

FIRST THE SOIL, THEN THE ROOTS: THE CONTINUED STRUGGLE OF AFRICAN
AMERICANS AND NATIVE AMERICANS IN THEIR QUEST FOR
ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship is a key driver of economic growth and social mobility, but systemic inequalities have historically impeded the progress of marginalized communities, specifically African Americans and Native Americans. Despite their significant contributions to America's culture, economics, and overall development these groups of people continue to still face obstacles and challenges that inhibit them from achieving in their entrepreneurial pursuits. Historical evaluations often minimize or overlook the problems experienced by African Americans and Native Americans, by blaming the cultures of these groups for their low self-employment rates. Recent research underscores the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status in determining entrepreneurial behavior. This thesis explores the variables that influence self-employment rates among African American and Native American men in the United States using a quantitative analysis of IPUMS ACS data covering the years 2000-2022.

KEYWORDS: (Entrepreneurship, African Americans, Native Americans, socioeconomic factors, marginalized communities, self-employment)

ON MY HONOR, I HAVE NEITHER GIVEN NOR RECEIVED
UNAUTHORIZED AID ON THIS THESIS

Galdion Woods
Signature

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1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship has long been acknowledged as a driving force behind economic growth, innovation, and social advancement. However, the entrepreneurial landscape in America has been plagued with inequalities affecting marginalized communities, particularly African Americans and Native Americans. Despite their contributions to the nation's history, economy, and culture these groups continue to face challenges that hinder their access to entrepreneurial progress.

Historical studies often neglect to address or minimize the hurdles confronted by African American and Native Americans entrepreneurs. Instead, they have mostly focused on conventional entrepreneurship narratives. However, recent theoretical and empirical investigations have highlighted the importance of acknowledging how race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status intersect in understanding entrepreneurial behavior. For example, studies by Bogan and Darity (2007) and Fairlie and Meyer (2000) have emphasized how structural factors like systemic racism, industry type, occupation choice, or educational attainment play a pivotal role, in influencing self-employment rates within these communities.

In this study, I use a quantitative research approach using data from IPUMS ACS data from 2000 to 2022 to analyze the factors that influence self-employment rates among African American and Native American men in the United States. I focus on the impact of various socioeconomic aspects such as age, education, occupation, region, race, and much more. Moreover, I aim to provide a perspective that can possibly inform policy interventions that can help aid entrepreneurship and socioeconomic opportunities for their communities.

One of the key contributions of this research is its ability to provide understanding of the systematic barriers faced by African American and Native American male entrepreneurs. By implementing both historical and empirical evidence, this research highlights the multifaceted properties of entrepreneurship within these marginalized communities, including the intersectionality of how race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic plays a key role in the opportunities granted for these two demographics.

This thesis will follow this roadmap: In the next section, I provide a review of the history and literature on African American and Native Americans, building context for my analysis. Next, I will explain the methodology and theoretical ideology used in this study. This section will outline the variables, and analytical tools used to analyze the data. The following sections elaborate on the findings and results of the analysis, discuss their implications, and offer recommendations for further research in the field. Lastly, I will conclude by summarizing key findings and how they contribute to the larger picture to increase comprehension of the inequalities in entrepreneurship in African and Native American communities.

2. Literature Review

African Americans and Native Americans have suffered and are scarred by slavery, colonialism, displacement, and violence on both a mental and physical front. These marginalized groups have faced generations of oppression, discrimination, and racism, which has impacted their status in society, both socially and economically. Self-employment or entrepreneurship not only signifies economic advancement, but it also serves as a roadway route out of poverty and unemployment for many demographic groups (Bogan and Darity, 2007). Historically, systemic barriers have barred African Americans and Native Americans from the benefits of entrepreneurship, which has contributed to invariably low rates of entrepreneurship and wealth in both communities. The negative effects of these barriers are clear in the poverty rates experienced by both groups. In 2013, Native Americans and African Americans had poverty rates that exceeded than the national rate of 14.3%. According to census data, American Indians and Alaska Natives had a poverty rate of 27%, while Native Hawaiians experienced a rate of 17.6% and African Americans faced a poverty rate of 25.8%. The effects of historical trauma are persistent in both communities, so it is imperative to understand the historical context and structural barriers that have shaped their respective experiences and how it relates to their entrepreneurial situations today.

