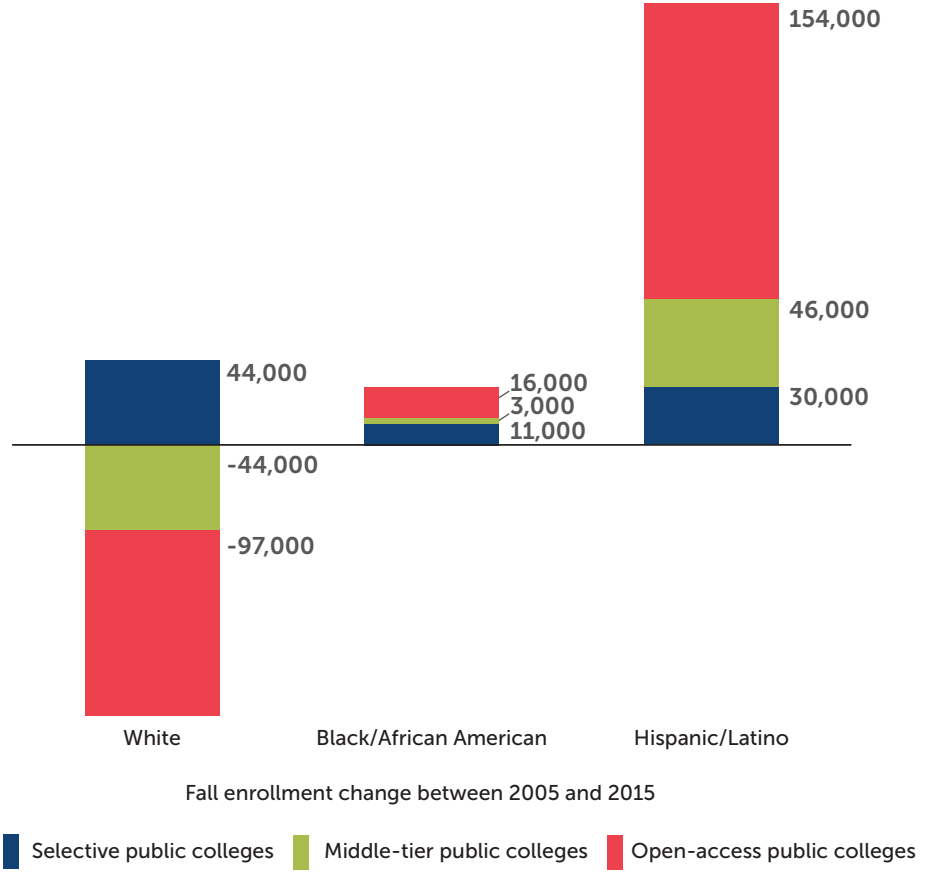
The disparity is not just about fairness, it's about money. Selective public colleges are spending nearly three times as much per student on instructional and academic support as public open-access colleges. Even among equally qualified students, what that money buys at selective public colleges is much higher graduation rates and, as a result, likely access to at least a middle-class income. The funding divide between the selective public colleges and the open-access public colleges is due in part to an elite political bargain among legislators, governors, selective public colleges, and affluent (mostly White) families. Affluent families have tolerated large tuition increases at selective public colleges because their children get access to a quality education subsidized by the public. The tuitions at selective public colleges are still in many cases far lower that at selective private colleges. This makes the tuitions at selective public colleges affordable and attractive to wealthy families even as they may seem prohibitively expensive to poor families.

The combination of racial segregation and widening disparities in spending between public selective and public open-access colleges has exacerbated race-based gaps in educational and economic outcomes. Not all students can access the best public colleges and the benefits they confer. The result is that the public higher education system is another factor that is disproportionately keeping Blacks and Latinos from fulfilling their potential, entering the middle class, and living fully in their time—the basic commitments of a democratic capitalist society.

The racial makeup of America is changing quickly, especially among the young. Black and Latino college-going rates are rising fast, and the overall percentage of college students who are White is declining. But if you were to tour selective public colleges, you would not see much evidence of that.

At selective public colleges, the enrollment of Whites has increased over the past decade more than the enrollment of Blacks and Latinos combined (Figure 1).

