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**Selection and Historical Height Data: Evidence from the 1892 Boas Sample of the
Cherokee Nation**

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Abstract: Economists have increasingly turned to height data to gain insight into a population's standard of living. Because height measures are used when other data are unavailable, testing their reliability can be difficult, and concerns over sample selection have led to several vigorous debates within the heights literature. In this paper, I use a unique contemporaneous census to gauge the extent of selection into a contested sample of American Indian heights. I have linked people from the 1892 Boas sample of the Cherokee Nation to the 1890 Cherokee Census. An initial analysis finds evidence of negative selection into the Boas sample. A detailed examination of those measured reveals a more complex story. Two distinct groups are present within the data. The first group consists of 64 members of the Cherokee elite. Their households owned more land, invested more in improvements to their land, and had higher literacy rates. The remainder of the Boas sample is poor relative to both the elite and the rest of the Cherokee Nation. Part, but not all, of this difference is due to their residential location. Forty percent of the Boas sample lived in poorest district of Cherokee Nation. These differences in wealth between the two groups were mirrored by a fairly dramatic difference in average heights. The average height of all men in elite group was 173.9 cm while the non-elite were several centimeters shorter at just 171.2 cm.

Keywords: Heights; Anthropometrics; Sample selection; American Indians

JEL Codes: N3; B4; I3; J1

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