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Socioeconomic Differentials among White Ethnicities in the American Community Survey, 2017-2021

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Abstract

We investigate socioeconomic variation among Whites in the United States. Using data from the American Community Survey, we explore educational attainment, wages, poverty, affluence, and household income by ancestry groups among non-Hispanic, single-race Whites. The results indicate that persons who identify as White report a wide variety of ethnic ancestries. Some ethnic groups have comparatively high socioeconomic attainments while others have low outcomes, including a few ethnic groups with poverty and high-school dropout rates that are similar to Blacks. Some of the socioeconomic variation between White ethnic groups is statistically associated with demographic control variables such as age, nativity, region, and disability, but notable socioeconomic differentials frequently persist. Indeed, some of the between-ethnic differentials are as large as the differentials between Whites overall and Blacks. Substantial socioeconomic variation within specific ethnic groups is furthermore evident, and the great preponderance of overall inequality is statistically within racial categories rather than between them. This abundance of variability seems largely inconsistent with critical race theory. The latter portrays Whites as a homogenous and uniformly advantaged group, and assumes that most inequality is statistically associated with average differences between racial categories. By contrast, our findings indicate that extensive demographic heterogeneity among Whites — in terms of both ethnic identity and socioeconomic characteristics — is a more realistic assessment in the contemporary era of rising class inequality.

Keywords: racial inequality, White ethnicity, critical race theory

Introduction: The Popularity of Critical Race Theory in American Sociology

In recent years in American sociology, Whites have been typically portrayed as a uniformly advantaged group. Their higher socioeconomic circumstances are attributed to systemic racism which is said to maintain White Privilege (Banaji et al., 2021; Feagin, 2013; Hummer, 2023).¹ Commonly known as critical race theory, this view is quite popular (e.g., Alba, 2020; Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Golash-Boza, 2016; Reece, 2019). As stated by a former president of the American Sociological Association:

As in the past, systemic racism today includes the complex array of recurring exploitative, discriminatory, and other oppressive White practices targeting Americans of color; the institutionalized economic and other social resource inequalities along racial lines (the racial hierarchy); and the dominant White racial frame that was generated to rationalize and insure White Privilege and dominance over Americans of color. (Feagin, 2020, p. 4)

W.E.B. Dubois is considered to have foundational influence on critical race theory, and his silhouette is featured on the cover of *American Sociological Review* which is probably the most prestigious journal in sociology.

Critical race theory is gaining popularity within population studies where that approach is sometimes referred to as “critical demography” (e.g., Bratter, 2015; Baker et al., 2022; DeAngelis et al., 2022; Hargrove, 2018; Horton, 1999; Hummer, 2023; Massey, 1999; Ortega, 2023; Stewart et al., 2020). Regardless of terminology, this perspective generically claims that “White persons gain privileges because of structural arrangements benefitting them” (Saenz & Morales 2019, p. 169), and that White Privilege “is used to maintain the social, political and economic power of White supremacy” (Bhopal, 2023, p. 114). As stated by Saenz et al. (2015, p. 8):

...the last few decades have seen the development of race perspectives that provide us a more profound understanding of how race stratification – White supremacy – is sustained due to its deep roots in the social, political, economic, and legal foundations and structures of societies....White supremacy is reproduced because it becomes part of what is considered natural and Whites derive privilege and rewards from their Whiteness.

The assumption that “Whites derive privilege and rewards from their Whiteness” is emphasized in studies that are popular in population studies and related sociological research. For example, McDermott and Ferguson (2022, p. 257) conclude that one should “consider Whiteness as a complex identity and basis of structural privilege and neocolonial dominance.” Frankenberg (1988, p. 1) theorizes about how “Whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege.” Withers (2017) argues that American culture is based on Whiteness which is defined as “a state of normalized White racial domination” which is consistent with Feagin’s (2013) assessment. Historical studies contend that immigrant groups including the Irish (Ignatiev, 1994), Jews (Brodin, 1998), and Italians (Guglielmo, 2003) came to be viewed and accepted as Whites only after exploiting, discriminating against, or otherwise distancing themselves from African Americans, thereby obtaining the benefits of White Privilege.

¹ For stylistic consistency, we capitalize White Privilege throughout our text although not all references in this literature follow this grammatical practice.

More recently, Torkelson and Hartmann (2021) acknowledge that there is some variation in socioeconomic status among Whites, as evolving “notions of internal variation — even stratification — among Whites” (Torkelson & Hartmann, 2021, p. 9) are associated with a “blurred” White color line that creates “anxieties or resentments located between the heart and certain emerging margins of contemporary Whiteness. This is where demographics, or more precisely, the social construction and surrounding politics of demographics, come centrally into play” (Torkelson & Hartmann, 2021, p. 6). Despite this acknowledgement, Torkelson and Hartmann (2021, p. 14) nonetheless conclude that “Whiteness studies has been about power and privilege since its inception” and that the advantages of Whiteness are still dominant due to “the fact that the problem of American race and racism remains, in a word, the problem of Whites and Whiteness.”

Twine and Gallagher (2008, p. 4) relatedly describe the “third wave of Whiteness studies” as being concerned with understanding the evolution of “White supremacy in neo-apartheid, post-imperial, and post-Civil Rights contexts.” Consistent with the general perspective of Torkelson and Hartmann (2021), Twine and Gallagher (2008, p. 5) assert that Whiteness studies should address how “institutional arrangements, ideological beliefs and state practices maintain White Privilege even as those prerogatives are being challenged by anti-racist social movements, identity politics, multiculturalism and immigration.” White Privilege has not diminished in its significance but has only become more complex and perhaps less immediately obvious (see also Bonilla-Silva, 2021).

Regarding the “internal variation — even stratification — among Whites” (Torkelson & Hartmann, 2021, p. 9), research addresses this issue by framing it as an anomaly in a system that overall protects White Privilege. In other words, the “margins of contemporary Whiteness” (Torkelson & Hartmann, 2021, p. 6) are portrayed as varied sorts of nonrepresentative groups who do not fundamentally challenge the underlying characterization of White supremacy for the majority of Whites. Torkelson and Hartmann (2021, p. 10) describe these margins as including “neo-confederates, proto-fascists, the Proud Boys, Patriot Prayer, Christian identity groups, neo-Nazis, varied right wing militias, the Boogaloo movement, and monikers like the Alt Right...”

Hochschild (2018) refers to the lower-income Southern Whites whom she studied as representing a “Great Paradox” (Hochschild, 2018, p. 8) because, despite their economic struggles, they tend to vote for the Republican Party, which she believes does not align with their economic interests (Hochschild, 2018, p. 261). Hochschild (2018) explains this purported lack of economic rationality among lower-income Southern Whites as being due to cultural issues associated with their nationalistic identity. Referring to Durkheim’s idea of collective effervescence, Hochschild (2018, pp. 224-228) describes how the excessively tribal instincts of lower-income Southern Whites temperamentally propel them towards the overly patriotic rhetoric of the Republican Party. Lower-income Southern Whites are thereby portrayed as a peculiar case on the margins of Whiteness who lack the intelligence and economic rationality to sufficiently comprehend their own material self-interests.

Lower-income Southern Whites are also the subject of Wray’s (2006) *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*. Wray (2006, p. 21) discusses historical references to this group as being “lubbers, crackers and poor White trash.” They have often been seen as diseased with “hookworm” and related disorders including eating dirt and showing “symptoms that were taken as signs of hereditary indolence and feeblemindedness” (Wray, 2006, p. 115). Some eugenicists in the early 20th century advocated for public policy measures to limit the spread of

the “defective germ plasm” of these problematic Whites, including sterilization (Wray, 2006, p. 72). Wray’s (2006) historical discussion is meant to illustrate how White Privilege may be seen as the typical case while many poor Whites are “not quite White” (i.e., they have “squandered away” much of their White Privilege [Sakamoto & Wang, 2015, p. 1268]) thereby constituting a specialized group on the margins of Whiteness.

In sum, recent research on Whites implicitly assumes that they are overwhelmingly advantaged in terms of socioeconomic characteristics. Those few groups of Whites who might seem to be not very socioeconomically advantaged are either largely ignored or are viewed as highly unusual cases. According to this literature, future studies should seek to clarify the continuing racial domination that undergirds White Privilege while clarifying how it persists amidst rising tensions in regard to various oddities at the margins of Whiteness and the color line (Twine & Gallagher, 2008).

Critical Race Theory Ignores Rising Class Inequality and Its Sources

Besides emphasizing White Privilege, another feature of the foregoing literature is its relative neglect of class inequalities and the economy, both of which shape racial inequalities as well as change over time (Bonacich, 1972; Shibutani & Kwan, 1965; Wilson, 2015). Economic inequality has generally risen (Shrider, 2024) even as labor market discrimination has arguably declined in the decades after the post-Civil Rights era (Fryer, 2014; O’Neill & O’Neill, 2012; Sakamoto et al., 2000; Sakamoto & Koo, 2024; Wilson, 2015). In comparison with prior decades, African Americans and other racial minorities increasingly include middle-class and affluent households (Iceland, 2019). In short, all racial categories are affected by changes in the system of economic production with its rising level of income inequality (Wilson, 2015).

In contrast to critical race theory which emphasizes racism as the primary source of inequality (e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Burton et al., 2010; Feagin, 2020; Lee & Kye, 2016), Sakamoto and Wang (2015, p. 1267) discuss the high level of within-group variance in the income distributions of the racial categories, which is consistent with other related research (Autor et al., 2008; Leicht, 2016; VanHeuvelen, 2018). In terms of a one-way ANOVA of logged income, for example, only about 5 percent is between 6 racial categories using recent data (Galor & Wainstock, 2025; Sakamoto & Wang, 2015). Similarly, the coefficient of determination (i.e., the percentage of statistically explained variation) for most socioeconomic outcomes is quite small if the regression equation only includes dichotomous variables indicating the major racial categories in the U.S. (e.g., Kim et al., 2018). Net racial effects on wages are actually even smaller after controlling for productivity-related variables such as education, years of work experience, and other skill indicators (Carneiro et al., 2005; Farkas & Vicknair, 1996; Heckman, 2011; O’Neill & O’Neill, 2012; Sakamoto et al., 2000; Wang et al., 2017).

Although critical race theory emphasizes White Privilege as the most important source of inequality, income and other related socioeconomic outcomes are now more heavily impacted by class background variables (Leicht, 2016; Sakamoto & Kim, 2003; Sakamoto & Tzeng, 1999; Sakamoto & Wang, 2015), which explains rising inequality within racial categories. We refer to class in its generic Weberian definition as market position (Weber, 1946) which has become more salient than race in 21st century America (Sakamoto & Wang, 2015) due to dramatic changes in the economy (Leicht, 2016; Leicht & Fitzgerald, 2022) and declines in racial discrimination (O’Neill & O’Neill, 2012; Sakamoto et al., 2000). In post-industrial economies with advanced technologies

and the globalized scale of production, firms are constantly seeking to promote their market power because even small market advantages can sometimes facilitate the accumulation of large profits (Sakamoto & Wang, 2020).