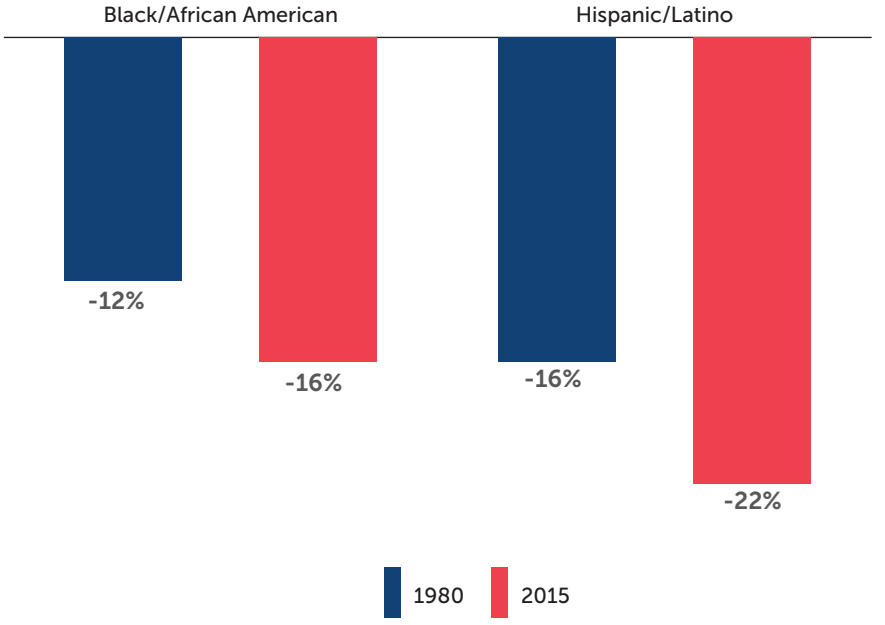
## Figure 1. At selective public colleges from 2005 to 2015, Whites gained 44,000 additional seats, while Blacks and Latinos combined gained 41,000 additional seats.




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System.
Note: 2005 enrollment is pooled fall enrollment numbers from academic years 2003-04 to 2005-06, and 2015 enrollment is pooled fall enrollment numbers from academic years 2013-14 to 2015-16.

Unequal access to selective colleges, which have far higher graduation rates than open-access colleges, is troubling at a time when Blacks and Latinos are falling further behind Whites in bachelor's degree attainment (Figure 2).

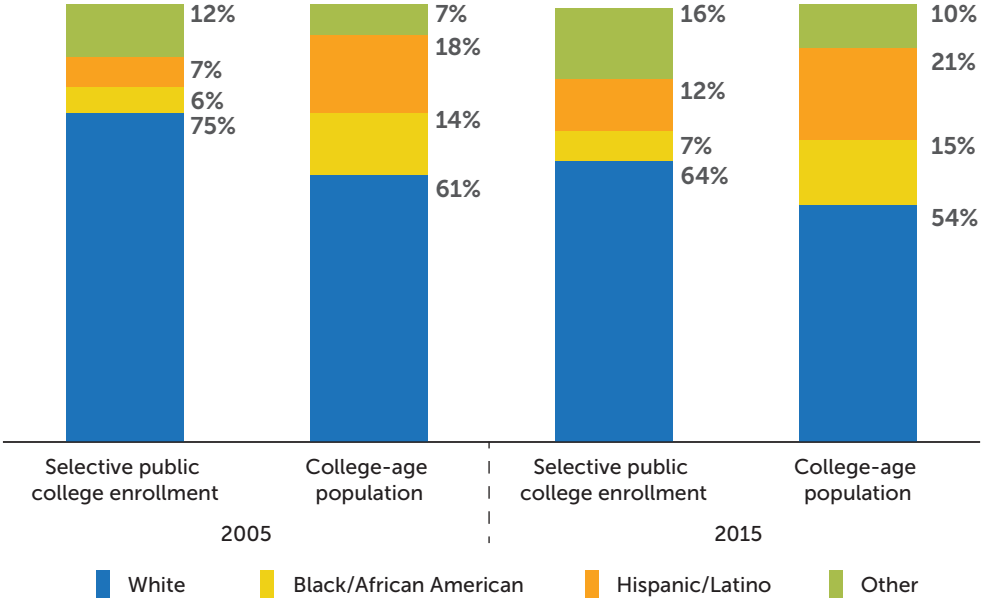
## Figure 2. Bachelor's degree attainment rates for both Blacks and Latinos have fallen further behind that of Whites since 1980.




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau's *Current Population Survey*, 1980-2015.
Note: We define attainment as the share of 25-to-30-year-olds who have completed at least four years of college.

Black and Latino students make up 36 percent of the college-age population, yet they are only 19 percent of the students attending selective public colleges (Figure 3).

