

The Immigrant Double Disadvantage among Blacks in the United States

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ABBREVIATED ABSTRACT

Prior studies have established that immigrant women in the United States and other countries are doubly disadvantaged in terms of labor market outcomes. Yet no study has considered whether and how a double disadvantage in labor force participation exists for black immigrants. This paper examines the double disadvantage for black immigrants from Caribbean and African nations compared to U.S. born blacks. Drawing from recent work that reconsiders the double disadvantage among U.S. immigrants, we also examine how marriage moderates the black double disadvantage. Our analysis reveals strong gendered differences in labor force participation and shows how marriage differentiates immigrant women's labor force entry more so than men's.

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Extended Abstract

It has been many years since Boyd (1984) articulated the double disadvantage thesis to describe the labor market position of immigrant women in Canada. She argued that immigrant women's labor force position reflects the "combined negative impact of sex and birthplace" such that their labor force outcomes are doubly disadvantaged (and lower) relative to those for the native-born and for men (1984: 1093). Since then, although studies have documented various forms of the double disadvantage (Raijman and Semyonov 1997; Schoeni 1998; De Jong and Madamba 2001; Adsera and Chiswick 2007; Foroutan 2008; Rebhun 2010), no work has examined gender and nativity gaps in the labor force participation of blacks in the United States. In this paper, we ask whether the gender-nativity gaps in U.S. labor force participation revealed in prior studies hold for blacks, and the extent to which marriage moderates any observed double disadvantage. Using micro data from IPUMS-USA, we begin by examining whether gender differences in labor market activity for black U.S. immigrants are larger than among native populations, and the extent immigrant women are disadvantaged relative to native-born women and native- and foreign-born men. We then consider how the disadvantage has shifted over time and the extent to which marital status helps to explain it.

Recent work by Donato, Piya, and Jacobs (2014) finds that although natives' and immigrants' labor force participation rates have closely tracked each other, converging somewhat between 1960 and 1990 but thereafter maintaining small nativity gaps for women and men, immigrant women were less likely than native women, and immigrant and native men, to be in the labor force throughout this period. More importantly, following Read and Cohen (2007), immigrant women's labor force experiences were more nuanced by marital status than prior studies had acknowledged. Marriage exacerbated and amplified immigrant women's disadvantage but its impact varied by national origin and religious practice, which reflects cultural expectations about wives' subordination to their husbands. Unmarried immigrant women's labor force participation was less constrained by such normative expectations. In contrast, among immigrant men, marriage improved their labor force participation prospects compared to unmarried men.

Therefore, although there was some variation in women's and men's participation rates by nativity, together gender and marital status were key drivers of labor market disadvantage. These findings suggest more complexity in the double disadvantage concept than considered in the past. We build on this recent work, but rather than focus on all immigrants irrespective of race, our emphasis is on black immigrants because studies show how they learn to negotiate the social dynamics of race as they incorporate into the United States (Bashi and McDaniel 1997; Waters 1999).

Data and Methods

In the current analysis, we focus on differences between immigrant and native prime-age (between ages of 25 and 54 years) black men and women in the United States because no studies have systematically considered such differences. Below we model labor force participation using measures that capture differences in human capital characteristics (education and age), family structure (marital status and number of minor children), and cultural assimilation (nativity). Our analysis uses microdata from IPUMS-USA for six years: 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010, and we extracted black women and men, foreign and U.S. born, aged 25-54 from the civilian, non-institutionalized population.

Data (not shown) from the most recent IPUMS-USA file tell us that the absolute number of foreign-born black persons in 2010 was approximately 2.4 million, compared to 17.4 million U.S. born blacks. Among blacks born in Caribbean nations, the leading origins were Jamaica and Haiti, with 34.4 and 32.3 percent (or 412,000 and 387,000), respectively. Moreover, among those born in Africa, Nigeria was the leading national origin; 17.1 percent, or 152,000, African born immigrants were Nigerian, followed by Ethiopians who were 14.6 percent of the African born immigrant population in 2010 (e.g. 129,000 persons).

For the United States, and for other countries where possible, we use information about individuals' labor force participation, nativity, human capital attributes such as education and age, marital status, number of children present, other income in households, residing in the central city, and year.¹ We analyze these data

¹Although we recognize that micro level variables are not the complete answer to understanding variation in labor force participation, they are important for understanding employment outcomes for foreign born populations (Poston 1994).

to empirically assess how well differences in human capital characteristics, family structure, and nativity explain gendered differences both across and within host societies.²

One final caveat before we begin. Our broad objective is to understand the gendered labor force activity of black U.S. immigrants. Given the large-scale analysis that follows, we focus only on one labor market outcome: labor force participation. We do this because joining the economically active labor force in the United States is an important initial step in an immigrant's economic assimilation, yet it is not a random process and results from complex interactions between discriminatory practices and immigrant characteristics (Hall and Farkas 2009; Stolzenberg and Tienda 1997). We also use labor force participation because it is likely to be a more conservative indicator of immigrant women's employment disadvantage than detailed measures related to working conditions and/or prestige or other rankings of occupations.