The U.S. was once considered to be one of the most competitive capitalist economies (Philippon, 2019) among developed nations, but market segmentation and monopolistic advantages have arguably reemerged in recent decades in some sectors (Appelbaum, 2017; Leicht, 2016). Firm entry in some industries may be declining along with reduced firm investment (Philippon, 2019). Some economists argue that firm concentration has increased in various industries resulting in declining market competition and thus greater market power for larger firms (Philippon, 2019). Market power “measures the ability of a firm to raise its price and increase its profits at the expense of its customers” (Philippon, 2019, p. 26), which reduces economic welfare and increases monopolistic profits (Eggertsson et al., 2021).

Relatedly, American economic growth has been relatively modest in recent decades (at least compared to the immediate post-World War II period), and a significant portion of that growth accrued to the upper quintile of the distribution of household income (Brady & Jantti, 2016; Iceland, 2006). The labor share of total income has declined while wage inequality has been increasing (Tomaskovic-Devey et al., 2015). Some economists argue that, due to rising economic segmentation, the prices of many commodities now tend to be higher in the U.S. than in Europe (Philippon, 2019, pp. 118-123). Meanwhile, incomes among American financiers have been notably increasing (Lin & Neely, 2020; Piketty & Saez, 2006) while immigration patterns have further exacerbated overall inequality in the labor market (Kim & Sakamoto, 2013; Lin & Weiss, 2019) especially in regard to lower-skilled African Americans (Borjas et al., 2010).

Associated with income inequality is the rent-seeking behavior of corporations which engage in expensive lobbying of politicians in order to obtain favorable regulations and economic policies (Philippon, 2019). Larger firms with greater market power spend much more on lobbying (Philippon, 2019, p. 167) which is often effective because American political campaigns have become very expensive. According to Philippon (2019, p. 176), “politics has become so expensive that new members of Congress are told in no uncertain terms that their first and highest priority in Washington is to raise the money they need to ensure that re-election.” Lobbying may arguably be seen as a form of legalized corruption that helps powerful firms to enhance their market power through favorable regulations and political clout (Campos & Giovannoni, 2007).

Wage differentials across firms have become increasingly important in accounting for rising salary inequalities in the 21st century American economy (Grusky, 2020; Sakamoto & Wang, 2017). Rising firm effects (i.e., firm rents) are likely very important in the trend in increasing earnings inequalities (Barth et al., 2016; Song et al., 2019). Extreme cases might be referred to as “superstar firms” with notably high levels of market share and wages (Autor et al., 2020).

However, not all workers at Amazon or other profitable companies gain from market power because “rent sharing” is declining (Cappelli, 1998; Dencker, 2009; Sakamoto & Kim, 2014). Workers who are able to extract economic rents are those employees who are employed at firms with market power and are also privileged by having some bargaining power in the labor process within their firm (Kim & Sakamoto, 2008; Sakamoto & Wang, 2017). Since most workers do not enjoy both of these advantages, wage inequality is increasing even within detailed occupational categories (Kim & Sakamoto, 2008; Martin-Caughey, 2021). As firms are continuously being

restructured to minimize labor costs using modern technologies and globalized competition (Cappelli, 1998; Dencker, 2009), high salaries are increasingly limited to only some higher-skilled workers (e.g., upper-level managers and elite professionals) with bargaining power and favorable employment contracts in larger firms with greater market power. These trends about the modern transformation of the system of economic production lead to the “increasing significance of class” (Sakamoto & Kim, 2003) and the declining significance of racial inequalities (Sakamoto et al., 2000).

Demographic Heterogeneity Rather than Assuming Homogenous Racial Categories

In contrast to critical race theory, we refer to our theoretical approach as the demographic heterogeneity view (Takei & Sakamoto, 2011) which is generally consistent with the theory of ethnic stratification discussed by Shibutani and Kwan (1965) as well as Alba and Nee’s (2014) related rendition of contemporary assimilation theory. In regard to the latter, as immigrant groups adopt the values, norms, skills, language, and productive practices of the mainstream society (both intra-generationally and intergenerationally), then these groups become more integrated in terms of secondary and eventually primary relationships and associations. The socioeconomic characteristics of immigrants and their offspring thereby come to resemble the mainstream, which itself may consist of the descendants of a broad mixture of people whose ancestors were among prior waves of immigrants (Alba, 2020).

The speed and degree of assimilation by immigrant groups into mainstream society will be moderated by the extent to which the latter is open towards integrating immigrants which can vary over time (Constant & Zimmerman, 2013; Sakamoto et al., 2000; Shibutani & Kwan, 1965). Discriminatory practices may certainly impede and limit assimilation depending on historical, social, political, and economic circumstances (Iceland, 2017; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Sakamoto & Tzeng, 1999). However, various groups of immigrants differ in the extent to which they desire to assimilate or arrive with valued skills (Borjas, 2014; Ek, 2024; Sakamoto et al., 2021; Shibutani & Kwan, 1965) with sojourners being one example of immigrants who do not plan to immediately assimilate (Massey, 1986; Sowell, 1996), while the Amish are an example of a religious community that seeks to maintain their traditional sub-culture across generations (Stone et al., 2025; Weyer et al., 2003).

As mentioned above, our demographic heterogeneity view is broadly compatible with assimilation theory. However, we prefer the former perspective because it more explicitly recognizes the significance of class and socioeconomic factors that are notably relevant for contemporary America with its high level of inequality as previously discussed. Class origins and socioeconomic resources will impact the settlement process and socioeconomic prospects of immigrants in the host society, ameliorating or even overriding issues relating to ethnic discrimination. For example, college-educated Hispanic men who were raised in the U.S. have wages that are similar to college-educated White men (Wang & Sakamoto, 2021) while second-generation Nigerian Americans have higher levels of education and incomes compared to the average White American (Sakamoto et al., 2021). Most second-generation Asian American groups have such levels of educational attainment that elite universities (e.g., Harvard) have engaged in racial discrimination in order to reduce the politically-embarrassing high enrollments of Asians (Arcidiacono et al., 2023).

In comparison to the previous century, 21st century America is probably more accepting of ethnic

diversity and “multiculturalism” (Alba, 2020; Frey, 2018; Nee & Holbrow, 2013; Sakamoto & Kim, 2003) with moderated social pressures for cultural assimilation (Abramitzky et al., 2017; Foner, 2023). Cultural factors associated with immigrants (operating through family characteristics, educational attainment, and ambition or motivation for achievement) likely continue to impact their labor market outcomes and the socioeconomic attainments of their native-born offspring (Ek, 2024; Kim, 2025; Polavieja, 2015; Sakamoto, Kim, & Takei, 2012; Sowell, 1996). Immigrants may sometimes be “selective” in regard to certain cultural or socioeconomic variables (Feliciano, 2020; Kim, 2025; Sakamoto & Wang, 2021). Our demographic heterogeneity view is more compatible with the expectation of significant socioeconomic variation that reflects the cultural diversity of immigrants rather than focusing narrowly on how they homogeneously become “mainstream” (Alba & Nee, 2014).

White Ethnic Variation within the White Racial Category

The ethnic identities of foreign-born immigrants are often prominent especially among those who recently arrived in the U.S. Their second-generation offspring typically share their parental ethnic identities particularly if the second-generation offspring marry within their own ethnic group (Choi et al., 2008; Duncan & Trejo, 2018; Min & Kim, 2009). This ethnic identity may sometimes be further supported to the extent that the second-generation resides within an ethnic enclave (Rumbaut, 1994).

Our demographic heterogeneity view is a broad perspective, however, and is not meant to apply only to immigrants and their second-generation offspring. With intergenerational assimilation combined with intermarriage that may be quite extensive especially for later generations (i.e., the “melting pot” [McLemore & Romo, 1994]), ethnic identities may sometimes become more selective and symbolic to the extent that they are only weakly associated with any distinctive cultural or immigrant characteristics (Alba, 1990; Gans, 1979; Waters, 1990). In the case of third-and-higher generation Whites, the White racial category may be too broad to be meaningful for one’s ancestral identity because “for many White Americans, Whiteness has been an empty signifier. In terms of identity, ethnicity was much more salient, along with regional identities.... Those identities had content. ‘White’ was often a residual category....” (Kasinitz & Waters, 2023, p. 9). For this reason, self-reports of ancestry among third-and-higher generation Whites may be more indicative of their ethnic identities which are often maintained (Alba, 1990; Marger, 2015) even if to some extent they may sometimes be loosely described as “symbolic” (Gans, 1979; Waters, 1990).

In the following, we view ethnic identity among Whites as another aspect of demographic heterogeneity. Ethnic identity likely varies widely among Whites both in terms of type and intensity. Being the largest racial category, White persons have ancestries from a vast array of countries and regions arriving in the U.S. at different historical time periods. Assimilation and intermarriage lessen one’s ethnic identity with one’s immigrant ancestral origins, but on the other hand, ethnic identity does not necessarily entirely disappear because White is often viewed as too broad a category. In some cases, ethnic identities persist in terms of ethnoreligious groups with varying degrees of distinctive sub-cultures (e.g., Amish, Mormons, Hutterites, Mennonites, Quakers). In other cases, ethnic identity may be associated with regions or locales (e.g., Appalachian, Cajun, French Canadian, Texan) but the generational persistence of the latter identities given migration seems empirically unclear.

The Research Objectives of the Current Study

In the foregoing, we have briefly considered a wide range of issues relating to racial and ethnic inequality. While they are relevant to establishing the broader theoretical context of our analysis, our research contribution is limited to what can be learned from our data that are obtained from a cross-sectional, demographic survey. The strengths of these survey data are that they are nationally representative, and they have a wide range of variables based on the tested methods of the U.S. Census Bureau. The survey is large enough to provide reliable information on even relatively small demographic groups. Our primary research objective is thus to explore the demographic heterogeneity of the White racial category — an issue that has been obscured by recent studies based on critical race theory.

Many of the aforementioned Whiteness studies rely on historical discussions, qualitative interviews based on small convenience samples, and theoretical discussions rather than representative data or demographic analyses on the socioeconomic characteristics of Whites in the 21st century. For example, a historical discussion of labor market conflicts and other social interactions between various Irish immigrants and African Americans in the antebellum Northeast (Ignatiev, 1994) does not provide information on the broad patterns of racial and ethnic inequalities two centuries later. McDermott and Ferguson's (2022, p. 257) pronouncement that one should "consider Whiteness as a complex identity and basis of structural privilege and neocolonial dominance" is not based on any serious factual evidence nor do the authors clarify how their assertion is even capable of being empirically tested.

