Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Parking is always a nightmare on a college campus, and Ivy University is no exception. I allotted what I thought would be ample time to find a place, insert the requisite pile of quarters into the meter, and hike to the library to be on time for my 5:30 appointment. What I hadn't planned for was the change that had taken place in the guest parking areas in the few years since I'd been a regular visitor to Ivy University. Where there used to be a number of angled spaces, there were now only a few parallel slots, and I had to drive around several times before something opened up—"stalking the meters," a familiar college pastime, but one for which I had little spare energy. To compound the parking challenge, the wind and rain put me in a foul mood for the walk, which now became more like a jog, dragging my backpack weighed down with my tape recorder and paperwork, and struggling with a flimsy umbrella that wanted to turn itself inside out, rendering it useless against the growing storm. On most of my visits to campus, I found Ivy University an inspiring place, with its expansive quadrangle hemmed in by the timeless building façades of classic and somewhat forbidding Greek architecture. The immediate impression one receives when walking on this campus is that this is an academically focused university that takes itself seriously; that message is delivered through its selectivity, its rigor, and its physical design.

Tiana sat waiting for me in the library foyer, looking remarkably more confident and mature than when I last saw her four years earlier. Her hair was sleekly pulled back, lending a bit more professionalism to her look, despite the addition of a few more visible body piercings than I remembered. She radiated energy and enthusiasm, and I was delighted to see her again, despite her good-natured chiding of me for being late. We both appreciated the irony of this role reversal. As a college freshman four years before, it was Tiana who was often late to meetings. We embraced and entered the library together to begin a conversation about her college years.

And so this research project began, retracing the connections that I'd formed four years earlier with a group of remarkable college students,

most of whom were just beginning their experiences with higher education. These students were remarkable for a number of reasons:

- They all came from backgrounds that disadvantaged them at an elite institution of higher learning.
- As a result, these students did not meet the traditional entry requirements to Ivy University.
- Their access came through a New York state and private university supported program—the Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP)—that was designed to provide access and opportunity for promising students who might otherwise be denied entrance to four-year colleges and universities.
- They all chose to attend Ivy University, a selective private university that prided itself on aspiring to Ivy League status.
- These students were amazingly diverse in terms of immigrant status, racial/ethnic/cultural identities, and chosen majors.
- Despite the odds against their success at an elite university, 22 of the 23 students who were part of an earlier portion of this longitudinal ethnographic research project (published in Goodwin, 2002) graduated from this university within five years.

In terms of persistence, resilience, and retention, this is clearly a remarkable group of individuals. Their stories are the focus of this book.

WHY SHOULD WE CARE?

At the same time that I was writing about these graduates, a historic battle was being fought in the Supreme Court over the validity of affirmative action in admissions practices of colleges. Two cases, *Grutter v. Bollinger et al.* (2003) and *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2003), challenged the admissions policies of the University of Michigan. The nation's most respected legal minds examined the complex question of democratic access to higher education. This issue was a hot topic for educators, researchers, students, and parents as we explored the equity of selective admissions to institutions of higher education, especially those that prepare students to become leaders in their chosen fields.

Competition for credentials is fierce, and access to prestigious institutions is seen as a prerequisite entry card for future success. Numerous studies have documented the difference in outcomes for graduates from elite institutions versus graduates from nonselective institutions. These studies have also documented the disparate levels of admissions to elite institutions for students from diverse backgrounds (Bowen & Bok, 1998;

Hurtado & Inkelas, 1998; Karabel & McClelland, 1987; Katchadourian & Boli, 1994; Kuh, 2001; Nettles, Perna, & Millett, 1998; Rendon, 1998; Trent et al., 2003). Admissions procedures to many selective colleges and universities continue to tilt toward the power of financial affluence and class status when determining who wins the academic lottery, giving advantage to those with the most social and political capital (Bourdieu, 1973/1977). Democratic access is not a reality in this country. Affirmative action is only one measure that attempts to provide more opportunity for *equity* of access. Hence, the Supreme Court decision deeply affects the lives of students like those in this study. In June 2003, the Supreme Court ruling made admissions to colleges almost as muddy as before by ruling that race may be used as a factor in admissions programs, but it must be "'narrowly tailored' to achieve the university's diversity goals" (*Split Ruling*, 2003).