## Figure 3. Blacks and Latinos are underrepresented at selective public colleges.



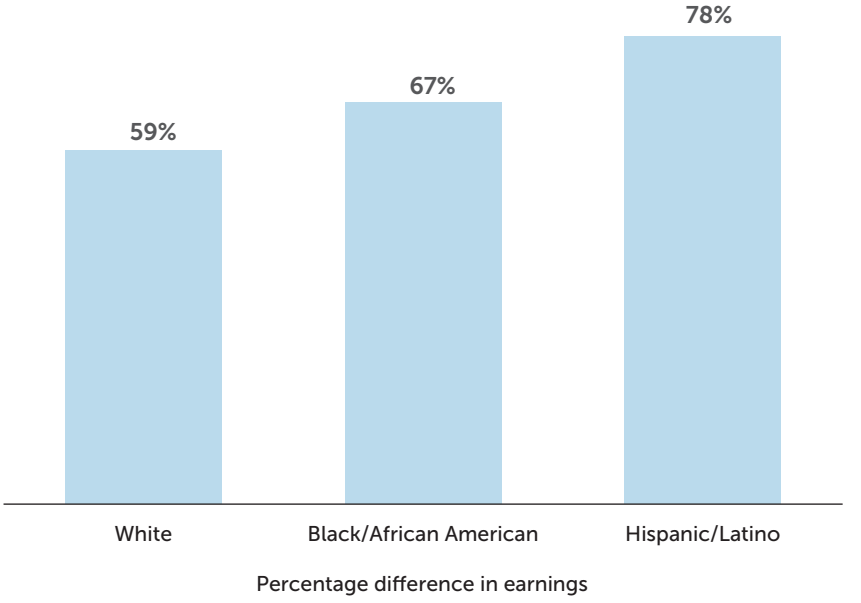

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System and the US Census Bureau's *American Community Survey*, 2005 and 2015.
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding. 2005 enrollment includes pooled fall enrollment numbers from academic years 2003-04 to 2005-06, and 2015 enrollment includes pooled fall enrollment numbers from academic years 2013-14 to 2015-16.

This isn't just a matter of equity. It's a matter of determining the future.

All workers, regardless of their race or ethnicity, see a huge earnings boost by attaining a bachelor's degree.

Black and Latino workers get a larger percentage boost than do Whites (Figure 4).

## Figure 4. The earnings boost for a bachelor's degree over a high school diploma is larger for Blacks and Latinos than it is for Whites.

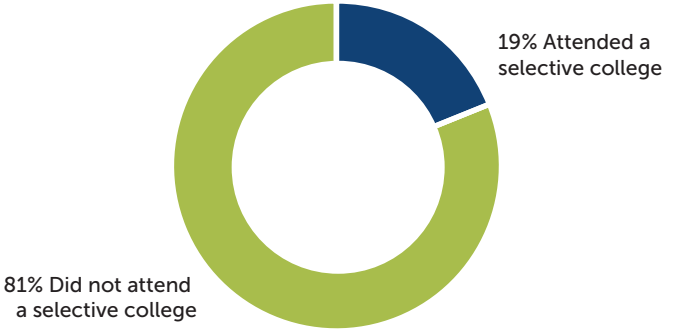



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau's *American Community Survey*, 2015.
Note: Earnings were calculated for 25-to-64-year-olds who worked full time for the full year.

Selective public colleges justify their enrollment disparities by pointing out that Whites score higher on standardized admissions tests. This is true, but there are far more Black and Latino students with the qualifications to attend selective colleges than ever get to attend one.

About 341,000 Black and Latino students scored above average on the SAT or ACT in 2014. But only about 65,000 of them enrolled in a selective college (Figure 5).

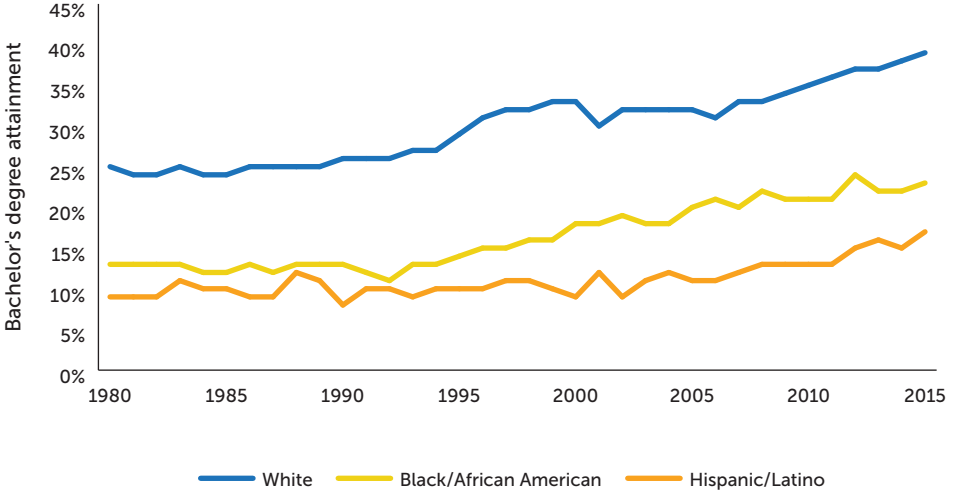
## Figure 5. Of the 341,000 Black and Latino students who scored above average on the SAT or ACT, fewer than one-fifth gained entry to a selective college.