In the following, we contribute to this area of study by more thoroughly analyzing the demographic diversity and socioeconomic attainments of Whites. Because White Privilege and structural racism are popular terms that have figured prominently in this literature, one concern of our analysis is to assess whether notable socioeconomic advantages may be construed as being consistently evident among Whites. Critical race theory portrays Whites as being primarily high on socioeconomic attainments since White Privilege is thought to be a homogenizing process across White ethnic groups, and race is said to be the major driver of socioeconomic inequality (Ignatiev, 1994; Brodtkin, 1998; Guglielmo, 2003; Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Feagin, 2020). Contrarily, the empirical results of a detailed demographic analysis might alternatively reveal that many groups of Whites might not be advantaged and may even have low levels of socioeconomic attainments. We also hypothesize that sociodemographic controls (e.g., age, nativity, education in some models) may explain more of the variation in outcomes (e.g., wages, poverty) than race itself contrary to the emphasis of critical race theory.

A generic feature of critical race theory and related literature on Whiteness is the limited use of quantitative data and multivariate analysis of the socioeconomic characteristics and ethnicity of Whites. For example, in an influential article, Bonilla-Silva (2004, p. 936) relies on just one descriptive socioeconomic indicator which is household "mean per capita income." This variable is not problematic in itself, but Bonilla-Silva (2004) ignores the variation in its distribution as well as its multivariate sources (i.e., not only race). Compared to Whites, African Americans tend to be younger, to have lower levels of education, and to reside in the South all of which are associated with lower incomes (i.e., including among Whites [Iceland, 2017]) so that the overall bivariate White-Black income differential does not indicate the extent of wage discrimination in the labor market (Sakamoto et al., 2000). Furthermore, given rising levels of inequality, the incomes of many people differ substantially from the mean of the distribution including, for

example, the declining long-term earnings of White men without a college degree (Cheng et al., 2019).

Due to limited recent research on demographic heterogeneity among Whites using quantitative data, our study is largely exploratory. One goal is to provide a foundation for future research to further examine the factors that help shape ethnic demographic heterogeneity among Whites. While our focus is obviously on Whites, other racial categories are included as reference groups because White Privilege is inherently comparative and because our findings are better placed within the broader context of diverse racial inequality in contemporary America.

Data and Methods

We use the five-year, 2017-2021 sample of the American Community Survey (ACS) provided by the U.S. Census Bureau. These data are nationally representative. They provide a sample size that is sufficiently large to analyze relatively small ancestry groups. The ACS contains information on socioeconomic characteristics as well as many other relevant social demographic variables including ancestry. We restrict our target population to persons who are at least 25 years of age and have additional selection criteria for specific outcomes, as described below.

Our statistical analysis includes descriptive statistics broken down by demographic groups as well as regression models. Several versions of the regressions are estimated using different sets of independent variables. These various specifications are explained and discussed below.

Dependent Variables

Socioeconomic well-being is multidimensional. We investigate five dependent variables that are available in the ACS and that are widely recognized as being intrinsically important socioeconomic outcomes. The first is the highest level of educational attainment completed, defined with five categories: less than high school; high school; some college (including associate's degree); bachelor's degree; and a master's, professional, or doctoral degree. This study is restricted to respondents who are at least 25 years old, by which age people typically have completed most of their education.

The second dependent variable is hourly wage, calculated as the individual's earnings (in terms of 2021 dollars in order to adjust for inflation) divided by their hours worked. Following convention, we log this variable to reduce its skew when used in regression models. This part of the analysis is restricted to individuals aged 25 to 64, with over 500 hours worked during the 12 months prior to the survey. The latter restriction is imposed in order to remove the effects of persons who are not clearly engaged with the labor market.

The third dependent variable is poverty status. People are considered poor if their family income falls below the official poverty line as established by the U.S. Census Bureau. The poverty line is characterized by different income thresholds that vary by family size and composition, which differentiate the basic economic needs of a household. This analysis is restricted to people in the poverty universe (as defined by U.S. Census Bureau) which refers to persons residing in households and excludes people living in institutionalized group quarters such as dormitories, jails, and military barracks.

The fourth dependent variable is affluence. Individuals are defined as affluent if their household

income is five times or above the poverty line for their household (Farley, 1996; Iceland, 2019). While poverty status is a well-known indicator of the level of household income, affluence is not as widely studied. Affluence is increasingly becoming an important indicator to investigate, however, as the proportion of high-income households has been rising (Iceland, 2019) reflecting rising class inequality as discussed above. This analysis is restricted to people in the poverty universe, given that its calculation is based on a multiple of the poverty line variable.

The last dependent variable is household income. Unlike the poverty and affluence measures, it is not adjusted for family size or composition. The unit for this analysis, unlike other measures, is the household rather than the individual. Household income is measured in terms of the actual dollar amounts which are adjusted to 2021 dollars to control for inflation. When used as a dependent variable in the regression, household income is logged to reduce the skew. Following common practice, household incomes of zero or less are reassigned a value of 1 in order to permit logging (Sakamoto et al., 2022).

Independent Variables

As discussed above, we investigate ethnic differences in socioeconomic attainments among Whites. More exactly stated, we measure ethnic identity in terms of the four-digit codes provided by the ANCESTR1 variable that is available in the ACS. This variable records the first response to the ACS question “What is your ancestry or ethnic origin?” Respondents were asked to self-report any and as many responses as they wished to. ANCESTR1 is the first response that the respondent provided. As stated in the ACS manual:

Some compound responses such as ‘Pennsylvania Dutch’ or ‘French Canadian’ were treated as a single response. Respondents could give virtually any response, though they were instructed not to give a religion (the U.S. Census is not allowed to collect information on religion). A few responses were not categorized in the samples and were instead coded ‘Uncodable,’ ‘Deferred Cases,’ or ‘Other.’ These uncategorized responses were usually religions.²

Because of the very large number of responses, we made our analysis tractable by explicitly identifying only those ANCESTR1 ethnic groups with a sample size of at least 100. Ethnic groups with less than 100 were grouped together as All Other Whites, which is a residual category. The ACS has another variable (i.e., ANCESTR2) to allow the respondent to provide a second response about their ancestry, but for the purposes of our exploratory study, we only consider ANCESTR1 and leave ANCESTR2 for future research.

For simplicity and to avoid confusion, we allocate all Hispanic Whites to an overall Hispanic category which has been studied in prior research (e.g., Mitchell & Tienda, 2006). That is, in our investigation, Whites only include non-Hispanic Whites. We use the terms “Whites” and “non-Hispanic Whites” interchangeably.

Because our study is focused on Whites (i.e., non-Hispanic Whites), our categorization of Hispanics is only a reference group that includes persons of any race who identify as Hispanic (i.e., Hispanic Whites, Hispanic African Americans, Hispanic Asians, Hispanic Native Americans,

² https://usa.ipums.org/usa-action/variables/ANCESTR1#description_section

Hispanic Pacific Islanders, and Hispanic Other Race). For the purposes of our study, we refer to this grouping simply as Hispanics. Our analysis includes additional reference groups: non-Hispanic African Americans (hereafter, Blacks); non-Hispanic Asian Americans (hereafter, Asians); and non-Hispanic persons of all other races (i.e., Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, Other Race persons) which also includes multi-racial individuals (hereafter, Other Races).

We include several control variables in some of our regression models. Nativity is determined by whether or not an individual was born in the United States; among the foreign-born, we also differentiate people by citizenship status. We include a dichotomous variable for whether someone speaks English only, very well, or well. Age and age-squared are continuous variables. Family type is measured in terms of three categories: married couple (as the reference), female-headed households (family households with and without children), and other households. Gender is controlled for in the models specified with a male dichotomous variable although in some analyses we estimate separate models for men and women. We include dichotomous variables for whether the individual resides in a metropolitan area, has a disability, and or is a military veteran. The control for Census region is inclusive of four Census-designated regions (Northeast, Midwest, South, and West).

For our research concerns, we do not seek to operationalize a specific theory of social class or social stratification in the labor market. The independent variables are considered to be potential resources that often may enhance an individual's educational or income attainments. The exact mechanisms of these processes are beyond the scope of our analysis (Hedstrom & Ylikosji, 2010). They are not necessary to adjudicate for the purpose of assessing how much of these social resources statistically explain racial and ethnic differentials. Our data are furthermore not detailed enough to discern very specific processes underlying social class formation or income inequalities (e.g., Sakamoto & Wang, 2017).

For example, a long-standing debate is whether is the effect of education on an individual's income (Sakamoto et al., 2012) derives from human capital (i.e., augmented productivity or skill enhancement), market signaling (i.e., highly educated people learn faster and are more readily trained for complex jobs) or credentialism (i.e., highly educated people are not more productive or trainable but simply benefit from possessing a culturally valued symbol). Regardless of the specific mechanism involved, the extent that education is a resource to increase one's income attainment may be assessed by our empirical analysis which is the key issue for our investigation into racial and ethnic differentials in income. For the cohorts included in our data, prior research has already established that educational attainment is notably associated with lifetime earnings (Tamborini et al., 2015) regardless of the particular nature of that association.

Analytic Strategy

Although our data provide a lot of important information, we acknowledge that they are not experimental as they are obtained from a cross-sectional survey. As with most sociological and social demographic research using survey data that are nonexperimental, strong claims about causal effects are unwarranted. While some research using specialized methods and suitable data have sought to more clearly argue for causal effects using nonexperimental data (Morgan & Winship, 2014), our research objectives and data are not appropriate for such approaches. In short, due to data limitations, we do not make strong causal claims.

That said, our study is certainly not unique in that regard as there is a long tradition of multivariate analysis of survey data in the sociology, social demography, and related observational social sciences (Morgan & Winship, 2014; Li & Xie, 2022). Although our data are nonexperimental, causal processes do in fact operate in the social world, and researchers should seek to provide systematic evidence to try to understand the strength of these processes (Duncan, 1966; Xie, 2007). We show the results from a series of regression equations where the independent variables are assumed to have causal effects on a given dependent variable based on theoretical reasons, prior literature, and the time-order condition.

The time-order condition refers to the assumption that the dependent variable must be measured at a later point of time than the independent variables that are hypothesized to causally affect the dependent variable (Bohrnstedt & Knoke, 1988, p. 434). Because our data are cross-sectional and are thus measured at the same point in time, we must make the additional assumption that the independent variables (although measured in the same cross-sectional survey as the dependent variable) were causally determined before the dependent variable. For this reason, the dependent variable in the regression does not have any causal effect on any of the independent variables. Because this assumption is a strong one, in practice the common (if implicit) presumption is that any reciprocal effects (if actually present) are too small to make a major difference in the estimated coefficients.

Educational attainment is the dependent variable of our first regression. The independent variables are age, age squared, nativity status, speaks English, disability status and veteran status. A person's age and place of birth occur (and are defined) based on an earlier point in time before the individual completes their educational attainment (as ascertained between 2017 and 2021). Age and nativity status may therefore be viewed as independent variables in the regression of educational attainment among persons who are already aged 25 and over.

Our results are not highly sensitive to the inclusion of speaks English, disability status and veteran status because they are not applicable to the majority of persons. However, the rationale is that veterans often delay the completion of their schooling until their discharge from their military service. Persons with disabilities may also have lower levels of schooling by age 25. The dichotomous variable of whether or not speaks English is meant to typically pertain to recent immigrants (who are already at least age 25) some of whom may still be improving their English sufficiently in order to obtain additional schooling in the U.S.