Analytic Strategy. Our analysis begins with the United States, and formally tests whether and how black labor force participation varies by gender, nativity, and marriage. We predict the probability of labor force participation as a function of achieved and ascribed characteristics that reflect workers' attractiveness to employers.³ We also include education-year interactions that account for changing worker demands and capture shifts in the skill distribution of workers. In these models, our focus is on the coefficients for gender (female or not) and nativity (foreign born or not). We then build on these models by adding an interaction between gender and nativity; it allows us to evaluate the overall effects of the double disadvantage on the probability of labor force participation. We also add a three-way interaction between nativity, gender, and marital status. In all models, we examine whether the double disadvantage assessed in the two-way interaction term (between gender and nativity) remains net of differences in marital status returns to nativity.

Results

Below we offer a preliminary assessment of whether and under what circumstances foreign and U.S.

²In future analyses, we will also estimate separate models for U.S. immigrants from the largest sending nations in 2010 and then add migration-specific factors to the models' specifications. Migration variables include period/year of initial entry (before 1987=referent, 1987-96, and 1997-2010) to capture shifts in policy contexts, and dummies variables for national origins, speaks English well or very well, and being a naturalized citizen.

³We will present full demographic profiles of our samples by year in the final version of this paper. For now, we present descriptive characteristics of our key variables for 2010 in Appendix Table 1.

black women and men are likely to be in the labor force, how participation rates have shifted over time, and examine the extent to which the effect of gender depends on nativity and marital status. This assessment begins with a formal test of whether black employment returns differ by gender and nativity over time. The baseline model includes categorical terms for gender and nativity in addition to a vector of individual characteristics associated with women and men's employment. To capture temporal differences in employment opportunities, we also add year dummy variables and treat 1960 as the reference group.

Table 1 presents point estimates for Model 1 and shows that our focal variables, i.e. gender and nativity, are significant predictors of black labor force participation. Compared to U.S. born blacks, Caribbean born participated more but African born participated less. In addition, women participated less than men, while those married were more likely to be in the labor force than those unmarried. Compared to those with less than a high school degree, higher levels of schooling translated into more labor force activity. As for the statistical controls, they contain few surprises. For example, household headship increased the odds of labor force participation, but having young children and living in the central city predicted lower odds of labor force participation. The effect of age is curvilinear; as age increased, the likelihood of labor force activity increased but eventually it declined. However, what is remarkable was the extent to which labor force participation declines across the years; compared to 1960, blacks faced declining opportunities that grew in magnitude over time.

Table 1 about here

Assessment of Double Disadvantage. In Model 2 of Table 1, we add two gender-nativity interactions (Caribbean born*female and African born*female). To visualize what these coefficients mean, we generated predicted probabilities for each of the six groups for years from 1960 to 2010 using the coefficients from Model 2. Figure 1 clearly shows that African immigrant and U.S. born women had the lowest labor force participation across the 50-year period, followed by Caribbean born women, African born men, U.S. born men and Caribbean born men, respectively. There are several noteworthy findings that contrast with prior studies that examine average differences net of race. First, the positions of the groups in Figure 1 relative to each other shifted very little over the period. Second, although most immigrant and U.S. born men had higher labor force

participation rates than comparable women, rates for African immigrant men and Caribbean immigrant women were fairly close to each other. Third, compared to average rates for all immigrants (see Donato, Piya and Jacobs 2014), those for blacks were lower in 1960 and remained lower in 2010. Thus, among Caribbean men, approximately 80 percent were in the labor force in 1960 rising to 85 percent in 2010. Among U.S. born and African born women, approximately 63 percent were in the labor force in 1960 and their participation grew to 73 percent by 2010.

Figure 1 about here

Double Disadvantage by Marital Status. In the final version of this paper, we will continue by examining the black double disadvantage by marital status. In particular, we will use coefficients from Model 3 of Table 1 because they include three-way interactions between nativity, gender and marital status, and by doing so, they relax the restriction of uniform employment returns to marital status across gender and nativity groups. Once again, we will visually display these results by calculating predicted probabilities. In addition, we will calculate predicted probabilities of black women's and men's labor force activity by nativity, marital status, and education to see if gaps in labor force participation vary across skill level.

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Appendix Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables among US Born, Caribbean Born, and African Born Blacks in 2010

Variable	Range	Total Sample		US-Born		Caribbean-Born		African-Born	
		N= 19,463,918		N=17,375,857		N= 1,199,395		N=888,666	
		Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
In Labor Force	0 - 1	77.7%	79.3%	77.2%	78.1%	82.6%	87.7%	79.9%	88.8%
Married	0 - 1	29.9%	36.3%	27.6%	34.0%	45.5%	52.7%	56.4%	55.9%
< High School	0 - 1	1.4%	13.5%	1.3%	13.8%	11.2%	13.3%	1.9%	7.1%
High School	0 - 1	38.4%	45.6%	38.9%	47.0%	36.2%	41.8%	3.8%	25.8%
Some College	0 - 1	31.0%	25.6%	31.3%	25.5%	29.5%	25.4%	28.2%	27.6%
Bachelors +	0 - 1	2.2%	15.3%	19.6%	13.6%	23.0%	19.6%	3.0%	39.5%
City Center	0 - 1	28.5%	27.7%	28.0%	27.2%	36.0%	33.0%	27.8%	3.6%
Head of HH	0 - 1	55.9%	4.7%	56.9%	39.6%	52.0%	43.7%	39.9%	57.4%
Age	18 - 54	37.4	36.8	37.3	36.6	39.5	39.2	36.4	37.7
# Children<5	0 - 5	.20	.13	.19	.11	.19	.17	.37	.33

Source: IPUMS USA, 2010. Sample limited to non-institutionalized men and women who identified as racially black, 25-54 years old, born in US, Caribbean, or in Africa. Ns are weighted to reflect population.