Coinciding with the serious challenge to affirmative action, the economy has taken a disastrous nosedive in terms of productivity, earnings, and employment opportunities. Acts of terrorism in 2001 resulted in devastating effects on the economy and propelled the country into a war with Iraq and the establishment of expensive security mechanisms within the "homeland." The current unemployment rate of slightly over 6% is higher than this country has seen in a number of years, and the median search time for job seekers has risen to 4.2 months, breaking a 17-year record (Sahadi, 2003, p. 1). Scores of discouraged job seekers have dropped out of the hunt and are not included in these figures.

The students in this study are graduating into an economy that has no room for them, despite their academic achievements and contrary to the rosy forecast when they began their college careers. As a result, many of them face a bleak employment outlook and a diminished opportunity for earnings that would allow them to pay off the significant debt that they may have incurred during college. By default, many of them decide to accelerate their entry into graduate schools, a worthwhile alternative, but one that sees students incurring even more debt, especially in the tight economic climate that offers few scholarships for graduate education. In addition, there is no guarantee that upon completion of graduate school, the economic situation will have improved. Add into this dark equation the fact that some of these students have worked to provide financial assistance to their families, and things become even more complicated. It is not just the student who is disadvantaged by the economic situation, but the family who has invested in, and perhaps gone into debt to finance, an education that was supposed to elevate the entire family. In this "Job-search Hell" (Sahadi, 2003, p. 1), the loss of income during the undergraduate years may not be offset by a lucrative job at graduation.

Each of us who claims some type of allegiance to this nation has a vested interest in the success of all of our college graduates. College is touted as the proving ground for future leaders and professionals (Katchadourian & Boli; 1994, Keohane, 2001; among others) and as a prerequisite for employment that will pay a living wage in today's society. Anticipated earnings for graduates of four-year colleges and universities continue to be significantly higher than for those who have high school or even two-year degrees. In fact, jobs requiring a bachelor's degree as a prerequisite are expected to grow 21.6 percent between 2000 and 2010 (*Occupational Outlook Handbook*, 2003, p. 2). The degree becomes more and more important for achieving a job that pays well enough to support oneself, let alone a family, and at the same time provides a venue for giving back to society and the economy.

However, the context of a society in crisis at the time of graduation impacts students and their experiences. But to what extent? What do we really know about the reality of college and postgraduate outcomes at this particular time for students from disadvantaged backgrounds? Hard-fought campaigns have created a number of successful access programs, and perennial battles have managed to salvage and maintain many of them, albeit at weakened levels. For example, in 2003, as in many years, the state of New York underwent an extensive battle over the education budget. The proposal submitted by Governor George Pataki included decreasing funding to compensatory programs in higher education by at least 50%. (For more discussion, please see Arenson, 2003.) The battle to provide equitable access is hard fought and never ending, yet we know little about what the students in these programs do after graduation. These programs are so strapped for funding that they can't afford the resources to conduct follow-up tracking of their graduates (personal communication with Barbara Leonard, Supervisor, Collegiate and Pre-Professional Programs Unit, New York State Education Department, December 11, 2002). The first step is to get deserving students into college, but the tangential concern should be how this access impacts the students' future quality of life. What little we hear are numbers that are quoted in the popular media to such an extent that they numb us to the realities behind these numbers. Quantitative research in its bright maze of astronomical statistics implies the magnitude of the outcomes—the numbers attending college, the numbers graduating, the numbers dropping out, the numbers employed, the numbers on welfare, the change in employment prospects—but it can only gloss over the on-the-ground lived experience of real people with names, faces, families, histories, hopes, and dreams, especially those who are most vulnerable to economic stress.