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the National Center for Education Statistics' *Education Longitudinal Study of 2002*, 2012.

Blacks and Latinos have made some recent gains in earning bachelor's degrees, but they lag far behind Whites (Figure 6).

## Figure 6. Blacks and Latinos have slowly increased bachelor's degree attainment, but neither group has reached the attainment rate (25%) that Whites achieved in 1980.



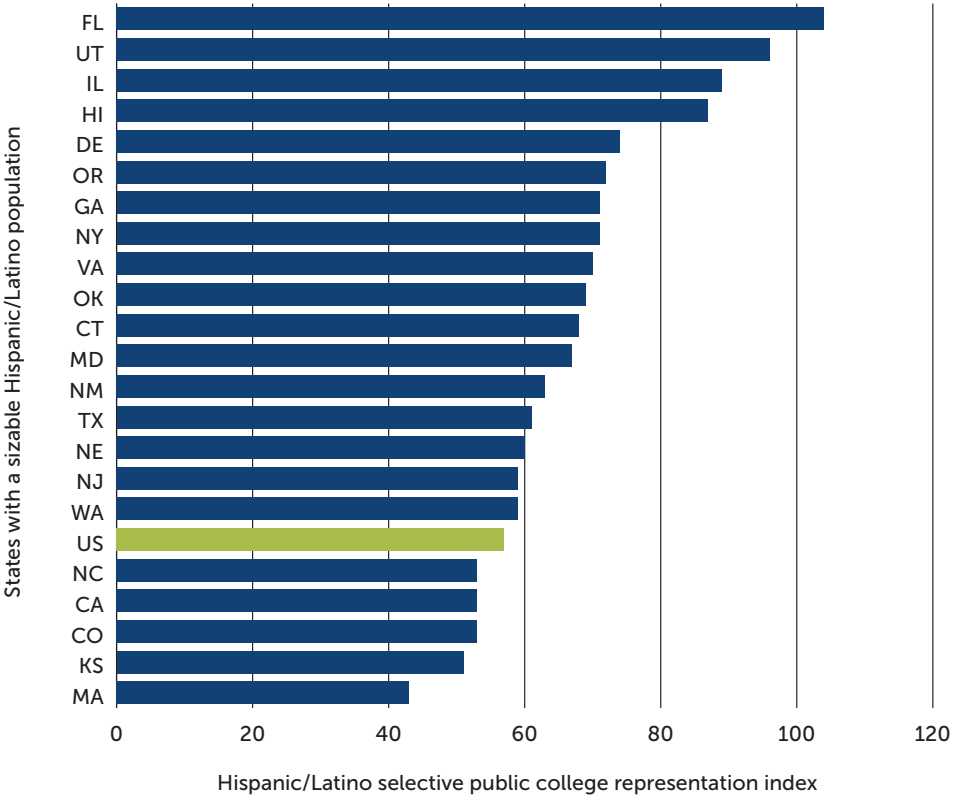

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau's *Current Population Survey*, 1980-2015.
Note: Bachelor's degree attainment is the share of 25-to-30-year-olds who have completed at least four years of college.

Public universities are funded by all taxpayers and should serve all segments of their states' populations. But that is not happening.

Blacks and Latinos are severely underrepresented at selective public colleges.

Florida is the only state where the proportion of Latinos in selective public colleges is equal to the proportion of Latinos in the college-age population (Figure 7).