We use ordinal logistic regression when education is the dependent variable because it consists of five categories that are generally ranked from lower to higher. That is, as mentioned above, our data on educational attainment refer to an ordered hierarchy of categories (i.e., less than high school; high school; some college; bachelor's degree; and a master's, professional, or doctoral degree) so that as a dependent variable, it may be viewed as a latent variable without the interval-level scaling of the categories. Lacking exact numeric values, traditional OLS estimates cannot be computed. Ordinal logistic regression is a flexible approach for investigating hierarchical categorical data as the dependent variable because this model does not require numeric information on the distance between the intervals (Long & Freese, 2006).³ Instead, the coefficients from ordinal logistic regression refer to the log odds of moving from a lower to a

³ The intervals may be scaled (e.g., in terms of the number of years typically required to finish the particular educational level), but then the OLS results are dependent upon the specific scaling that is used (Xie, 1989).

higher category (Long & Freese, 2006).

The ordinal logistic regression is an extension of the somewhat more familiar binary logistic regression that is used to investigate dichotomous dependent variables (Long & Freese, 2006). Because the poverty and affluence variables are dichotomous, binary logistic regression is used to investigate those dependent variables where the estimated coefficients are again interpreted as log odds of being in the category that is indicated by the score of 1 (i.e., not 0).

As for the hourly wage as the dependent variable, it is continuous and is therefore analyzed with standard OLS regression. The latter is similarly used to estimate the regression of the household income variable which is also continuous. As is commonly done, we estimate all of the regressions separately by gender (i.e., men versus women) due to notable gender interactions in educational and income outcomes.

For each of the regressions of the income-related dependent variables (i.e., wage, household income, poverty, affluence), we estimate three model specifications. Two of these specifications are the simplest baseline models. We refer to the most basic specification as the White Privilege model which includes only the following independent variables: Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Other Race, with Whites as the reference group. This specification is inspired by critical race theory which emphasizes the overall socioeconomic advantages of Whites as a racial category due to White supremacy (e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2004, p. 934; Saenz, Embrick, & Rodriguez, 2015, p. 8) without controlling for other demographic variables.

The independent variables for the second baseline model include Black, Hispanic, Asian, Other Race, and a series of dichotomous variables indicating each of the various White ethnic groups (using English being the reference category). We refer to this specification as the White Ethnics model. The results for this regression provide evidence about how much the White Privilege advantage varies by White ethnic group but again without any demographic control variables.

As described above, our results are essentially descriptive. The information that is being provided by these regressions is based on the assumption that racial identity (i.e., the White Privilege model) or ethnic identity (i.e., the White Ethnics model) are exogenous. In other words, racial identity and ethnic identity are assumed not to be themselves caused by wage, household income, poverty or affluence. Making that assumption, the regression estimates will enable us to ascertain how much of the variance of the given dependent variable may be statistically decomposed into being between versus within the racial and ethnic groups. That is, the results will show how much of the income variable is statistically explained by the average differences between the racial categories (i.e., the White Privilege model) or by the average differences between non-White racial categories plus the White ethnic groups (i.e., the White Ethnics model).

Our third specification is the Demographic Heterogeneity model. Its independent variables include all of the aforementioned racial and ethnic variables, but also the demographic control variables (i.e., age, gender, education, disability, metropolitan status, region, nativity status, speaks English, family type, and veteran status). According to the demographic heterogeneity view, many of these latter demographic variables will be far more important — both in terms of direct effects and explained variance — than the White Privilege effect emphasized by critical race theory.

We also estimate the White Privilege and the White Ethnics specifications for the ordinal logistic

regression of education. In the Demographic Heterogeneity model using education as the dependent variable, however, we do not include region, metropolitan status, and family type variables as independent variables. These latter variables often are determined after education is completed and therefore typically violate the time-order condition discussed earlier. Current region of residence, for example, is frequently different from the place where the individual completed their education. In other words, region, metropolitan status, and family type are not sufficiently exogenous independent variables with respect to the highest level of educational attainment.

Empirical Results

Ethnic Diversity

Basic descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1, which lists 42 groups of Whites. As noted earlier, an ethnic group was explicitly identified as a separate category if its sample size is at least 100. A great deal of ethnic variability is evident in Table 1. These results are consistent with the demographic heterogeneity view that the White racial category is diverse.

The largest group in Table 1 is All Other Whites, which is the residual category that constitutes 33.8 percent of all Whites. This residual category includes over a hundred possible ethnic identities, including non-codable responses. The next largest specific group is German (14.9 percent) followed by English (10.4 percent) and then Irish (9.6 percent). The next largest group is United States (7.2 percent), which is not usually considered to be a specific ethnic identity by sociologists. Many of these Whites may not be aware of their ancestral origins.

The smallest ethnic groups shown in Table 1 (i.e., .01 percent or less) include Maltese, Turkestan, Rom (not to be confused with Romanian), German Russian, Uzbek, Kurd, Appalachian, and North American. Other small groups (i.e., less than 1.0 percent but greater than .01 percent) include Pennsylvania German (hereafter, Amish), Prussian, Greek, Sicilian, Portuguese, Croatian, Bohemian, Bosnian, Serbian, Hungarian, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Bosnian, Slav, Iranian, Israeli, Armenian, Palestinian, French Canadian, Cajun, and Texas. Groups greater than 1.0 percent but less than 7.0 percent include Dutch, French, Italian, Norwegian, Scotch Irish, Scottish, Swedish, and "White".

These findings reveal a great deal of ethnic diversity among Whites. Immigrant streams have been ongoing for centuries generating a variation in identities. Ethnic diversity is wide-ranging, including not only some traditional, regional, or somewhat generic North American groups (e.g., Amish, Appalachian, Cajun, French Canadian, North American, Texan, United States, White) but also various European-origin groups (e.g., Croatian, Dutch, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Portuguese, Rom, Russian, Scottish, Swedish) as well as Middle Eastern and western Asian groups (Armenian, Iranian, Israeli, Kurd, Palestinian, Russian, Turkestan, Uzbek) among others.

Socioeconomic Diversity

According to our demographic heterogeneity view, a variety of class and social demographic variables affect socioeconomic attainments. Being the largest racial category comprising a wide variety of persons who fall into the White category, socioeconomic variability (in addition to ethnic diversity) among Whites is likely to be pronounced. White Privilege may not be applicable to all White ethnic groups.

Table 1 Socioeconomic Outcomes by Ancestry Groups and Race, 2017-2021

	Less than high school	High school	Some college	BA	Grad	Median household income	% poor	% affluent	Wages	Sample size	% of white pop
Non-Hispanic whites (total)	5.2	34.6	22.9	22.8	14.4	75,527	7.9	39.3	34.5	7,765,942	100
Dutch	4.3	32.7	24.1	23.8	15.1	77,147	6.4	40.4	35.8	82,286	1.04
English	3.3	29.0	23.3	26.4	18.0	80,300	5.8	44.3	37.9	845,522	10.42
French	5.1	35.3	24.9	21.2	13.6	72,222	7.8	39.2	34.1	150,384	1.99
German	3.6	33.3	24.5	24.2	14.4	78,502	6.2	41.2	34.3	1,178,508	14.89
Pennsylvania German	26.6	41.7	15.4	10.0	6.4	60,000	11.2	25.6	27.3	8,414	0.10
Prussian	1.2	24.7	29.7	26.5	18.0	79,579	7.5	40.6	34.2	1,304	0.02
Greek	5.7	25.4	20.0	27.7	21.2	88,163	6.9	47.9	42.0	33,547	0.47
Irish	3.8	31.7	24.2	24.7	15.6	80,167	7.0	43.2	36.0	722,525	9.61
Italian	3.7	32.4	21.9	25.4	16.6	86,876	6.5	46.4	38.3	445,300	6.01
Sicilian	4.5	29.9	26.8	24.7	14.0	75,932	9.4	39.0	32.7	5,049	0.07
Maltese	4.0	34.1	24.0	23.0	15.0	93,947	4.8	50.8	41.3	1,071	0.01
Norwegian	2.2	29.5	26.6	26.5	15.3	81,458	5.6	43.9	35.5	119,659	1.42
Portuguese	13.2	37.0	21.8	18.2	9.9	79,758	7.4	40.7	34.8	30,660	0.44
Scotch Irish	2.5	26.3	26.5	26.2	18.5	74,400	6.0	41.1	34.3	90,074	1.10
Scottish	2.4	26.7	25.3	27.3	18.3	82,541	5.9	44.6	37.3	135,337	1.73
Swedish	2.1	26.8	24.7	28.3	18.2	80,542	5.8	44.8	37.3	87,571	1.08
Turkestanti	5.3	23.5	15.7	34.6	20.9	70,295	19.2	29.9	39.6	107	0.00
Croatian	3.3	28.7	20.2	28.8	19.0	86,317	5.6	48.7	40.6	10,537	0.14
Bohemian	3.9	40.8	24.8	20.0	10.5	67,093	6.6	37.8	30.3	6,307	0.07
German Russian	1.0	18.9	25.6	34.3	20.2	89,031	8.7	42.5	33.4	500	0.01
Rom	15.9	32.8	22.3	16.3	12.7	50,000	26.7	24.2	24.7	275	0.00
Hungarian	2.8	31.4	22.9	24.4	18.6	78,000	7.4	43.1	38.1	31,849	0.42
Romanian	4.8	24.6	19.3	27.1	24.3	82,895	8.4	43.7	39.8	11,800	0.18
Russian	1.9	16.8	17.8	31.3	32.2	90,016	7.8	51.0	46.2	61,753	0.86
Serbian	3.9	28.5	19.4	27.1	21.2	89,500	6.4	46.0	40.0	5,151	0.08
Bosnian	8.4	50.2	19.0	15.1	7.4	75,527	9.8	29.7	28.1	3,021	0.06
Uzbek	10.2	22.3	15.7	27.3	24.5	58,000	15.5	25.1	26.7	409	0.01
Slav	2.0	26.9	23.6	27.6	19.9	75,000	6.3	44.2	36.5	3,166	0.04
Iranian	3.2	15.8	13.6	30.7	36.7	90,080	10.6	48.8	47.9	12,986	0.21
Israeli	3.6	26.2	16.1	27.5	26.6	94,203	10.4	49.9	49.0	3,036	0.05
Armenian	6.5	26.3	21.3	26.0	20.0	78,000	11.8	41.7	39.0	13,184	0.20
Kurd	13.9	25.1	16.9	27.7	16.4	55,475	19.7	23.3	36.0	492	0.01
Palestinian	7.9	25.7	19.5	27.8	19.2	71,842	14.5	30.2	38.3	2,558	0.05
Appalachian	11.6	41.3	21.5	12.9	12.7	53,381	15.3	29.9	28.0	794	0.01
French Canadian	5.2	37.3	23.7	20.9	12.9	77,368	6.7	40.5	34.4	57,066	0.72
Cajun	11.4	41.2	18.9	18.6	9.9	64,738	10.9	31.5	30.6	2,979	0.04
"United States"	9.0	45.2	21.8	15.8	8.3	60,853	10.1	30.5	29.2	572,776	7.22
"Texas"	4.8	32.2	24.2	25.5	13.4	77,979	7.3	40.5	36.3	1,519	0.02
"North American"	5.6	31.8	25.7	24.6	12.2	76,714	6.6	39.8	32.8	807	0.01
"White"	7.6	40.8	21.6	19.0	11.1	66,235	11.4	31.2	30.7	364,417	4.60
North African/Southwest											
Asian country	8.4	23.1	17.2	29.8	21.6	71,842	15.5	33.6	38.6	46,618	0.79
All other whites	6.5	37.2	22.3	21.1	13.1	72,947	9.2	36.5	33.1	2,614,624	33.83
Non-white race groups											
Black	10.3	40.2	26.3	14.2	8.9	46,629	17.6	21.4	24.4	1,001,293	--
Asian	9.8	20.4	14.9	30.3	24.7	99,520	8.6	44.8	40.6	631,220	--
Hispanic	25.5	36.7	19.6	12.3	5.9	59,000	14.4	19.6	23.8	1,355,369	--
Other race	7.9	33.3	26.3	20.4	12.3	64,738	13.8	30.7	30.2	362,242	--

Source: 2017-2021 American Community Survey. Calculations for blacks, whites, and Asian groups are for people who report that group alone.