The goal of this qualitative research, therefore, is to give a face to living, breathing college graduates from diverse backgrounds that placed

them at a disadvantage at elite universities, and to understand how they navigated their college years and how they perceive their future opportunities. Two broad questions guide this research study:

1. How did this group of disadvantaged students experience, and eventually succeed at, an elite university?
2. What are the immediate outcomes after graduation from an elite university for this group of disadvantaged students?

The narrations of the students as they describe their lived experiences and their aspirations are the focus of this book.

LOOKING FOR ANSWERS

Tiana, the student I met at the beginning of this chapter, was part of a group of 23 students who participated in an earlier study that took place during 1998 and 1999. This qualitative research was conducted on the campus of Ivy University in New York State where I began by observing the students as they participated in a summer program that preceded their first semester of enrollment. The intent of the program was to give them a focused and paced introduction to the college experience through a concentrated period of study of one academic subject and a number of skill-enhancing courses. The program, part of HEOP, which is partially funded by the New York State Education Department, supported students who were entering this university from disadvantaged educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, determined by a complex formula of family size, income, and high school location and rating (Bureau of Higher Education Opportunity Program, 1998–1999).

During the fall semester, I interviewed each of these students twice and followed up with several focus groups in the spring. Faculty, staff, and graduate students who worked with the students were also interviewed. What emerged through the transcribing, coding, and analysis of these conversations was a complex picture of a diverse population navigating an educational environment that was perplexing and sometimes hostile to them. Of particular interest to me was the emerging significance of immigration status for these students and how this impacted their experiences at Ivy University.

I became more connected with these students than I had expected. As a middle-aged, White woman (older than many of the students' mothers and a late bloomer in the area of research) and coming from a position of upper-middle-class privilege (although not that far removed from my rural and immigrant, working-class roots), these students were surprising in the

trust and confidence they allowed me, despite the obvious differences in our life circumstances. One thing we could all identify with was the struggle of being a student. They seemed willing to participate because they would be assisting me in my studies, and they would be provided with an opportunity to give visibility to their experiences.

In the intervening years, while I worked on turning these student observations and narrations into a book (Goodwin, 2002), I maintained limited contact with the students through e-mail correspondence and an occasional lunch or conversation on campus. As the students approached graduation, I felt compelled to discover how things turned out for them. They had been unselfish and generous with their time and stories, and I had been reeled into their lives after spending so much time poring over their words and experiences. I was curious about how everything played out, about the "ending," so to speak. Hence, this project became a longitudinal study to explore the outcomes of college for this particular population and to answer the questions that were posed in the previous section.

Reestablishing connections with all of the students came about in a variety of ways. The HEOP staff on the Ivy University campus, who provided ongoing support for these students throughout their college years, had been important support for me as well during this research process. The assistant director provided me with an update regarding the students' status, and I contacted them by e-mail during the spring semester of 2002, their fourth year in college, to request their participation in a follow-up project. Many responded, and I began interviews that semester immediately before many of them graduated. In addition, the program held a graduation dinner for the students and their families. I wangled an invitation to the celebratory dinner where I was able to reconnect with most of the participating students and their families right at the point of graduation. Interviews continued the following fall semester with some students who were still on campus completing their fifth year of study. I also traveled to New York City to interview a few of the graduates, and I interviewed another in Buffalo. Some students were impossible to interview in person, but I was able to speak with several of them by phone. And then there were some who had dropped off the radar or who did not respond to my inquiries. In the end, I was able to complete 14 in-depth interviews, speak with 3 students by phone, and ascertain the whereabouts of the remaining 6 students, although I did not interview them.

The reality of keeping track of students as they graduate is that as they move *on* with their lives, they move *away* from their college experiences. For some, the Ivy University years were not the most uplifting and rewarding period of their lives, and they chose to put it behind them as

quickly as possible. Unfortunately, this probably included distancing themselves from my research that probed their college experiences and served as a reminder of things they just wanted to forget. Some may not have wanted to revisit who they were as young and naive first-year students or the grueling journey through the remaining years at college. I wish I had been able to include the unique experiences of all of the original participants because their stories are important and their strengthening voices need to be heard. But engaging and maintaining participation is a challenge that is inherent to qualitative research (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, refer to this as the "mortality rate," common in longitudinal research) and makes me value the contributions of those who agreed to participate even more.