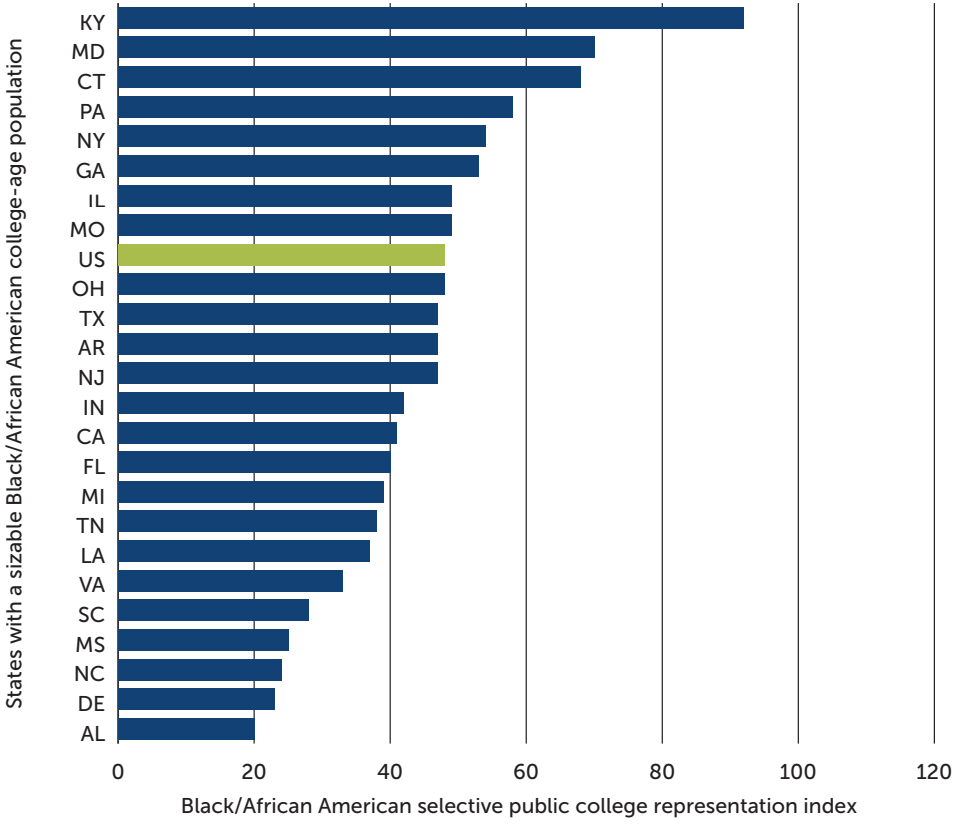
## Figure 7. In Florida, the share of Latino students at the selective public colleges mirrors the college-age population. In all other states with sizable Latino populations, Latinos are underrepresented at selective public colleges.




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System and the US Census Bureau's *American Community Survey,* three-year pooled data centered on 2015 (2014-2016).
Note: The representation index is the first-time fall enrollment to college-age population ratio. 2015 enrollment is pooled fall enrollment numbers from academic years 2013-14 to 2015-16. Only states with both a sizable Hispanic/Latino college-age population and at least one selective public college in 2015 were included.

Blacks, overall, are less represented in selective public colleges than they were a decade ago. Blacks are underrepresented in every state (Figure 8).

## Figure 8. Blacks are underrepresented at selective public colleges in every state with a sizable population of Blacks.

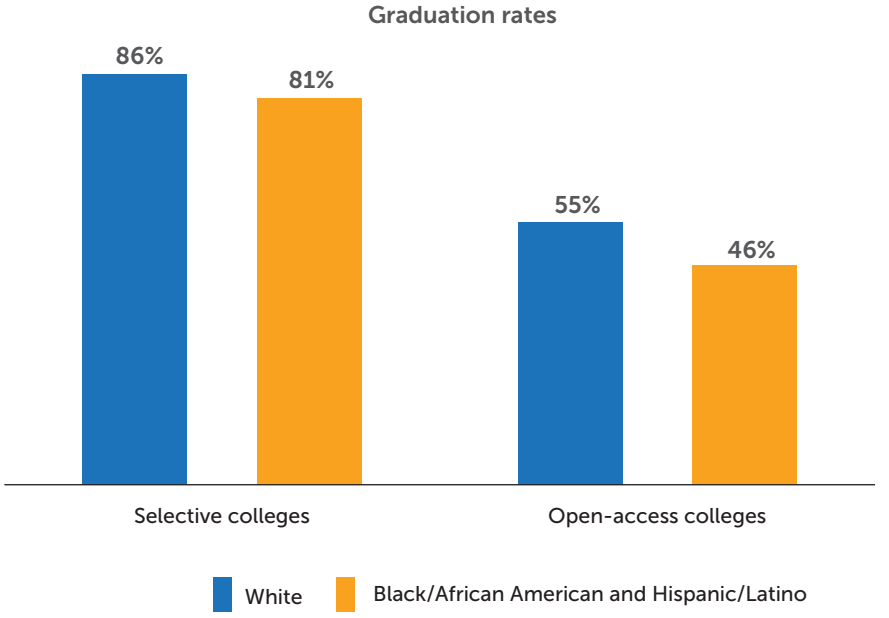



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System and the US Census Bureau's *American Community Survey*, three-year pooled data centered on 2015 (2014-2016).
Note: The representation index is the first-time fall enrollment to college-age population ratio. 2015 enrollment is pooled fall enrollment numbers from academic years 2013-14 to 2015-16. Only states with both a sizable Black/African college-age population and at least one selective public college in 2015 were included.