Light and Gold (2000) found that groups experience resource disadvantages, because of historical factors such as slavery and peonage. Their research highlighted that African Americans are in a position of resource disadvantage, as well as Mexican immigrants. They explain that resources include human capital, a positive work ethic,

good diets, reliable health, contact networks, self-confidence, and education. Bogan and Darity (2007) argue that this shifts the lack of self-employment rates on cultural rationale, rather than focusing on the historical effects of white supremacy on black bodies, minds, and souls. However, expanding on Light and Gold's findings, I would argue that based on the resources listed, Native Americans also fall within the resource disadvantage category as well, due to the impacts of colonialism on their overall existence. Nonetheless, this paper will focus on how various institutional factors affect self-employment rates, rather than the cultural arguments used to minimize the effect of colonialism. Moreover, to expand upon Native Americans falling within the resource disadvantage category, it is crucial to delve into the enduring impact of colonialism on indigenous communities.

Colonialism, brought about forced displacement, cultural assimilation, and systemic oppression which has exacerbated the resource disadvantage, experienced by Native Americans, including their socio-economic, health, and education. These factors are relevant because human capital, social capital, and financial capital are essential for successful businesses launches and a business's ultimate longevity (Howard, 2019). Native Americans were stripped of these elements, from the onset of European colonization, resulting in the brutal enslavement of some Native American populations, and the stealing of their land, food, and goods (Diane, 2018). The colonization and exploitation of Native Americans began in 1492, when Christopher Columbus accidentally stumbled upon North America, which he thought was India, which falsely led to Natives being called Indians. The exploitation and disenfranchisement experienced by Native Americans throughout history, from the onset of European colonization to contemporary times, has attributed to a diminished capacity for them to participate and succeed in entrepreneurial activities.

Eurocentric notions of exceptionalism and entitlement gave birth to pride and extreme self-confidence self-images that were entirely different from Native Americans way of living. In addition, Europeans valued capitalist, individualistic approached, which also diverged from Native American beliefs (Diane, 2018). Despite settlers initially benefiting from indigenous knowledge, European settlers soon became greedy and violent, exploiting Native American resources and dismissing their rights. These conflicts between European settlers and Native Americans can be argued as the direct cause and beginning of the contemporary lack of social trust among indigenous people towards contemporary governments.

Teller (2010) highlights that the social and cultural aspects of Native tribes significantly influence entrepreneurship on the reservation. He explains that barriers to entrepreneurship must be understood in relation to the historical context, as Native people have endured exclusion, oppression, and exploitation (Tulchin & Shortall, 2008), leading to a fragmented relationship between tribes and the federal government. This distrust that was fostered further after years of broken treaties, and exploitation, has bled directly into the economic detriment of many Native Americans today. European settlement spread diseases, such as smallpox that killed off millions of indigenous peoples and were forced to move into lands, they had no knowledge of, which killed off more. Europeans also introduced Natives to less nutritious foods, such as alcohol, which was deadly (Diane, 2018). The intergenerational impact of colonial violence, including the violent forced relocation of Native peoples during the events of the Trail of Tears from 1831 to 1850, and another event where the Dine were forced to walk 300 miles across New Mexico, were some just some examples of the lasting scars of colonial violence. She further explains that the lands were too small for them and insufficient for their needs, resulting in the need for US and

Canadian governments to sign treaties with indigenous tribes, promising some of their native lands. However, the government often violated treaties, effectively impairing the sustainability of traditional lifestyles. The deaths and exploitation of so many indigenous peoples were a direct attack on human capital, social capital, and financial capital, resulting in the setting back of generations of peoples. Forced relocation and land dispossession not only resulted in many deaths, but it also damaged the possibilities of transferring traditional practices, cultural knowledge, and wealth. Additionally, it severed the trust that Native Americans have towards the federal government, as oftentimes they were undermined and discarded. Having low trust for the federal government has led to Native Americans not pursuing education, or economic advancement.

