Do past wealth gaps explain modern inequality? Evidence from immigration to the United States

Brian Marein*

March 11, 2026

Abstract

Recent research attributes persistent racial wealth inequality in the United States to historical wealth disparities. However, inferring the determinants of long-run racial wealth inequality from aggregate data is complicated by a key fact: 30 million European immigrants arrived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with no direct claim to the wealth accumulated by earlier generations of Americans. Drawing on cash-on-arrival data from immigration reports, I find that immigrants arrived with few assets, far behind the native-born population. Yet by the late 20th century, survey data indicate that the descendants of these later-arriving groups, predominantly from Southern and Eastern Europe, achieved wealth parity with the longer-established descendants of Northwestern Europeans. Using a stylized model, I show that this rapid convergence can be explained mostly by immigrants' income growth and, to a lesser extent, higher savings rates. These findings indicate that initial differences in wealth matter less for long-run outcomes than previously suggested. At the same time, the results underscore the central role of race in shaping inequality, consistent with faster economic convergence within racial groups than across them.

Keywords: wealth inequality, intergenerational wealth transmission, immigration

JEL Classification Numbers: D31, J15, N11, N12

*Wake Forest University, Department of Economics (mareinb@wfu.edu)

1 Introduction

In recent years, economists have increasingly sought to understand wealth accumulation and address wealth inequality (Piketty & Zucman, 2014; Saez & Zucman, 2016). Group differences in wealth—across regions (Dray et al., 2023) and racial groups (Collins & Holtkamp, 2025; Derenoncourt et al., 2023, 2024; Feir et al., 2024), for example—are highly persistent, with wealth converging more slowly than income. Some research suggests that this pattern is explained by intergenerational wealth transfers, such that historical wealth disparities are a key driver of long-run inequality (Blau & Graham, 1990; DeCanio, 1979; Derenoncourt et al., 2024; Hamilton & Darity, 2010; Menchik & Jianakoplos, 1997; White, 2007). As Darity et al. (2018, p. 3) summarize, "[W]ealth is built primarily by the transfer of resources across generations, locking-in the deep divides we observe across racial groups."

This paper reconsiders wealth accumulation in the United States by accounting for the 30 million Europeans who immigrated during the Age of Mass Migration, roughly 1850 to 1924. With such a large demographic shift, modeling long-run wealth accumulation while treating whites as a homogeneous group can obscure important variation in starting wealth and accumulation patterns. To address this, I examine intraracial wealth dynamics by documenting patterns of wealth accumulation among European immigrants and their descendants. I then consider how treating whites as a single group affects our understanding of the determinants of wealth accumulation in light of this analysis.

I begin by establishing three key facts. First, using IPUMS census data, I show that by 1920, nearly half of white adults were either foreign-born or had foreign-born parents. This represents a dramatic compositional change. These newcomers had no direct claim to the wealth accumulated by earlier generations of white Americans, yet they are implicitly assumed to share in the inheritance of that wealth in models that treat whites as one group.

Second, using the United States Immigration Commission Reports (commonly known as the Dillingham Commission Reports), I document that immigrants at the turn of the 20th century, especially from Southern and Eastern Europe, arrived with very little wealth,

typically close to none. Data from Canada corroborate these findings (Armstrong & Lewis, 2017). Together with the first fact, this establishes that a large share of the white population began their American experience without inherited wealth.

Third, using the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) and National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79), I find no significant difference in wealth across white ethnic groups by the late 20th century, regardless of whether their reported ancestry traces to old or new immigrant groups. Northwestern Europeans comprised the overwhelming majority of early immigrants, dating back to the initial European settlement of North America, while Southern and Eastern Europeans predominated at the turn of the 20th century. Without data on ancestors' arrival dates, one would expect those of Southern and Eastern European ancestry to have less wealth than those of Northwestern European ancestry if initial wealth influenced long-run accumulation, since their families arrived later and started at a disadvantage. In fact, they do not.