WHO ARE THESE STUDENTS?

Experience is always contextual, so the personal and educational histories that these students brought to campus, as well as the influences of an elite college environment that mediated the experiences of these students, are critical pieces of the story of these four years. During my initial research project, at the point of college entry for most of these students, I found an interesting pattern emerging that grouped their histories and experiences in an unexpected fashion. The sociological lenses at the turn of the 20th century focused on group variations determined predominantly by race/ethnicity, class, and gender. Critical research questions around such topics as women in science and math, or the Black student experience of higher education versus that of White students, explored the differences in lived experiences of students who claimed membership in these various groups. However, this particular group of students in my study was so diverse in background that these parameters were immediately too constricting to guide this research. It was true that I had participants of both genders, but they also had tremendously diverse racial/ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Their class positions were similar, but certainly tempered by their gender, race/ethnicity/culture, and family history.

Only after the summer spent observing these students in classes, when I finally talked with them one on one about themselves, did the richness of their ethnic histories become apparent. Over time, a grouping pattern evolved for these students that focused on, but did not collapse, these rich histories by looking at their immigration status. What became clear was that the length of time and experience in this country made a difference in the expectations these students brought to college and in their perspectives about the college experience.

The three emergent groups corresponded to the generational nature of immigration. If the student had been born in another country and later

immigrated to the United States, the student was considered a first-gener-ation immigrant and became part of a group that I called "The Pleasers." One of the outstanding characteristics of the young people in this group, one that has also been documented in research focused particularly on first-generation immigrants (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco,, 1995), is the desire to please their parents and family before themselves. In addi-tion, they are generally committed to obeying the rules and regulations constructed by their communities and schools. Of the 23 students in the 1998 study, 9 of them fell into this group. Six of the students in the 2002 project were Pleasers.

Students who were born in the United States to parents who immi-grated from another country fell into the second group, "The Searchers." Of the three groups, the Searchers seemed to have the greatest challenge decid-ing how to construct their identities. They were often torn between a dual allegiance (Ogbu, 1991; Suarez-Orozco, 1991) to the cultural roots of their parents and their desires to determine their own destinies. Hence, their search for an identity became a defining characteristic. Seven students in the 1998 study were Searchers, and four continued on with the 2002 research.

Both the Pleasers and the Searchers were *voluntary* immigrants; the choice to immigrate to the United States was a deliberate and thoughtful decision on the part of these students' families. By contrast, the third group, "The Skeptics," were descendants of immigrants who *involuntar-ily* migrated to the United States (Ogbu, 1991). Many of their ancestors were slaves who had endured enforced marginalization and subordina-tion to the culture of the dominant White, Anglo-European majority. Seven of the original research participants were Skeptics, and four of the 2002 cohort belonged to this group.

These groupings were useful explanatory tools when exploring the variety of perspectives and experiences that the students narrated. Chap-ter 2 will examine the characteristics of these groups in greater detail. However, regardless of any group differences, no matter how interesting or seemingly significant, the bottom line is that 22 of the original 23 stu-dents completed their bachelor's degrees at this university.

HOW DID THESE STUDENTS SUCCEED?