Notes: the calculations for poverty, income, and education are for people aged 25+; earnings and wages are for people aged 25-64 with over 500 hours worked, and positive earnings. Median household income calculated for households. Sample size is count of group age 25+.

The combined total for all Whites overall is referred to as “Non-Hispanic Whites, total” in Table 1. For this total of Whites overall, Table 1 shows that the percentage without a high school degree is 5.2 percent. That table indicates, however, substantial variation in the high school dropout rate by ethnicity. Some groups have very low percentages without a high school degree such as German Russian (1.0 percent), Prussian (1.2 percent), Russian (1.9 percent), Slav (2.0 percent), Swedish (2.1 percent), Norwegian (2.2 percent), Scottish (2.4 percent), Scotch Irish (2.5 percent), and Hungarian (2.8 percent). Other groups have percentages in the range from 3.0 percent through 5.1 percent (i.e., still below the overall average for Whites) including Dutch, English, French, German, Irish, Italian, Sicilian, Maltese, Croatian, Bohemian, Romanian, Serbian, Iranian, Israeli, and Texan.

Conversely, several groups are above the White overall figure of 5.2 percentage for high school dropouts. That is, the high school dropout figure is 26.6 percent for Amish, 15.9 percent for Rom, 13.9 for Kurd, 13.2 percent for Portuguese, 11.6 for Appalachian, 11.4 for Cajun, 10.2 for Uzbeks, 9.0 for United States, 8.4 for Bosnian, 8.4 for North African-Southwest Asian country, 7.9 for Palestinian, 7.6 percent for White, 6.5 for Armenian, 6.5 for All Other White, 5.7 for Greek, 5.6 for North American, and 5.3 for Turkestan. For reference, Table 1 shows that Blacks have a high school dropout rate of 10.3 percent which is lower than the point estimates for Amish, Rom, Kurd, Portuguese, Appalachian, and Cajun. Indeed, despite all the rhetoric about Asian Americans being highly selective immigrants in regard to educational attainment (e.g., Lee & Zhou, 2015), the proportion of Asians without a high school degree (9.8 percent) is only half of a percent point lower than Blacks.

Other educational statistics in Table 1 similarly indicate substantial ethnic variation among Whites. The percent with a graduate degree among Whites overall is 14.4 percent, but 25 groups have a higher percent (e.g., 15.1 percent among Dutch, 18.0 percent among English and Prussian, 15.6 percent among Irish, etc.). Despite having a slightly higher rate of high school dropouts than Whites overall, Greek, Turkestan, Armenian, Uzbek, Kurd, and Palestinian also nonetheless have a higher rate than Whites overall in possessing a graduate degree thus indicating substantial within-group educational variability. On the other hand, Amish, Rom, Portuguese, Appalachian, Bosnian, White, and Cajun all have lower levels of possessing a graduate degree as well as a higher rate of high school dropouts than Whites overall.

Other socioeconomic variation evident in Table 1 includes, for example, relatively high poverty rates above 11.0 percent among Amish, Turkestan, Rom, Kurd, Uzbek, Armenian, Palestinian, Appalachian, White, and North African-Southwest Asian country, but relatively low poverty rates below 6.0 percent among English, Maltese, Norwegian, Scottish, Swedish, and Croatian. Almost half or more of Maltese, Croatian, Iranian, Israeli, and Russian are affluent in contrast to approximately a quarter or less of Amish, Rom, Uzbek, and Kurd. By comparison, the percent affluent is 44.8 for Asians, 39.3 for Whites overall, 21.4 for Blacks, and 19.6 for Hispanics.

In sum, basic descriptive statistics reveal considerable diversity among Whites. Although often portrayed as uniformly homogeneous and socioeconomically successful (e.g., Feagin, 2013; McDermott & Ferguson, 2022; Saenz, Embrick & Rodriguez, 2015; Bhopal, 2023; Hummer, 2023), diversity among Whites is evident in various manifestations. Ethnic diversity has already been noted above, but significant socioeconomic variation is also obvious. While statistical averages are typically referenced in regard to the socioeconomic standing of Whites, many ethnic groups have above-average levels of persons who do not have a high school degree, including a few

groups exceeding the rate of Blacks. Many White ethnic groups have educational or poverty levels that differ substantially from the overall average for Whites (either higher or lower), underscoring the fact that a measure of central tendency does not necessarily describe a majority of the group.

Ordered regression models of educational attainment are shown in Table 2.⁴ To conserve space, Table 2 only shows the antilog of the coefficients (the “odds ratios”). The results for the basic White Privilege model (in which Whites overall are the omitted category and no control variables are included) show that White men overall are advantaged in educational attainment relative to Black men whose odds ratio is .52. However, with an odds ratio of only .29, Hispanic men appear to be even more disadvantaged than Black men. Conversely, Table 2 shows that the Asian male odds ratio is 2.03, indicating that educational attainment among Asian men is much higher than among White men. The results for the White Privilege model in Table 2 for women show a similar overall pattern although the racial differentials are somewhat less pronounced. For example, the odds ratio for Asian women is 1.49 which is lower than for Asian men.

In the White Ethnics model shown in Table 2, no control variables are included in the regression but the various ethnic groups are identified with English being the reference group. The earlier discussion of Table 1 identified various groups with high levels of high drop-outs, and those disadvantages are also evident in the White Ethnics model in Table 2 (e.g., Amish, Portuguese, Rom, Bosnian, Appalachian, Cajun, Kurd, United States). The new information provided by the White Ethnics model in Table 2 is that gender differentials are considered. The results in Table 2 reveal, however, that gender differentials in the ethnic effects are usually relatively small with the possible exceptions of significantly greater educational disadvantages being evident among Rom men (relative to Rom women) and Kurdish women (relative to Kurdish men).

The Demographic Heterogeneity model in Table 2 does not yield very different results or conclusions from the White Ethnics model. Although the Demographic Heterogeneity model in Table 2 controls for age, nativity, English speaking, disability, and veteran status, the results indicate that those independent variables do not substantially affect the ethnic differentials in regard to educational attainment for either men or women.

However, the goodness-of-fit improves considerably for the Demographic Heterogeneity model in Table 2. Among men, the pseudo-R-squared is .025 for the White Privilege model, .031 for White Ethnics model, and .065 for the Demographic Heterogeneity model in Table 2. The relative differences in the pseudo-R-squared's are even larger for women in Table 2. These findings regarding the pseudo-R-squared's indicate that the control variables used in the Demographic Heterogeneity model, though limited, nevertheless statistically explain more variance than do racial category and ethnicity.

⁴ The proportionality assumption of the ordered regression model (i.e., equal ethnic differences across every educational level) is, given patterns in Table 1, not always strictly correct and is likely violated. However, for our descriptive purposes involving many dozens of groups, we nonetheless use ordered regression models of educational attainment as a useful summary approach to outline averaged patterns of ethnic differences.

Table 2 Ordinal Logistic Regression Models of Educational Attainment by Gender, 2017-2021

	Men			Women		
	White privilege	White Ethnics	Hetero- geneity	White privilege	White Ethnics	Hetero- geneity
	OR	OR	OR	OR	OR	OR
Dutch		0.82 ***	0.83 ***		0.80 ***	0.78 ***
English (omitted)						
French		0.67 ***	0.67 ***		0.74 ***	0.69 ***
German		0.76 ***	0.78 ***		0.86 ***	0.81 ***
Pennsylvania German		0.15 ^b ***	0.14 ^b ***		0.22 ^b ***	0.20 ^b ***
Prussian		1.12	1.16 *		1.12	1.03
Greek		1.09 ***	0.99		1.15 ***	0.98
Irish		0.81 ***	0.78 ***		0.91 ***	0.81 ***
Italian		0.86 ***	0.76 ***		0.91 ***	0.73 ***
Sicilian		0.77 ***	0.73 ***		0.91 *	0.74 ***
Maltese		0.81 *	0.71 **		0.76 **	0.65 ***
Norwegian		0.89 ***	0.95 ***		1.00	1.00
Portuguese		0.41 ***	0.37 ^a ***		0.49 ^a ***	0.42 ^b ***
Scotch Irish		1.07 ***	1.13 ***		1.08 ***	1.17 ***
Scottish		1.05 ***	1.04 ***		1.11 ***	1.07 ***
Swedish		1.07 ***	1.09 ***		1.14 ***	1.13 ***
Turkestani		1.55	1.65		1.13	1.97 *
Croatian		1.06	0.97		1.08 *	0.97
Bohemian		0.61 ***	0.72 ***		0.59 ***	0.69 ***
German Russian		1.46 **	1.88 ***		1.44 **	1.77 ***
Rom		0.24 ^a ***	0.26 ^a ***		0.69 ^a	0.63 ^a *
Hungarian		0.96 *	0.89 ***		0.96 *	0.87 ***
Romanian		1.19 ***	1.07		1.34 ***	1.21 ***
Russian		2.15 ***	2.05 ***		2.08 ***	2.09 ***
Serbian		1.00	0.97		1.23 ***	1.12 *
Bosnian		0.35 ^a ***	0.36 ^a ***		0.41 ^b ***	0.38 ^b ***
Uzbek		1.04	1.44		1.31	1.99 **
Slav		1.25 ***	1.23 **		1.05	1.05
Iranian		3.02 ***	2.82 ***		1.94 ***	2.04 ***
Israeli		1.20 **	0.96		1.69 ***	1.26 **
Armenian		1.01	1.04		1.01	1.15 ***
Kurd		1.00	0.89		0.54 ^a **	0.51 ^a **
Palestinian		1.06	0.93		0.90	0.76 ***
Appalachian		0.40 ^a ***	0.48 ***		0.47 ^a ***	0.53 ^a ***
French Canadian		0.61 ***	0.59 ***		0.71 ***	0.64 ***
Cajun		0.40 ^a ***	0.41 ^a ***		0.49 ^a ***	0.47 ^a ***
"United States"		0.39 ***	0.42 ***		0.45 ^b ***	0.47 ^b ***
"Texas"		0.83 *	0.92		0.72 **	0.71 **
"North American"		0.82 *	0.80 *		0.67 **	0.63 ***
"White"		0.49 ***	0.50 ***		0.58 ***	0.52 ***
North African/Southwest Asian country		1.26 ***	1.18 ***		1.00	0.97
All other whites		0.60 ***	0.60 ***		0.68 ***	0.62 ***
Non-white race groups						
Black	0.52 ***	0.36 ***	0.36 ***	0.66 ***	0.51 ***	0.45 ***
Asian	2.03 ***	1.44 ***	1.45 ***	1.49 ***	1.16 ***	1.21 ***
Hispanic (not white)	0.29 ***	0.20 ^b ***	0.24 ^b ***	0.34 ***	0.26 ^b ***	0.29 ^b ***
Other race	0.81 ***	0.57 ***	0.58 ***	0.91 ***	0.70 ***	0.61 ***
With controls			X			X
Pseudo R-Squared	0.025	0.031	0.065	0.016	0.020	0.069
Observations		5,358,853			5,757,213	

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, "a" not significantly different than Blacks at $p < .05$, "b" significantly lower than Blacks at $p < .05$

Source: 2017-2021 American Community Survey. Calculations for blacks, whites, and Asian groups are for people who report that group alone. Controls include age, age squared, nativity, speaks English, disability status, and veteran status.