The quality of the university is important. No matter their race or ethnicity, students do better at selective colleges.

White students who attend selective colleges have an 86 percent graduation rate, and Blacks and Latinos graduate from them at an 81 percent rate. At open-access colleges, Whites graduate at a 55 percent rate; only 46 percent of Blacks and Latinos graduate from them (Figure 9).

## Figure 9: Graduation rates at selective colleges are higher than at open-access colleges.

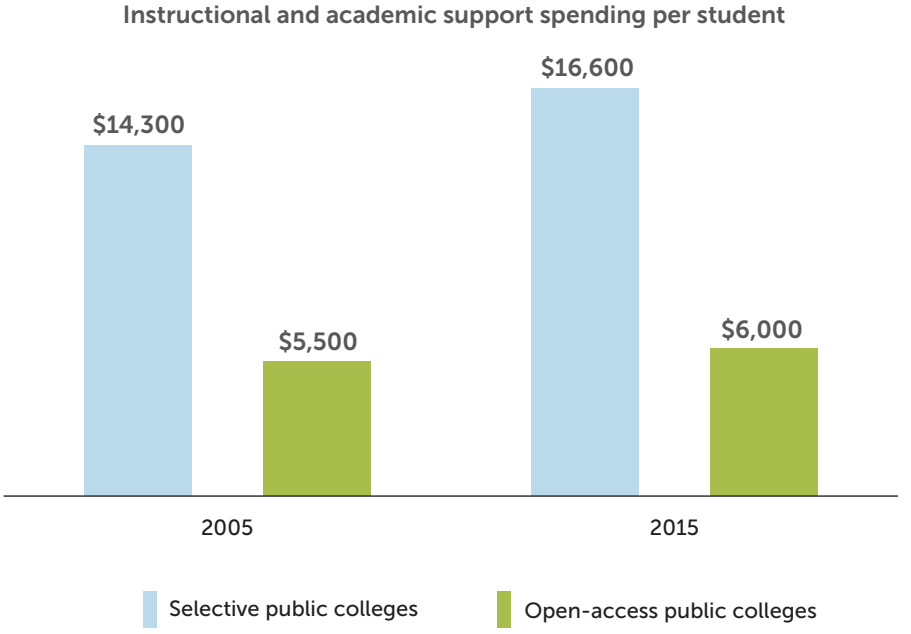



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the National Center for Education Statistics' *Education Longitudinal Study of 2002*, 2012.

States compound the problem by giving far more resources to selective public colleges (Figure 10).

The result is a tiered public higher education system in the United States that inherently favors White students.

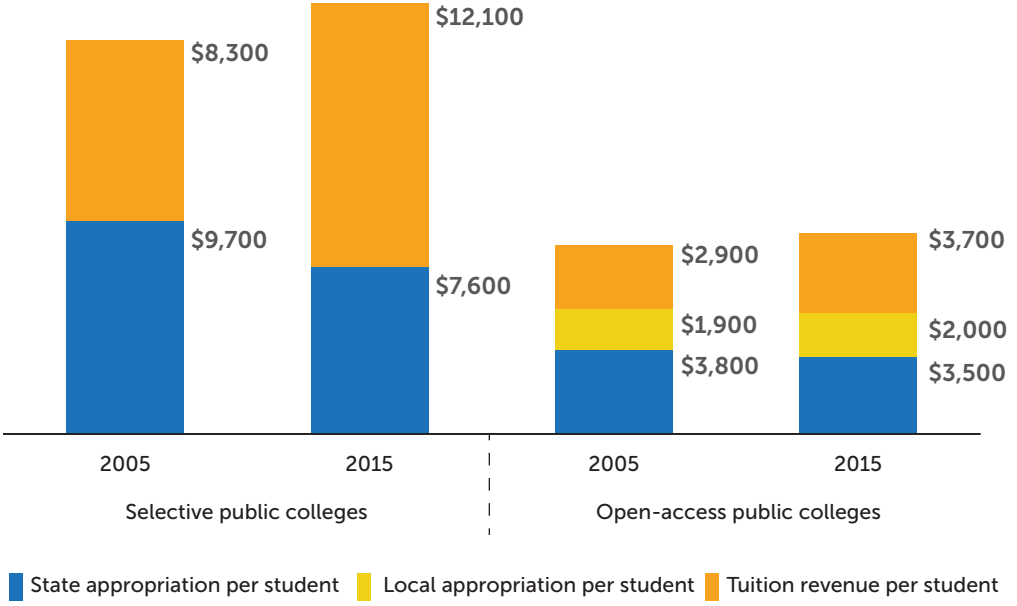
## Figure 10. The gap in instructional and academic support spending per student between open-access and selective public colleges has widened from $8,800 in 2005 to $10,600 in 2015.