These awful experiences still exist in their communities, causing poverty and continual marginalization. Despite these dire circumstances, Native Americans were still able to participate in entrepreneurship. Birzer (1999) found that Native Americans traded and continued to trade before and after the arrival of Europeans, and that in the post-Columbian period continued to use trade to benefit themselves, tribes, and nations, using a recent paradigm known as the “middle ground”. He explains that the middle ground served as gigantic trade zone where culture became a commodity, effectively breaking down barriers between the Europeans and Natives to foster a cordial relationship. Examples of how Natives participated in entrepreneurial-like jobs: they produced deerskins for export companies, traded fur, provided transportation and military services, and traded food with the colonists (Birzer, 1999). He explains that the main objective of many Indians, was not to become farmers, but to be successful merchants and landowners, correlating treaty making to market making. Which empowered them to gain access to white land markets and define their

territories to better protect them (Birzer, 1999). This indicates that Native Americans did have entrepreneurial aspirations and saw it as an opportunity to reclaim their sovereignty and land, effectively empowering them to recapture their traditions, and ways of life. Despite these historical efforts to reclaim their sovereignty and establish businesses, contemporary Native American entrepreneurs continue to be plagued with barriers that impede their economic advancement.

The landscape of literature that covers the barriers faced by Native American entrepreneurship is multi-faceted, encompassing five parts: geographical, political, social & cultural, economic, and education (Teller, 2010). According to Teller (2010), a 1998 study conducted by Diane Garsombke and Thomas Garsombke addressed the problems of barriers to Native American entrepreneurship. They found that in their research Native Americans from the midwestern region (Minnesota and Wisconsin) identified a top five list of recognized hinderances to entrepreneurship (Garsombke and Garsombke, 1998). In their paper, the 5 inhibitors are: Aspiration Level, Formal Business Education, Limited Capital Access, Discrimination, and Communication (Garsombke and Garsombke, 1998). These findings suggest that within Native American communities, the impacts of violence extend past physical and negatively impact mental health, leading to self-imposed limitations on their own beliefs and abilities. Moreover, because of traumatic historical plights, contemporary Native American communities endure ongoing challenges due to their limited political sovereignty and legal status (Cornell & Kalt, 2010). This constrained sovereignty is different amongst tribes and affects their economic, social, and legal abilities, specifically in their capacity to protect their rights to lands (Colbourne, 1999). Furthermore, these limitations hinder their entrepreneurial activities, consequently, causing Native Americans to be the most marginalized and vulnerable segments of the

United States Population (Colbourne, 1999). However, despite these vulnerabilities, court rulings that have clarified and redefined sovereign rights to land have granted Natives with an opportunity to participate in economic developments. To do this Natives must assert their place in open economies and cooperate with differing worldviews choosing to either opt-in or opt-out from economic engagement outside of their communities, whether that be regionally, nationally, or globally (Colbourne, 1999). This nuanced approach causes tribes to cautiously decide the pros and cons of participating in economic events outside their communities. Despite these complexities, contemporary Native American entrepreneurship have a wide range of ventures including agriculture, aquaculture, energy, mining, tourism, art, and design. Whether it is small-scale family operations or large community-owned businesses, Native Americans' entrepreneurial spirit across communities try to drive economic growth, while respecting cultural traditional values (Colbourne, 1999). In the pursuit of economic reconciliation, their ventures serve as critical agents for protecting and gaining sovereignty, rights, and access to essential resources (Anderson et al., 2004, 2008; Dana, 2007; Peredo et al., 2004). The preservation of their traditions, cultures, and values is critical for the future of Native American Entrepreneurship, so these ventures operate to revitalize them and foster social and economic opportunity for future generations. While Native American entrepreneurship goals work to preserve cultural traditions and to gain more opportunities, a similar narrative of resilience and economic endurance appears in the context of African American entrepreneurship.

African Americans have played a vital role in shaping and building the American economy since the nation's inception, despite enduring centuries of systemic rejection from entrepreneurial opportunities. This rejection, perpetuated by ubiquitous racial barriers constructed by white supremacy in the United States, has

contributed to the intergenerational lack of entrepreneurial prosperity and exacerbated the levels of poverty in the black community. Juliet E. K. Walker's work (2009) lays the foundation for understanding the context of black entrepreneurship. Walker examines and tracers back the history of black business activities, of both enslaved and free black peoples, as early as the 1620s, showing that African Americans have been integral to America's economic landscape.