Table 3 Ordinary Least Squares Regression Models Predicting Logged Hourly Wage by Gender, 2017-2021

	Men			Women		
	White privilege	White Ethnics	Hetero- geneity	White privilege	White Ethnics	Hetero- geneity
	<u>B</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>B</u>
Dutch		-0.05 ***	-0.01 *		-0.05 ***	-0.01 *
English (omitted)						
French		-0.09 ***	-0.02 ***		-0.06 ***	-0.02 **
German		-0.08 ***	-0.02 ***		-0.05 ***	0.00
Pennsylvania German		-0.33 ***	-0.02		-0.23 ^a ***	-0.10 ^a ***
Prussian		-0.08	-0.08		-0.17 ^a **	-0.16 ^a ***
Greek		0.05 ***	0.00		0.09 ***	0.03 **
Irish		-0.06 ***	-0.01		0.00	0.01 ***
Italian		0.02 ***	0.03 ***		0.05 ***	0.02 ***
Sicilian		-0.19 ***	-0.11 ***		-0.08 **	-0.04
Maltese		0.09 *	0.11 *		0.11	0.09
Norwegian		-0.05 ***	0.00		0.00	0.03 ***
Portuguese		-0.06 ***	0.03 **		0.00	0.03 **
Scotch Irish		-0.11 ***	-0.08 ***		-0.07 ***	-0.06 ***
Scottish		-0.03 ***	-0.03 ***		-0.01	-0.01 *
Swedish		-0.01	-0.01		0.03 ***	0.01
Turkestani		0.02	0.01		0.19	0.21 ^a
Croatian		0.10 ***	0.07 ***		0.07 ***	0.03
Bohemian		-0.19 ***	-0.08 **		-0.13 ***	-0.01
German Russian		-0.18	-0.20 ^a *		-0.03	-0.04 ^a
Rom		-0.45 ^a ***	-0.12 ^a		-0.21 ^a *	-0.12 ^a
Hungarian		0.01	0.00		0.00	-0.01
Romanian		-0.04	-0.06 **		0.06 **	0.01
Russian		0.17 ***	0.05 ***		0.13 ***	0.01
Serbian		0.03	0.03		0.10 **	0.05
Bosnian		-0.25 ***	-0.07 **		-0.19 ***	-0.01
Uzbek		-0.40 ^a ***	-0.35 ^a ***		-0.16 ^a *	-0.14 ^a *
Slav		-0.08	-0.10 **		0.06	0.03
Iranian		0.12 ***	-0.05 **		0.16 ***	0.03
Israeli		0.12 **	0.07		0.19 ***	0.08 *
Armenian		-0.03	-0.09 ***		0.05 **	-0.01
Kurd		-0.20 **	-0.16 ^a *		-0.27 ^a **	-0.13 ^a
Palestinian		-0.19 ***	-0.19 ***		0.08	0.06
Appalachian		-0.30 ***	-0.20 ^a ***		-0.23 ^a *	-0.14 ^a
French Canadian		-0.07 ***	0.00		-0.02 **	0.01
Cajun		-0.19 ***	-0.01		-0.19 ***	-0.06 ^a *
"United States"		-0.25 ***	-0.06 ***		-0.21 ***	-0.05 ***
"Texas"		-0.16 **	-0.05		0.00	0.10
"North American"		-0.06	0.01		-0.16 ^a **	-0.05 ^a
"White"		-0.22 ***	-0.07 ***		-0.17 ***	-0.04 ***
North African/Southwest Asian country		-0.12 ***	-0.14 ***		-0.03 **	-0.05 ***
All other whites		-0.14 ***	-0.03 ***		-0.10 ***	-0.01 ***
Non-white race groups						
Black	-0.37 ***	-0.47 ***	-0.26 ***	-0.20 ***	-0.27 ***	-0.10 ***
Asian	0.11 ***	0.01 ***	-0.04 ***	0.12 ***	0.06 ***	0.06 ***
Hispanic	-0.36 ***	-0.46 ***	-0.15 ***	-0.29 ***	-0.35 ^b ***	-0.09 ***
Other race	-0.17 ***	-0.26 ***	-0.12 ***	-0.09 ***	-0.15 ***	-0.05 ***
With controls			X			X
R-Squared	0.048	0.055	0.252	0.030	0.036	0.233
Observations		3,047,494			2,719,163	

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05, "a" not significantly different than Blacks at p<.05, "b" significantly lower than Blacks at p<.05

Source: 2017-2021 American Community Survey. Controls include age, aged squared, disability status, veteran status, education, family size and type, number of children, nativity, speaks English, region, and metro status.

Table 3 shows the regressions of log hourly wage. Among men, the R-squared is .048 for the White Privilege model, .055 for White Ethnics model, and .252 for the Demographic Heterogeneity model in Table 3. Among women, the R-squared is .030 for the White Privilege model, .036 for White Ethnics model, and .233 for the Demographic Heterogeneity model in Table 3. The White Privilege model thus statistically explains less than 5 percent of the variance of log hourly wages, which is consistent with prior discussions (Sakamoto & Wang, 2015, p. 1267). For both men and women, focusing exclusively on racial category ignores the vast majority of wage inequality. The latter is far more affected by the control variables for the Demographic Heterogeneity model which in Table 3 include, age, nativity, English speaking, disability, and veteran status, education, family size and type, number of children, region, and metro status.

The results for the White Ethnics model in Table 3 for men reveal important variability across ethnic groups. Some groups have significantly higher wages than those of English ancestry (e.g., coefficients of .17 for Russian, .12 for Iranian, .12 for Israeli, .10 for Croatians) whereas many other groups have significantly lower wages (e.g., coefficients of -.45 for Rom, -.40 for Uzbek, -.33 for Amish, -.30 for Appalachian, -.25 for Bosnian, -.25 for United States, -.22 for White, -.20 for Kurd, -.19 for Palestinian, -.19 for Cajun, -.19 for Bohemian).⁵

Contrasting the White Ethnics model with the Demographic Heterogeneity model in Table 3, a portion of ethnic variation in wages is statistically explained by group differences in the control variables. Usually (but not always), the ethnic coefficients are somewhat closer to zero after controls. For example, the highly negative coefficients for Amish, Rom, and Cajun men are no longer statistically significant after controls (i.e., in the Demographic Heterogeneity model) and the statistically significant, positive effect for Israeli men is no longer statistically significant. The coefficient for Iranian is actually statistically significant and negative (i.e., it switches sign) in the model with controls.

However, even in the Demographic Heterogeneity model, variation in the net effects of ethnicity is still evident for men in Table 3. Some statistically significant, negative effects remain such as -.35 for Uzbek, -.20 for German Russian, -.20 for Appalachian, -.19 for Palestinian, -.16 for Kurd, -.14 for North African-Southwest Asian country, -.12 for Rom, and -.11 for Sicilian. For several of these groups (i.e., Uzbek, German Russian, Appalachian, Kurd, and Rom) the disadvantage is not statistically different from that for African American men in the Demographic Heterogeneity model as indicated in Table 3.⁶

The results for women in Table 3 similarly indicate ethnic variation, although perhaps a little less so than for men especially in the Demographic Heterogeneity model. After controls, the statistically significant, negative effects include -.16 for Prussians, -.14 for Uzbeks, -.10 for Amish, -.06 for Scotch Irish, and -.06 for Cajun as well as a few others with effects closer to zero. Statistically significant, positive effects in the Demographic Heterogeneity model for women include .08 for Israeli, .03 for Norwegian, Portuguese, and Greek, .02 for Italian, and .01 for Irish.

⁵ For simplicity, we just report the coefficients, but one may take their exponent (and then subtract 1) to find their exact proportionate effects.

⁶ In Tables 2, 3, and 4, the superscript a denotes that the coefficient is not statistically different from that for African Americans at the .05 level of significance. The superscript b indicates that the coefficient is statistically different from and lower than that for African Americans at the .05 level of significance.