Table 1: Logistic Regression Models Predicting Labor Force Participation

	(1)		(2)		(3)	
Focal Variables						
<i>Nativity (ref= US Born)</i>						
Caribbean Born	0.267	(0.001)	0.170	(0.002)	0.228	(0.003)
African Born	-0.142	(0.002)	-0.328	(0.003)	-0.229	(0.004)
<i>Gender (ref= Male)</i>						
Female	-0.688	(0.001)	-0.699	(0.001)	-0.361	(0.001)
<i>Marital Status (ref= Unmarried)</i>						
Married	0.444	(0.001)	0.443	(0.001)	1.104	(0.001)
Focal Interactions						
Caribbean Born x Female	--	(0.000)	0.153	(0.003)	0.103	(0.004)
African Born x Female	--	(0.000)	0.330	(0.004)	0.361	(0.006)
Caribbean Born x Married	--	(0.000)	--	(0.000)	-0.323	(0.005)
African Born x Married	--	(0.000)	--	(0.000)	-0.375	(0.007)
Female x Married	--	(0.000)	--	(0.000)	-1.034	(0.001)
Caribbean Born x Female x Married	--	(0.000)	--	(0.000)	0.336	(0.006)
African Born x Female x Married	--	(0.000)	--	(0.000)	0.210	(0.009)
Controls						
<i>Education (ref= < High School Degree)</i>						
High School Degree	0.244	(0.002)	0.245	(0.002)	0.265	(0.002)
Some College	0.301	(0.004)	0.302	(0.004)	0.308	(0.004)
Bachelor's Plus	1.319	(0.006)	1.321	(0.006)	1.340	(0.006)
<i>Year (ref=1960)</i>						
1970	-0.121	(0.001)	-0.121	(0.001)	-0.116	(0.001)
1980	-0.245	(0.001)	-0.245	(0.001)	-0.231	(0.001)
1990	-0.308	(0.002)	-0.308	(0.002)	-0.297	(0.002)
2000	-0.525	(0.002)	-0.526	(0.002)	-0.507	(0.002)
2010	-0.484	(0.002)	-0.485	(0.002)	-0.460	(0.002)
City Center (ref=lives outside city center)	-0.119	(0.001)	-0.119	(0.001)	-0.116	(0.001)
Age	0.146	(0.000)	0.146	(0.000)	0.157	(0.000)
Age Squared	-0.002	(0.000)	-0.002	(0.000)	-0.002	(0.000)
Number of Children <5	-0.294	(0.000)	-0.294	(0.000)	-0.308	(0.000)
Head of HH (ref=other HH member)	0.683	(0.001)	0.683	(0.001)	0.469	(0.001)
High School x 1970	0.333	(0.003)	0.333	(0.003)	0.329	(0.003)
High School x 1980	0.462	(0.003)	0.462	(0.003)	0.448	(0.003)
High School x 1990	0.594	(0.003)	0.594	(0.003)	0.573	(0.003)
High School x 2000	0.447	(0.003)	0.446	(0.003)	0.421	(0.003)
High School x 2010	0.664	(0.003)	0.663	(0.003)	0.624	(0.003)
Some College x 1970	0.248	(0.005)	0.248	(0.005)	0.246	(0.005)
Some College x 1980	0.562	(0.004)	0.562	(0.004)	0.554	(0.004)
Some College x 1990	1.001	(0.004)	1.001	(0.004)	0.989	(0.004)
Some College x 2000	0.879	(0.004)	0.878	(0.004)	0.869	(0.004)
Some College x 2010	1.015	(0.004)	1.016	(0.004)	0.988	(0.004)
Bachelors + x 1970	0.162	(0.008)	0.162	(0.008)	0.174	(0.008)
Bachelors + x 1980	0.304	(0.007)	0.305	(0.007)	0.301	(0.007)
Bachelors + x 1990	0.713	(0.007)	0.715	(0.007)	0.708	(0.007)
Bachelors + x 2000	0.422	(0.007)	0.422	(0.007)	0.411	(0.007)
Bachelors + x 2010	0.813	(0.007)	0.813	(0.007)	0.786	(0.007)
Constant	-1.480	(0.003)	-1.475	(0.003)	-1.784	(0.003)
Observations	80,978,507		80,978,507		80,978,507	

Standard errors in parentheses

All coefficients are significant at p<0.001

Figure 1: Probability of Labor Force Participation, by Gender and Nativity (using coefficients from Model 2 in Table 1)