During the follow-up interviews with these students, only 3 of the 14 who completed in-depth interviews felt that they had received a strong preparation for college from the high schools they attended. Several more talked about strong leadership opportunities and specific programs within their high schools that had given them a boost for college, but the majority of students felt that their high school preparation had been lack-

ing in some way. These responses are not surprising given the context of the urban high schools from which most of these students graduated. Douglas Massey, Camille Charles, Garvey Lundy, and Mary Fischer, (2003) noted the following about incoming first year Latinos and Blacks when compared to Whites and Asians:

> In addition to coming from less stable and more socioeconomically disadvantaged families and neighborhoods, students from the former groups [Latinos and Blacks] are also, on average, more likely to have experienced social disorder, violence, and lower-quality instruction within their schools, especially if they attended racially segregated institutions. . . . Even though blacks and Latinos report comparable access to most educational resources, the average quality of the resources appears to be lower. To a considerable degree, this inequality is structured by school segregation. (pp. 106–107)

The connections that these researchers trace between race and quality of educational resources, are expanded by William Trent et al. (2003) to include economic class location:

> Schools that are populated by almost exclusively low-income children tend to have fewer resources, less-prepared teachers, fewer college-preparation courses, and other conditions that negatively affect student learning than do schools populated by students with a diversity of income levels. (p. 3)

One of the criteria that determined eligibility for the college access program (HEOP) in which my research cohort participated was educational disadvantage, meaning a school system that did not have the resources or programs that could provide strong opportunity for its graduates to pursue study at a college or university. The opportunity for special programs and AP courses (courses that offered advanced placement and college credit) may have been limited or nonexistent. Teresa, a participant in the 1998 study, described her situation at a local urban high school:

> I didn't know that going to a high school that was below standards was really going to affect me in life until I got to college and realized that I'm totally unprepared for what's going on around me. And I have to make it on my own wits. I mean, I don't have any experience from high school. I think, I didn't

know it at the time, I didn't know it until I got here that I went to one of the worst high schools in the world. I don't know anything and it's not because I didn't pay attention. It's because it was never taught to me. Like other students are coming here and they took, "Well, I took AP biology; I took AP chemistry." There are no AP classes in [my high school] whatsoever.

Some students talked about how they had deluded themselves into thinking that they *were* prepared for college because, after all, they had been admitted to this selective university, only to find these illusions trampled in the first days and weeks on campus, taking a toll on their psyches. The following excerpts express some of the frustration the students experienced during this transition:

L. G.: What was the most disappointing aspect of college?

NICOLE: Uhm, I guess when you find out you're not the smartest! Which, unfortunately, I started to find that out after freshman year. And, that was really disappointing. I just felt, was I doing something wrong? I thought I was studying, and yet, sometimes I didn't really maybe understand the work. I couldn't get a knack for the work. And it really made me start to look at myself. And, I guess that's when I started to question whether math was what I wanted or not.

CLARISSA: I think that I haven't done as well as I expected. . . . I was accustomed to in high school, getting things right away and doing well. You know, that hasn't been the case. So, that was hard to get accustomed to. No need to get accustomed to it. Just hard to feel that.

MARTINE: Uhm, it was really very challenging with academics, with the education I had received before college. It was a very . . . it wasn't just the next step. I felt like it took three steps at a time. I felt I didn't have, I didn't know enough about myself.

In researching *The Source of the River,* Massey et al. (2003) also found that, at selective colleges and universities, overconfidence was problematic for specific groups of the entering student population:

Through a judicious cross-tabulation of reported self-confidence and indicators of prior academic success and prepara-

tion, we can identify a subset of black and Latino students whose confidence seems most out-of-keeping with their actual level of college preparation, people at greatest risk of experiencing psychological trauma in encountering the realities of academic life in very selective institutions. . . . These people are most at risk of experiencing emotional shock, disappointment, and depression in response to their encounter with college-level work. . . . Thus in terms of potential for undermining the psychological motivation for success in higher education, the most serious threat seems to be overconfidence. (p. 106–107)

In addition to lacking a solid academic preparation for college, several students commented on personal skills, such as time management, becoming a problem for them. When Clarissa was asked why she felt that college was more of a struggle than she anticipated, she responded:

I think, poor time management skills. Uhm, some of it was that I didn't have the background in certain areas that I needed. But I think the majority of it was poor time management skills, especially my freshman year. I could have done much better had I stuck to what I knew coming in, what I was told.

And even when the student felt prepared for a particular discipline, the transfer of skills to the college level didn't happen as expected, as revealed in their responses to a question about whether they found Ivy University harder or easier than expected:

TIANA: I went to a competitive high school. I'd say it's harder than I expected.