Table 4 Logistic Regression Models Predicting Poverty, Affluence and Household Income, 2017-2021

	Poverty			Affluence			Household Income		
	White privilege	White Ethnics	Hetero- geneity	White privilege	White Ethnics	Hetero- geneity	White privilege	White Ethnics	Hetero- geneity
	OR	OR	OR	OR	OR	OR	B	B	B
Dutch		1.09 ***	1.01		0.85 ***	0.92 ***		-0.06 ***	-0.02 *
English (omitted)									
French		1.35 ***	1.12 ***		0.81 ***	0.94 ***		-0.13 ***	-0.02 *
German		1.06 ***	0.96 ***		0.88 ***	0.99 **		-0.03 ***	0.02 ***
Pennsylvania German		2.03 ***	1.37 ***		0.43 ***	0.67 ***		-0.31 ***	-0.03
Prussian		1.31	1.32		0.86	0.82 *		-0.07	-0.10
Greek		1.19 ***	1.21 ***		1.16 ***	1.10 ***		0.06 ***	0.00
Irish		1.21 ***	1.06 ***		0.96 ***	1.02 ***		-0.02 ***	0.03 ***
Italian		1.12 ***	1.04 **		1.09 ***	1.07 ***		0.04 ***	0.03 ***
Sicilian		1.67 ***	1.34 ***		0.80 ***	0.88 **		-0.15 **	-0.08
Maltese		0.82	0.81		1.30 **	1.48 ***		-0.05	-0.09
Norwegian		0.96 *	0.91 ***		0.98 *	1.08 ***		0.01	0.03 ***
Portuguese		1.28 ***	1.00		0.86 ***	1.07 ***		-0.07 ***	0.02
Scotch Irish		1.03	0.96		0.88 ***	0.91 ***		-0.06 ***	-0.01
Scottish		1.01	1.03		1.01	0.97 **		0.03 ***	0.00
Swedish		0.98	1.00		1.02	0.99		-0.01	-0.02
Turkestanti		3.82 ^a ***	4.89 ^b ***		0.54 ^a *	0.55 ^a *		-0.721 ^a	-0.983 ^a *
Croatian		0.95	1.01		1.19 ***	1.14 ***		0.04	-0.01
Bohemian		1.14	0.98		0.76 ***	1.02		-0.22 ***	-0.04
German Russian		1.53	1.69 ^a *		0.93	0.92		0.02	-0.09
Rom		5.86 ^b ***	3.71 ^b ***		0.40 ^a ***	0.63 ^a **		-0.942 ^a ***	-0.645 ^a **
Hungarian		1.29 ***	1.30 ***		0.95 **	0.92 ***		-0.03 *	-0.03 *
Romanian		1.48 ***	1.61 ***		0.97	0.92 **		0.00	-0.12 ***
Russian		1.35 ***	1.62 ***		1.31 ***	1.03		0.07 ***	-0.06 ***
Serbian		1.10	1.12		1.07	1.11 *		0.07 *	0.02
Bosnian		1.75 ***	1.47 ***		0.53 ***	0.84 **		-0.14 **	-0.13 **
Uzbek		2.94 ^a ***	3.31 ^b ***		0.42 ^a ***	0.42 ^a ***		-0.43 **	-0.501 ^a ***
Slav		1.09	1.15		1.00	0.90		-0.02	-0.04
Iranian		1.91 ***	2.44 ^b ***		1.20 ***	0.96		-0.09 **	-0.33 ***
Israeli		1.87 ***	2.20 ^a ***		1.25 ***	1.14 *		0.05	-0.12 *
Armenian		2.16 ***	2.21 ^a ***		0.90 ***	0.91 ***		-0.21 ***	-0.27 ***
Kurd		3.96 ^a ***	4.55 ^b ***		0.38 ^a ***	0.42 ^a ***		-0.41 *	-0.626 ^a ***
Palestinian		2.74 ***	3.31 ^b ***		0.54 ***	0.52 ^a ***		-0.39 **	-0.592 ^a ***
Appalachian		2.90 ^a ***	2.07 ^a ***		0.54 ***	0.76 *		-0.592 ^a ***	-0.333 ^a **
French Canadian		1.15 ***	0.95		0.85 ***	0.97 *		-0.06 ***	0.02
Cajun		1.97 ***	1.37 ***		0.58 ***	0.81 ***		-0.28 ***	-0.08
"United States"		1.80 ***	1.32 ***		0.55 ***	0.79 ***		-0.35 ***	-0.11 ***
"Texas"		1.26	1.08		0.86 *	1.01		-0.07	-0.01
"North American"		1.14	0.96		0.83 *	0.92		-0.10	-0.03
"White"		2.07 ***	1.54 ***		0.57 ***	0.76 ***		-0.30 ***	-0.15 ***
North African/Southwest Asian country		2.96 ***	3.51 ^b ***		0.64 ***	0.60 ***		-0.30 ***	-0.480 ***
All other whites		1.64 ***	1.32 ***		0.72 ***	0.88 ***		-0.18 ***	-0.07 ***
Non-white race groups									
Black	2.48 ***	3.45 ***	2.07 ***	0.42 ***	0.34 ***	0.54 ***	-0.64 ***	-0.74 ***	-0.39 ***
Asian	1.09 ***	1.51 ***	1.64 ***	1.25 ***	1.02 ***	1.03 ***	0.17 ***	0.07 ***	-0.15 ***
Hispanic	1.95 ***	2.72 ***	1.51 ***	0.38 ***	0.31 ^b ***	0.56 ***	-0.30 ***	-0.40 ***	-0.13 ***
Other race	1.85 ***	2.57 ***	1.79 ***	0.68 ***	0.56 ***	0.75 ***	-0.27 ***	-0.37 ***	-0.21 ***
With controls			X			X			X
(Pseudo) R-Squared	0.020	0.024	0.158	0.028	0.033	0.184	0.020	0.023	0.188
Observations		10,743,857			10,743,857			5,892,795	

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05, "a" not significantly different than Blacks at p<.05, "b" significantly lower (or higher in poverty) than Blacks at p<.05

Source: 2017-2021 American Community Survey. Controls include gender, age, aged squared, disability status, veteran status, education, family size and type, number of children, region, and metro status.

The indicators of economic well-being shown in Table 4 include poverty, affluence, and household income. In regard to measures of goodness-of-fit, pseudo-R-squared's are shown in Table 4 for the poverty and affluence models because they are logistic regressions. R-squared is reported for the household income model which is estimated by OLS. Results from Table 4 consistently show that the goodness-of-fit of the Demographic Heterogeneity model far exceeds the goodness-of-fit of the White Privilege model and of the White Ethnics model. For example, in predicting poverty, the pseudo-R-squared is .020 for the White Privilege model, .024 for White Ethnics model, and .158 for the Demographic Heterogeneity model. In predicting affluence, the pseudo-R-squared is .028 for the White Privilege model, .033 for White Ethnics model, and .184 for the Demographic Heterogeneity model. In predicting household income, the R-squared is .020 for the White Privilege model, .023 for White Ethnics model, and .188 for the Demographic Heterogeneity model. The control variables for the Demographic Heterogeneity model in Table 4 are the same as for Table 3. These control variables clearly have, at least in a statistical sense, much greater explanatory power than focusing exclusively on racial category (i.e., the White Privilege model) or ethnicity (i.e., the White Ethnics model).

Nonetheless, according to the results for the Demographic Heterogeneity model in regard to poverty, ethnic variation remains apparent even after the controls. Several groups in the Demographic Heterogeneity model have higher odds ratios than Blacks including Turkestan, Rom, Uzbek, Iranian, Kurd, Palestinian, and North African-Southwest Asian country while the odds ratios for Blacks and Appalachian, Armenian, Israeli, and German Russian are not statistically different at the .05 level. Regarding affluence, the Demographic Heterogeneity model indicates that several groups have point estimates that are higher than Asians, including Greek, Italian, Maltese, Norwegian, Portuguese, Croatian, Serbian, and Israeli. Regarding household income, many statistically significant and negative coefficients are evident in the Demographic Heterogeneity model including, for example, -.98 for Turkestan, -.65 for Rom, -.63 for Kurd, -.59 for Palestinian, -.50 for Uzbek, -.48 for North African-Southwest Asian country, -.33 for Iranian, and -.33 for Appalachian. For comparative purposes, the household income coefficients in the Demographic Heterogeneity model are -.40 for Blacks and -.13 for Hispanics. The household income coefficients in the Demographic Heterogeneity model for Turkestan, Rom, Kurd, Palestinian, Uzbek, and Appalachian are not statistically different from Blacks at the .05 level.

Discussion

We earlier referred to the influential study by Bonilla-Silva (2004, p. 941) in which the contemporary U.S. is portrayed as being so thoroughly racist in promoting White supremacy that the term "Americakkk" is used (indirectly referring to the Ku Klux Klan although the political influence of the latter organization is likely overstated even at its height of popularity 100 years ago [Fryer & Levitt, 2012]). In his ranking of 1990 household "mean per capita income" across 20 racial and ethnic groups, Bonilla-Silva (2004, p. 936) reports that this statistic is lower for non-Hispanic Whites than for Asian Indians, Japanese, Argentines, Taiwanese, Chileans, Chinese, and Filipinos. The same study also finds that, compared to African Americans, "mean per capita income" is lower for Hmong, Cambodians, Laotians, Mexicans, Salvadorians, and Guatemalans. We therefore disagree with Bonilla-Silva's (2004) simplistic conclusion that contemporary "Americakkk" is tightly organized around promoting White supremacy to exploit African Americans because his own data show that Whites do not have the highest income and Blacks do not have the lowest income. Bonilla-Silva's (2004) discussion appeals to proponents of critical

race theory, but his conclusion is too narrow to be consistent with his own statistics.

We have used U.S. Census data to extend the study of racial and ethnic inequality by investigating the socioeconomic characteristics of Whites so as to provide further information that is relevant to assessing the accuracy of critical race theory. The latter portrays stereotypically Whites as a homogenous and uniformly advantaged group (e.g., Twine & Gallagher, 2008), and assumes that most inequality is statistically associated with average differences between racial categories because White identity is said to be simply based on “structural privilege and neocolonial dominance” (McDermott & Ferguson, 2022, p. 257). Such pronouncements assume away ethnic and class variability among Whites. Demographic heterogeneity among Whites has been largely invisible in studies asserting critical race theory.

The case of Asian Americans represents a curious contrast because for that group, ethnic heterogeneity and variation in socioeconomic status has been a time-hallowed theme (e.g., Kim, 1973; Wong, 1985; Sakamoto et al., 2009; Tran, 2024). For example, as Kao and Thompson (2003, p. 432) argue, “the model minority image is misleading and damaging to ethnic groups that are extremely disadvantaged but happen to be classified under the rubric of Asian Americans...” According to Lee and Zhou (2015, pp. 186-187),

underscoring the enormous heterogeneity within the Asian American population, Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotians are Asian ethnic groups that exhibit lower educational attainment than the U.S. average, and these groups also have higher high school dropout rates than Blacks and Latinos in the United States.

Some have even suggested that “Asian American” as a term should be eliminated (Khemka, 2023) because the heterogeneity within that racial category is purportedly too vast.

In regard to Whites, our results reveal a substantial degree of ethnic diversity — largely unacknowledged in the 21st century — within the White racial category. As with other racial categories, the variability in ethnic identity is likely related to national origins, generation, region, language, and religion (Gordon, 1964; Neidert & Farley, 1985).⁷ For comparison, Tran (2024, p. 584) emphasizes the “demographic diversification” of Asian Americans reporting that 80.5 percent of them identify as Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean or Japanese. That is, these six ethnic groups represent about 8 out of 10 Asian Americans. By contrast, even setting aside the extremely heterogeneous All Other Whites category that constitutes 33.8 percent of all Whites, Table 1 lists 41 ethnic groups that constitute only about two-thirds (i.e., 66.2 percent) of Whites. Taken at face value, these findings suggest that “demographic diversification” among Whites is considerable despite being entirely unacknowledged by many proponents of critical race theory (e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2004).

If anything, ethnic heterogeneity among Whites may be understated in our data because the U.S. Census Bureau is prohibited from asking questions about religion (U.S. Census Bureau, 2025).⁸ Using other data, however, the high educational and income attainments of American Jews have been well documented (e.g., Burstein, 2007; Chiswick, 1993). Anecdotal evidence suggests high

⁷ Related views about African Americans are evident in recent research (Hamilton 2019) including in regard to Nigerian Americans (Sakamoto et al. 2021).