Similarly, to Native American entrepreneurship, it is crucial to understand the historical contextualization of African American barriers and obstacles to self-employment, business ownership, and any form of entrepreneurship. Since their arrival to America, they have been exploited in virtually every aspect, and often perceived as inferior beings designed for inhumane labor. This subjugation to forced labor, stripped African Americans from the benefits of entrepreneurship, minimized their existence as human beings, and caused the eradication of wealth building. Historically, legal frameworks consistently favored whites, impeding black economic progress (Nordhauser, 1998). When African Americans were able to carve out their own success in prosperous sectors, for example beauty products or music, White people tried to assert dominance over these areas as well (Nordhauser, 1998). Black businesses were also subjected to losing business to immigrant businesspeople, who also were seeking opportunities in America (Nordhauser, 1998). Another interesting point is that during the post-civil rights movement, that is where we began to see programs aimed to benefit and aid black businesses (Nordhauser, 1998). Even then it was not sufficient to make up for the exploitation and oppression that inhibited black economics. This historical subjugation that operated through white supremacy, ranging from slavery, anti-miscegenation laws in 1661 to the enforcement of racial segregation and Jim Crow laws, underscores the legacy of racism and oppression in

America. More importantly it paints a historical picture of why African American Entrepreneurship has been historically low.

Further insights into the paradigms and obstacles experienced by African American entrepreneurs are provided by Bogan and Darity's expansion on research from 1910 to 2000. The low historical rate of African American entrepreneurship is well studied, however the exact causes of this is still being researched (Bogan and Darity, 2007). The research (Fairlie and Meyer, 2000) indicates that from 1910 to 1990, the self-employment of black men rates generally followed the same direction of white-self-employment rates (Bogan and Darity, 2007). More interestingly, despite following the direction of white self-employment, for 80 years, the self-employment rate was a about a third of the white race (Bogan and Darity, 2007). Moreover, based on evidence from Fairlie and Meyer, they concluded that if not for the continuing factors (international capital discrimination, and general discrimination) reducing black self-employment, racial convergence in self-employment rates is a possibility within two generations (Bogan and Darity, 2007). This indicates the lingering prevalence of racism and prejudice on African American socioeconomic status. Nevertheless, Bogan and Darity examine arguments that blame African American culture for the lack of entrepreneurship. However, it is quite evident that the structures implemented and curated with the intent to enforce white supremacy has made it practically inaccessible or more challenging for black people to succeed in their entrepreneurial ventures.

Unsurprisingly, Black people some of the lowest levels of social trust due to traumatic historical experiences. Such as the repeated violations of civil rights laws, or the legacy of slavery, resulting in the erosion of trust African Americans have towards the government, U.S. institutions and other social integrations. (Howard,

2019). This lack of trust towards the government has also been reinforced by the negative experiences African Americans have when attempting to secure a business loan (Howard, 2019). Without startup capital or financial capital, businesses cannot even exist, let alone fail (Howard, 2019). This indicates the persisting historical legacy of distrust stemming from systemic oppression and white supremacy, continues to have a trickling down on contemporary black businesses, resulting in the reduction or complete impediment of the start of black self-employment/entrepreneurship. Moreover, it reveals a similarity between African American and Native Americans, which is that due to oppression, colonialism, both demographics have suffered socioeconomically, as well as psychologically, and they both understandably have less trust in the government.

Despite these obstacles, black resilience and creativity throughout history, African Americans entrepreneurship has evolved throughout the 20th century, with the rise of black millionaires and Black Corporate America.

3. Theory and Methodology

Due to historical factors, Native Americans and African Americans have low self-employment rates compared to other demographics of people. With that understanding, in my research of the low levels of self-employment in the African American and Native American communities in the male population, I am testing for structural factors to determine their primary influence on self-employment rates within these populations. My theory is that African American and Native American culture is not the reason for low self-employment rates in their communities, but rather that Native Americans may have access to industries, occupations, and tribal traditions that may not be accessible to African American men, which can significantly impact one's ability for self-employment (Howard, 2019).