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, academic years 2004-05 and 2014-15.
Note: Students are measured in full-time equivalents to account for full-time and part-time students. Adjusted for inflation to 2015 dollars.

In the past decade, spending differences between selective public colleges and open-access public colleges have been growing. States are cutting appropriations to selective public colleges, but these colleges are more than making up for the loss in revenue by increasing tuition (Figure 11).

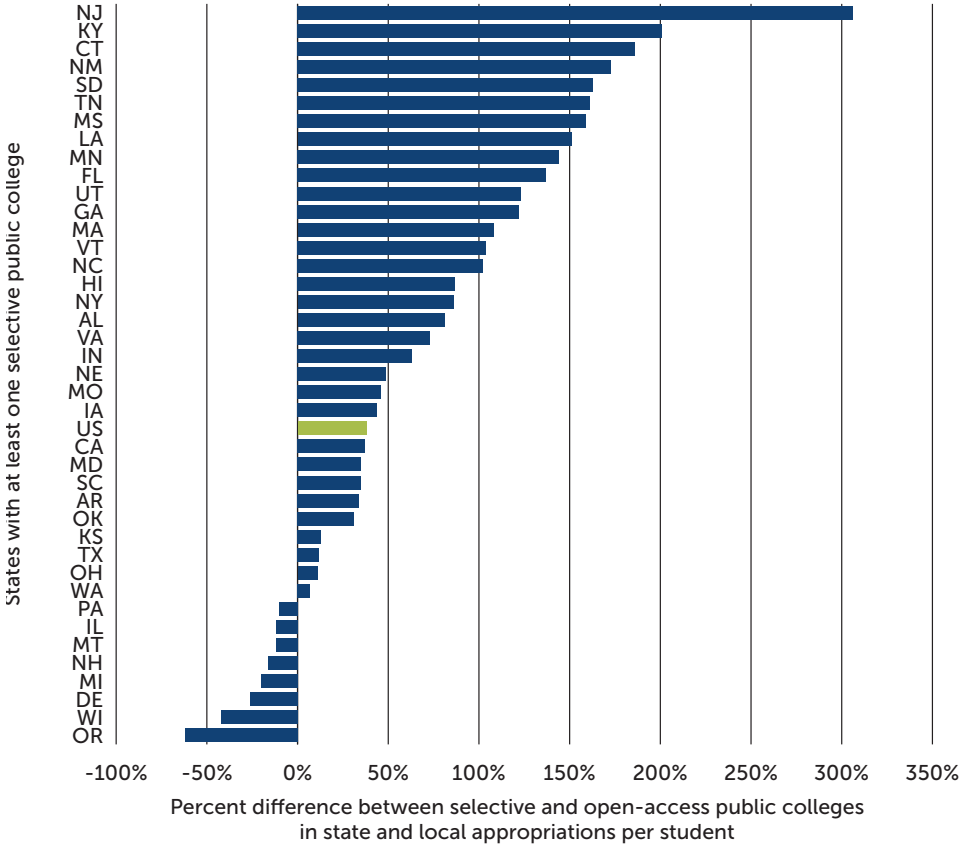
## Figure 11. Since 2005, selective public colleges have become more dependent on tuition revenue. In so doing, they have widened their funding advantage over open-access public colleges.




Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, academic years 2004-05 and 2014-15.
Note: Students are measured in full-time equivalents to account for full-time and part-time students.

In 15 states, selective public colleges received at least double the amount of state and local appropriations per student that open-access public colleges received (Figure 12).

## Figure 12: Fifteen states, led by New Jersey, give at least twice as much in appropriations per student to selective public colleges as they do to open-access public colleges.