⁸ See the “Frequently Asked Questions” web page of the U.S. Census Bureau. <http://www.census.gov/data/what-is-data-census-gov/guidance-for-data-users/frequently-asked-questions.html>

socioeconomic attainments among Mormons (Chua & Rubinfeld, 2014), and Salt Lake City has been identified as having the highest rate of upward intergenerational mobility of any place in America (Chetty et al., 2014). On the other hand, many traditional groups such as Mennonites and Hutterites are unidentified in our data but may have below-average educational attainment (Ediger, 1977).

For simplicity, our analysis has not separately considered Whites who identify as Hispanic, but they are arguably another source of heterogeneity within the White racial category. We caution against prematurely concluding that all Hispanic Whites are “really” non-White minorities. As is well known, many millions of Europeans immigrated to Latin America during various time periods (e.g., Loveman, 2014; Sowell, 1996; Telles, 2014). Some of their descendants may have complex identities that may include being White (e.g., Soto-Marquez, 2019; Villarreal, 2010).

Mixed-race persons who partly identify as White (e.g., Alba et al., 2018) are another source of heterogeneity. We have not discussed this category due to space constraints, but immigration and intermarriage have increased during recent decades (Frey, 2018). The boundaries of the White category may be expanding to include persons with varying degrees of mixed parentage that may involve some groups which are not non-Hispanic White as commonly understood by current conventions (Alba, 2020).

Having acknowledged that generational expansion, we reiterate that our results for the White ethnic groups that we analyzed already reveal substantial heterogeneity in socioeconomic outcomes. Considerable variation across dozens of various White ethnic groups is evident in regard to educational attainment, wages, poverty, affluence, and household income. While some of this variation is statistically explained by demographic control variables such as age, nativity, region, and disability, notable socioeconomic differentials persist across these ethnic groups even after taking those factors into account. Indeed, some of the between-ethnic differentials are as large as the differentials between Whites overall and Blacks.

Another major finding from our analysis is that race and ethnic origin play a smaller role in statistically explaining socioeconomic outcomes than other variables. Specifically, in all of our regressions, the White Privilege model statistically explains only less than 5 percent of the variation in the dependent variable. That is, focusing only on the mean differentials between White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Other Race persons ignores over 95 percent of the variation in education, wages, poverty, affluence, and household income. By contrast, the goodness-of-fit statistics for the Demographic Heterogeneity are several times larger than for the White Privilege. For wages among men, for example, the R-squared for the Demographic Heterogeneity model (i.e., .252) is over 5 times greater than the R-squared for the White Privilege model (i.e., .048). By incorporating the ethnic, demographic, and class characteristics (associated with our control variables), the Demographic Heterogeneity model goes beyond bare-bones contours of the White Privilege model to provide a more realistic portrayal of racial and ethnic inequalities in contemporary America.

For persons committed to the critical race perspective, however, our findings do not entirely refute it. Table 1 clearly shows that the averages for each of the socioeconomic indicators (i.e., education, household income, wages, poverty, and affluence) are more favorable for Whites as an overall category than for Blacks. While researchers may choose to focus on that overall differential, our analysis has revealed that those average differentials statistically account for less

than 5 percent of the total variability of each of those socioeconomic indicators. In our view, social science should seek to understand as much variance as possible rather than only focusing on a tiny portion of it.

Another aspect of our results that is inconsistent with critical race theory is that Asians tend to have higher socioeconomic attainments than Whites. As is evident in Table 1, the averages for education, household income, wages, and affluence are substantially higher for Asians than for Whites as an overall category. Although Asians do have a slightly higher poverty rate than Whites, this differential is entirely due to very recent immigrants (Takei & Sakamoto, 2011) and does not persist in the Asian second-generation who have extremely high levels of intergenerational upward income mobility out of poverty (Sakamoto, Hsu, & Jalufka, 2022).

Because of the variety of demographic and class characteristics that are associated with socioeconomic outcomes, the latter also vary considerably within any given ethnic group. For example, the ethnic group in our study with the largest high school dropout rate is the Amish. However, 6.4 percent of this group has a graduate degree (which is greater than Hispanics) and 25.6 percent are affluent (which is greater than Blacks). Another example are Cajuns who have a high school dropout rate that is slightly higher than Blacks, but 31.5 percent of Cajuns are nonetheless affluent. This large level of within ethnic group variability is reflected in the low R-squared for the White Ethnics model (albeit that that R-squared is slightly higher than for the White Privilege model). Given the large variation of socioeconomic outcomes within racial and ethnic groups (i.e., 95 percent or more as noted above in regard to the R-squared's), the characterization of "the racialized nature of American society," though typical in critical race theory (e.g., Torkelson & Hartmann, 2021, p. 3), is highly exaggerated.

We note the historical counterfactual of larger net racial effects during 20th century America before the Civil Rights era. Using 1940 U.S. Census data, Sakamoto and Kim (2003) found that the net racial disadvantage in earnings for Blacks and for Asians was larger (in absolute value) than the net positive class advantage when the latter was operationalized by a major education level. Similar conclusions apply for occupational attainment in 1940 (Sakamoto et al., 1998; Sakamoto & Tzeng, 1999). In those data, a great deal of within group variation is still evident (e.g., a lot of White people were poor while tiny proportions of Blacks and Asians were affluent [Hilger, 2016]). However, compared to our results for the 21st century, the between racial component was significantly larger in 1940 as the racial effects were smaller than the class effects in contrast to the findings reported here.⁹

Our study has a few limitations. The first is that we only analyzed one of the two ancestry variables in the American Community Survey. Future research should investigate the ANCESTR2 variable in combination with the ANCESTR1 variable that we have studied here. Combining both variables will be more complicated but will probably yield more precise information about how Whites identify in terms of their ethnicities. Some Whites, for example, might not report a second ancestry. We suspect that the older immigrant groups from Europe (e.g., English, German, Dutch, French, Scotch Irish) will have a wider variety of second ancestries due to greater ethnic intermarriage over several generations compared to some more recent immigrant groups (e.g.,

⁹ Those studies do not report incremental R-squared's that are directly comparable to ours, but their other reported statistics are indicative of a somewhat larger between-racial component than what we report here.

Turkestani, Bosnian, Serbian, Uzbek).

Including a second ancestry will likely reveal more complex socioeconomic patterns some of which may relate to patterns of assimilation and migration. While Amish have the largest high school dropout rate, as noted above, some of them have a graduate degree. The latter highly educated Amish are probably more likely to have left traditional Amish communities or are the offspring of those who have left and intermarried with other ethnic groups. While the majority of the Amish in our data reside in Pennsylvania, a few reside outside of traditional Amish areas such as in Alaska, Connecticut or Washington D.C. These latter Amish may have different patterns of socioeconomic attainments and second ancestry compared to Amish living in Pennsylvania.

An interrelated, additional topic for future research is the geography of ethnicity. Some prior research has found that persons with Hispanic ancestry are more likely to identify as Hispanic when living in areas with more Hispanics (Choi et al., 2008) while biracial Asians are more likely to acknowledge their Asian identity in areas with more Asians (Xie & Goyette, 1997). In our data for Whites, most Cajuns reside in Louisiana, and as mentioned above, most Amish reside in Pennsylvania. By contrast, however, most Appalachians do not actually live in Appalachian states, and French Canadians are also fairly dispersed across the U.S. Understanding how geography interrelates with migration and intermarriage could potentially help to improve our understanding of White ethnic identity.

To reiterate another limitation already noted above, our data are nonexperimental. We therefore cannot make strong causal claims. Our analysis is ultimately only descriptive. Our data are only cross-sectional and lack longitudinal information or any intergenerational variables (i.e., parental characteristics).

In regard to longitudinal data, assessing how White ethnic identity may change intra-generationally is, to our knowledge, entirely unexplored with quantitative analysis although a few studies exist for Blacks and Hispanics (Alba et al., 2016). Intergenerational change in ethnic identity is directly related to classical assimilation theory (Gordon, 1964) and interconnected issues concerning the “melting pot” (Hirschman, 1983). Change in White ethnic identity likely overlaps with Alba’s (2020) view of the expanding boundaries of the White racial category as levels of intermarriage and migration continue to be high (Frey, 2018). The boundaries of the White racial category are certainly significant for understanding the racial demographic composition of America during the remainder of this century (Alba, 2020).

An additional limitation of our analysis is that our multivariate models are quite basic because they are designed to be applied to a wide range of groups rather than being tailored to the particular immigration histories and demographics of each specific group. For some groups, various interactions (i.e., a more complex multivariate model) may be both substantively and statistically significant. In the case of the Amish, for example, immigrants are unlikely to be a major factor whereas for other groups (e.g., Turkestani, Bosnian, Serbian) immigration may be a dominant pattern. Among foreign-born immigrants from non-English speaking countries, years spent in the U.S. is often a major factor in assimilating linguistically and culturally into the U.S. Future research should consider more detailed analyses specific to each of the various groups (e.g., Chiswick, 1993; Neidert & Farley, 1985).

Finally, our study has investigated several important socioeconomic outcomes, but future

research may explore other important dependent variables using U.S. Census Bureau data. Existing data would permit the assessment of ethnic differentials in labor force participation, unemployment, STEM attainment in college, health insurance coverage, and home ownership. In the foregoing we have laid the groundwork for more detailed, additional research.

Conclusion

This exploratory study has revealed considerable variation in ethnic identity and socioeconomic circumstances across dozens of different White ethnic groups. Some ethnic groups have comparatively high average socioeconomic attainments while others have low average outcomes, including a few ethnic groups with poverty and high-school dropout rates that are similar to (or greater than) Blacks. Some of the socioeconomic variation between White ethnic groups is statistically associated with demographic control variables such as age, nativity, region, and disability, but notable socioeconomic differentials frequently persist. Indeed, some of the between-ethnic differentials are as large as the differentials between Whites overall and Blacks. Substantial socioeconomic variation within specific ethnic groups is furthermore evident, and the great preponderance of overall inequality is statistically within racial categories rather than between them either before or after including demographic control variables.

This abundance of variability seems largely inconsistent with critical race theory. The latter portrays Whites as a homogenous and uniformly advantaged group, and assumes that most inequality is statistically associated with average differences between racial categories. By contrast, our findings indicate that extensive demographic heterogeneity among Whites is pervasive in terms of both ethnic identity and socioeconomic characteristics. Demographic heterogeneity among Whites is thus a more realistic assessment in the contemporary era of rising class inequality.

Akin to the critiques by Kao and Thompson (2003, p. 432) and Lee and Zhou (2015, pp. 186-187) in regard to Asians as a “model minority,” broad generalizations about White Privilege based on observed differentials using the White racial category mask substantial ethnic variability among Whites as well as considerable class inequality within racial and ethnic groups. Whites have been the largest group among the poor, but their poverty rate has been relatively static despite many years of economic growth (Brady, 2023; Iceland, 2019; Leicht, 2016). Meanwhile, mortality among Whites may be increasing due to despair associated with economic disadvantage (Elo et al., 2019). To better understand these social problems as well as racial inequality in general, more precise theories and evidence are required to advance beyond simplistic narratives about Whites as an undifferentiated whole.

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