Figure 1: Self-Employment Rates for African Americans & African Americans

Self Employment Rates for Native Americans and African Americans 2000-2022						
	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2022
Black	3.71%	3.87%	4.66%	4.88%	4.94%	5.41%
Native American	0.49%	0.49%	0.53%	0.64%	0.88%	0.92%

Source: IPUMS ACS

3.1. Methodology

My research was inspired by the work done by Bogan and Darity (2007). While their analysis of data shared similarities to Bearse's study of the 1976 Survey of Income and Education data, which examined self-employment patterns using a 1% sample from IPUMS from 1910 to 2000, my research takes a slightly different approach. I focused on the self-employment rates among Native American and African American males using IPUMS ACS data from 2000 to 2022. This recent timeframe allows for a contemporary examination of self-employment trends, within these specific demographic groups. The model in this research differs from the paper I am expanding on; instead of running a univariate probit model, I ran a simple regression. I included seven race/ethnicity dummy variables: Indigenous, White, Chinese, Pacific, and Hispanic. The other dummy variables I included indicated region, personal characteristics (such as age, marital status, education attainment, race, etc.), occupation, and industry.

The initial coverage of the IPUMS data spanning over 90 years (Bogan and Darity, 2007), provides a historical contextualization of self-employment, and what it looked like for different demographics of people. Within my dataset, I aim to focus on recent native born, marginalized groups, more specifically, Native Americans and African Americans. This focus contrasts with Bogan and Darity's work which focuses on both native- and foreign-born demographics. I aim to present structural factors that describe the biggest drivers for self-employment amongst African American and Native American men, which will help facilitate a better understanding in the trajectory of entrepreneurial trends across both demographics. Consistent low self-employment rates among African Americans, were revealed from the findings of Fairlie and Meyer (2000). Their data revealed a widening gap between native whites

and native black self-employment rate, indicating how important it is to investigate racial disparities in entrepreneurial ventures.

My research delves into examining self-employment rates, among Native Americans and African Americans, to hopefully provide and enhance the understanding of socioeconomic trends for both communities. I also hope it can be used as a tool to guide policy efforts that can effectively target areas that will reduce inequalities, and lead to results that will create positive change for these groups.

Figure 2: Linear Regression Results

	Coefficient	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)
Intercept	0.984	0.011	90.3011	0.00000
Native American	0.010	0.001	13.4815	0.00000
White	0.013	0.000	61.9362	0.00000
Chinese	-0.013	0.001	-15.8842	0.00000
Japanese	-0.004	0.002	-1.9097	0.05617
Pacific	0.011	0.001	21.7425	0.00000
Hispanic	0.005	0.000	19.7102	0.00000
Age	0.001	0.000	201.7867	0.00000
Northeast region	-0.008	0.000	-27.6325	0.00000
Midwest region	-0.011	0.000	-38.3604	0.00000
South region	-0.005	0.000	-21.0325	0.00000
Married male	-0.026	0.000	-98.1011	0.00000
High school graduate	0.002	0.000	9.338	0.00000
College graduate	-0.032	0.004	-7.638	0.00000
Speaks English	0.020	0.004	4.8368	0.00000
Number of children	-0.012	0.000	-42.2418	0.00000
Occupation-service provider	0.098	0.001	192.275	0.00000
Occupation-manager	-0.102	0.001	-90.3316	0.00000
Occupation-laborer	0.039	0.002	25.7166	0.00000
Occupation-craftsman	-0.079	0.001	-92.2798	0.00000
Occupation-military	-0.013	0.002	-7.0828	0.00000
Male Head of Household	-0.008	0.000	-31.9079	0.00000
Industry-agriculture, fishing, farm	-0.283	0.007	-38.3916	0.00000
Industry-construction	-0.197	0.004	-47.9592	0.00000
Industry-manufacturing	-0.244	0.001	-228.484	0.00000
Industry-wholesale/retail	-0.030	0.001	-24.0119	0.00000
Industry-utilities	-0.078	0.001	-127.297	0.00000
Industry-information	0.006	0.001	4.2153	0.00002
Industry-finance	-0.027	0.004	-6.5775	0.00000
Industry-general services	-0.172	0.001	-319.15	0.00000
Industry-public administration	-0.166	0.001	-264.768	0.00000
Industry-active military	0.129	0.002	85.5087	0.00000
Observations	8,654,471			
R Squared	0.088			
Adjusted R squared	0.088			
Residual Std. Error	0.266 (df = 8654438)			
F Statistic	176.470 (df = 32; 8654438)			