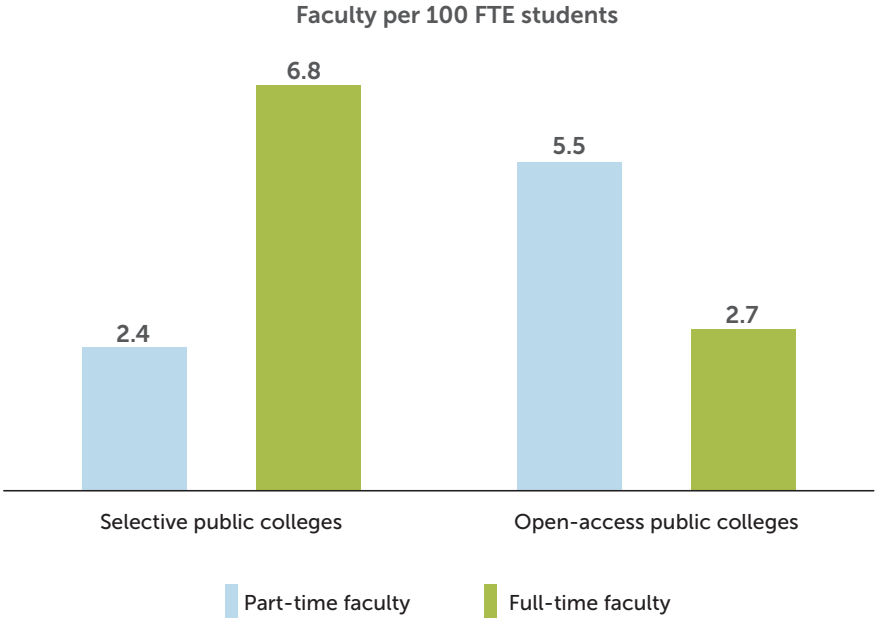



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, academic year 2014-15.
Note: Students are measured in full-time equivalents to account for full-time and part-time students. Colorado is excluded due to data limitations.

The result is that selective public colleges have far more resources than open-access public colleges.

For instance, selective public colleges have far more full-time faculty members and fewer part-time faculty members than open-access public colleges (Figure 13).

## Figure 13. Selective public colleges have far more full-time faculty per 100 full-time-equivalent (FTE) students than open-access public colleges, which rely more heavily on part-time faculty.

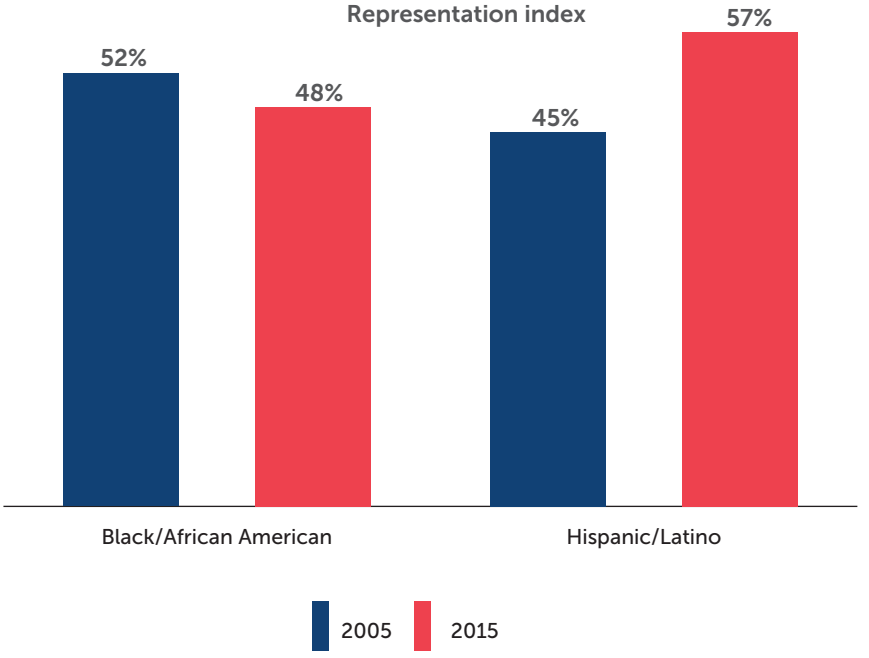



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, academic year 2014-15.
Note: Students are measured in full-time equivalents to account for full-time and part-time students.

Racial integration at selective public colleges has a long way to go. Latino attendance at selective public colleges has grown. Yet, Latinos are only a little more than halfway to representation in selective public colleges (12%) that is proportional to their share of the college-age population (21%).

The representation of Blacks in selective public colleges has actually fallen in the past decade (Figure 14).

## Figure 14. Latinos made significant progress in representation at selective public colleges from 2005 to 2015, but Black representation declined.

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Note: The representation index is the first-time fall enrollment to college-age population ratio. 2015 enrollment is pooled fall enrollment numbers from academic years 2013-14 to 2015-16. Only states with either a sizable Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino college-population and at least one selective public college in 2015 were included.

To help combat these increasing disparities, policymakers must consider several options:

1. End the overreliance on standardized test scores to decide who gets into selective public colleges. High-performing Black and Latino students deserve a greater chance of getting into selective public colleges and universities.

2. Make sure enrollment at selective public colleges reflects a cross-section of the state's college-age residents.

3. Allocate more state and federal spending to education at open-access public colleges, where the financial needs are greatest.

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can be accessed online at cew.georgetown.edu/SUStates

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