STACEY: Uhm, harder. The first year was definitely an eye opener for me. I had always been the person at the top. . . . So, I'm like, I did it in high school, a lot of the same stuff. I was able to get through it and do great. Why can't I do it here? I was just so frustrated.

The students were prepared for college to be a challenge. But they had worked hard and achieved well in their high schools and expected to succeed in this new challenge. Many students were in the top 10% of their graduating classes and they wondered why Ivy University was so much more difficult and challenging than they had expected.

Given the unexpected setbacks in the academic arena, how did these students move through these initial obstacles and go on to complete the four or five years of required courses, and become graduates of this elite university? Three simple words best summarize their formula for success: *drive*, *persistence*, and *resiliency*. The simplicity of these words belies the complexity of actions and behaviors that these students employed, most of them stemming from what may best be called "situational" incentives and motivators, those determined by their families and by their diverse historical and experiential cultures. For instance, Damon (a Skeptic who graduated from Ivy University cum laude with a major in political science) identified a number of culturally relevant influences as factors that pushed him toward success in college:

> Strong support system. Family and friends. Believing in God. Uhm, knowing that when you put your mind to it, you can accomplish anything. And, you know, a lot of people who have helped me succeed in college don't even know that they have helped me. Famous people, books that I've read of people who are my heroes, that when you read them, they're so inspirational. When you read Dr. King's speech, you get so inspirational [sic]. When you read a Malcolm X speech, you get so inspirational [sic]. You read an Earl Graves speech or a book by Earl Graves, or you read about people who live in interesting places where you want to be someday. You know that you can do it. It gives you that push. It gets you so motivated. You say, "Oh, I want to be Spike" [referring to Spike Lee].

The motivators are as diverse as the backgrounds of these students, and they all contributed to the remarkable persistence that these students demonstrated in the face of numerous obstacles. Their endurance epitomizes the definition of resiliency.

Resiliency has received a considerable amount of research interest over the past couple of decades, especially in the fields of psychology and social work, primarily because of its positive connotation emanating from a "strength perspective" rather than from an explanatory model of victimization and pathology (Krovetz, 1999; Norman, 2000; O'Connor, 2002; Ward, 1999, 2000). Historically, educational research and the focus of media have been on the pathological model, where problematic students are "deficient," causing them to become victims forever lost to society, whether through educational frustration resulting in dropping out of the system or through institutionalization within the penal or mental incarceration systems.

Rather than further identifying factors that lead to failure in this deficiency model and piling more rhetoric on the growing mass of improbable "solutions" to this crisis of student failure, I find the shift of focus to the resiliency of students who find themselves in challenging situations more useful. Their stories can reveal the means for achieving success when faced with a number of obstacles set in place by the rigidity and inertia of society, or simply by the roll of the dice of fate. Therefore, this book continues the focus of its predecessor, *Resilient Spirits: Disadvantaged Students Making It at an Elite University* (Goodwin, 2002), by employing resiliency as the central pivot around which the success of these students will be discussed in upcoming chapters. For now, I adopt and paraphrase Janie Ward's (1999, p. 177) revised definition of *resiliency*: the ability to withstand and become strengthened from crises, adversity, and risk factors known to produce negative outcomes. This version of resiliency includes the critical concept of "strengthening" versus "bouncing back" because, as Janie Ward points out, students like those in this study do not return to a previous state that is implied by bouncing back. Instead, they move through the crises and challenges and become empowered to the point that they are *not* the same as they were before these life experiences. It will become clear from the narrations of the students throughout this book that they feel empowered by their successes and emerge from college changed people. They have not simply bounced back, but have become individuals who are changed and stronger as a result of surviving the rigors of an elite university.

WILL SUCCESS IN COLLEGE
PAY OFF IN THE "REAL WORLD"?