Source: IPUMS ACS

4. Results and Analysis

This study used a multiple linear regression model to thoroughly analyze the determinants of entrepreneurship among men. The analysis was centered on comparing and contrasting entrepreneurship rates of African American individuals (reference category) to Native American individuals. The Western variable was used as a reference category for the region variable. The dependent variable in my regression equation was entrepreneurship (self-employment).

Educational attainment and occupation variables came up as important factors that influenced entrepreneurship rates. The omitted category for the education attainment variable was those who have received schooling but did not graduate from high school or college. People with a high school degree (HSgrads) showed a positive association with entrepreneurship, with a coefficient of 0.002, however those with college degrees (Colgrads) indicated a smaller likelihood for entrepreneurship, with a coefficient of -0.012 . Specific occupations, like managerial positions revealed a negative association with entrepreneurship, with a coefficient of -0.099 , while other occupations such as service providers indicated a positive correlation to entrepreneurship, with a coefficient of 0.097.

The focus of this paper was to determine what were key factors of entrepreneurship for African Americans and Native Americans, so going beyond education and occupation is crucial to understand how race/ethnicity impacted entrepreneurship rates. Individuals from different demographics demonstrated various levels of entrepreneurship in comparison to African Americans from the western region. Unsurprisingly, white men displayed the highest likelihood of being an

entrepreneur, with the coefficient being 0.013. More importantly, the coefficient of 0.010 for Indigenous/Native American men indicated a slightly higher likelihood of entrepreneurship compared to African Americans from the Western region. The higher likelihood of entrepreneurship among Native Americans to African American men may be due to historical or socioeconomic factors that may not be available to African Americans, which is like what Bogan and Darity (2007) argued in their paper for immigrants compared to African Americans. Despite both groups being severely marginalized and oppressed throughout history, there are still some underlying factors that give Native Americans an edge in entrepreneurship compared to African American men. This result shows the need to acknowledge the diversity in racial and ethnic perspectives and their approaches to entrepreneurial ventures.

5. Conclusion

The historical legacy of entrepreneurship of African Americans and Native American communities in the United States reveals centuries of systemic oppression and discrimination, which still exist and impact their economic opportunities today. Throughout history, discriminatory practices, institutions, and legislations has persistently restricted and disabled African and Native American entrepreneurs at every stage of business development (Bogan and Darity, 2007).

Despite the progress these communities have made, systemic racism remains as impediment to complete participation in the national/global economy in these communities. This study reveals the contemporary drivers of self-employment rates among African American and Native American men, signaling the need for a supportive policy change to dismantle the inequalities that exist for non-white men.

By analyzing the trends in African American and Native American entrepreneurship, I try to recognize and reveal non-cultural sources for the low rates for both demographics (Bogan and Darity, 2007). The literature that I've read shifts the blame of the low entrepreneurship rates on the pathologies that exist due to the pervasive nature of white supremacy on contemporary non-white entrepreneurs. These findings emphasize the need for a meticulous approach that considers both historical legacies and contemporary structural barriers in addressing the inequalities in African American and Native American entrepreneurship.

While my analysis provides important insights into contemporary self-employment trends, it may not holistically capture the enduring impacts of historical injustices on African American communities. Further research is needed to deeply explore the intersectionality of various structural factors, such as slavery, segregation, and discrimination outcomes. Each of these topics alone could be a thesis project and require extensive research to thoroughly dissect their multifaceted impacts on African American and Native American entrepreneurship. The continuance of the self-employment gap between non-whites and whites indicates the continuity of systemic inequalities, where some groups are favored more than others, such as whites, and even Native Americans being more likely to be self-employed than African American entrepreneurs. Identifying the roots of these economic struggles faced by Native Americans, and African Americans, requires careful study, and policies that are aimed to correctly eradicate the trees of inequality by the root. By addressing these challenges appropriately, policymakers, and communities can strive towards promoting a fair and prosperous economic landscape for all.

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