With varying degrees of success, I have tracked the immediate outcomes of college for the 23 students who participated in the original study that began in 1998. Many of them knew from the beginning of college that they planned to go on to graduate school to enhance their professional careers. Some looked forward to medical school, others to MBAs or master's degrees in fields such as education and engineering, and a few already planned to earn professional degrees or PhDs in their respective fields. Most of them acknowledged the necessity of work right after college to pay back loans, assist their families, and/or save for graduate school. However, the bright expectation was that having the degree in hand from a selective university would enable them to choose from lucrative job offers as soon as they graduated, without graduate-level degrees. That was then, 1998; this is now, 2003. How times have changed in those few years!

In the intervening years, the economy has turned upside down and the job offers have all but dried up, as corporations teeter on the globalization ledge and the stock market veers erratically north and south. Where the students hoped for financially attractive entry-level positions in their fields, they have discovered that they are now competing with a host of newly laid off and unemployed, overqualified, and experienced job seekers. And the competition is for virtually nonexistent jobs in this economy defined by downsizing and jettisoning work into the global market. As a result, the aspirations of the graduates have moderated, and a number of them have revised their immediate plans. They have had an opportunity to apply and enhance their resiliency skills beyond college.

Nine of the original 23 students did not participate in these follow-up interviews for a variety of reasons. What follows is an accounting of the most up-to-date information about these students at the time I stopped recording changes, approximately five years after the majority of these students entered college. In regard to these "missing students," through e-mails, phone conversations, and updates from the HEOP staff, I have fairly current and complete information about their situations at the time of this writing. Eight of the nine have graduated from Ivy University. One dropped out (the only one of the original group of 23 to not persist to graduation) at the end of his second year, and was living and working near Ivy University. One was just completing her fifth year at Ivy University and graduated at the end of the spring semester. Of the remaining seven graduates, one returned to her native Dominican Republic and two were working in the New York City/New Jersey area. From the information I last received from them, they both sounded like they were working for companies in their areas of expertise. The remaining four students set their sights on graduate school. Two continued on at Ivy University in the Master of Education Program. One was admitted to Howard University in Washington, DC, to begin work on a PhD in math, with her ultimate objective to become a college professor. The remaining graduate was admitted to Rutgers, but decided to return home to New York City to retake the law school entry board exams and to hold out for offers from more prestigious law schools.

That brings us to the remaining 14 students/graduates who are the heart of this book. Their stories will be fleshed out and given more life in the ensuing chapters, but a brief summary of where they are now provides an appropriate preview of what lies ahead. Four of the participants were older students at the time of our initial interviews in 1998. These students all graduated from Ivy University between 1999 and 2001. In the intervening years, one of them completed a master's degree at Emory, and all of them are currently working, three in jobs that are degree related. The

fourth is in temporary employment and will be entering law school in the fall. Seven of the remaining students graduated in the spring of 2002, within the traditional four years. Of these seven, three immediately went on to graduate schools, and four began working or looking for work. The final three finished college on the five-year plan. Two of them received degrees at the end of the spring semester of 2003, and one completed her studies at the end of the summer semester of 2003.

Regardless of whether these students went on to graduate school immediately or sought employment with their freshly earned degrees, all 14 students plan to complete some level of graduate education within a few years of receiving their bachelor's degrees. As their stories will reveal, none of these students breezed through college in a "traditional" fashion. All of them faced economic hardships and struggled with personal and academic challenges that were unique to their situations. And yet, all of these students valued their education and refused to become discouraged enough to drop out at the undergraduate degree level. Through waging their own wars within the academic system, they have become survivors and plan to reap more rewards. This is the story that follows. Chapter 2 explores in greater depth the identities of the student participants, focusing on their memberships in the three immigration groups and both the shared and unique characteristics within each cluster. Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 bring life to the students' somewhat isolated and protected college years by exploring the culture of Ivy University as well as the academic and social experiences of the students. Chapters 7, 8, and 9 look beyond the structured experiences of college to the students' goals and aspirations and to the reality of life for them after they breach the walls of Ivy University and cross the bridge into the "real world."