This result is not driven by misreporting or mixed ancestry: new white ethnic groups consistently and accurately self-identified (Farley, 1991; Johnson, 1974), and intermarriage with old white ethnic groups was initially rare (Pagnini & Morgan, 1990). The respondents to the SIPP, and to an extent the NLSY, were born during or shortly after the Age of Mass Migration, so a lack of knowledge about Southern or Eastern European ancestry, as well as significant intermarriage, are unlikely to be important. In the SIPP (1984–93), at least 89% of first- and second-generation respondents have birthplaces or parent birthplaces that align with their reported identities, and 92% of households are not a mix of old and new European ancestry. Moreover, one of the largest newcomer groups, Jews, can be more reliably identified due to their distinct ethnoreligious identity and historically low rates of intermarriage (Schwartz, 1970), and they are now among the wealthiest groups in the United States. In any case, the results are robust to excluding households with spouses of different ancestral groups, to capturing mixed ancestry with a continuous measure, and to directly comparing immigrants with the native-born.

Next, I consider wealth accumulation among native- and foreign-born white Americans using a stylized model adapted from Derenoncourt et al. (2024). I use all the same baseline parameters but alter only the income process to reflect immigrants' labor market trajectories. I assume no immigrant wage penalty, consistent with evidence that Southern and Eastern Europeans performed comparably in the labor market (Abramitzky et al., 2014). In this setting, the only difference between old and new whites is the gap in starting wealth. The resulting simulation shows that the wealth gap between native- and foreign-born populations is largely closed by the late 20th century. Equalizing income alone closes most of the gap, leaving only a modest residual difference by the late 20th century. I then incorporate a higher savings rate for immigrants, informed by an estimate from Haines (1985), which narrows the remaining gap further. Slightly higher earnings and capital gains rates, plausible given available evidence, then close the gap entirely.

By distinguishing immigrants from native-born whites, this approach complements and extends the prevailing framework for understanding wealth convergence in the United States. In a stylized model in which wealth accumulation proceeds separately by race, Derenoncourt et al. (2023, 2024) show that racial wealth convergence would have been exceedingly slow even under identical accumulation processes, given the enormous Black-white wealth gap on the eve of the Civil War. Yet the 150-year period they analyze also coincided with near-complete convergence within the white population across ethnic groups. Seen through this lens, their finding of slow interracial convergence coexists with a period of rapid intraracial convergence, a distinction that becomes visible once immigrants are treated separately from native-born whites. This pattern suggests that large initial wealth gaps do not necessarily preclude convergence, provided there is an environment of equal opportunity: while European immigrants began with wealth levels comparable to those of Black Americans, they benefited from a significantly broader range of economic prospects. In this respect, the present analysis is consistent with recent work on intergenerational mobility documenting considerable turnover in wealth rankings (Kalsi & Ward, 2025; Sutch, 2016).

At the same time, the rapid convergence achieved by new whites underscores the central role of race in shaping inequality in the United States. This interpretation aligns with Hao (2004), who shows that wealth is primarily stratified by race and ethnicity, rather than by nativity. Assimilation occurs along these dimensions: white immigrants converge in income towards native-born whites, etc. (Villareal & Tamborini, 2018). Economic outcomes converge much faster within racial groups than across them (Haines & Goodman, 1991; Ward et al., 2025). Economic opportunities have long been stratified by race, and a large initial wealth gap can be closed when the less-wealthy group has access to comparable opportunities. European immigrants certainly faced adversity, but from the outset they had access to economic opportunities unavailable to Black Americans (Collins, 1997). This nuance helps clarify the underlying mechanisms driving wealth inequality in the United States.

This emphasis on factors other than initial wealth in explaining group trends in wealth accumulation is consistent with recent studies suggesting that inheritances and wealth shocks are less important than is commonly assumed. In Sweden, the average heir depletes their inheritance within a decade (Nekoei & Seim, 2023). The effects of extreme negative wealth shocks—such as the Chinese Communist Revolution (Alesina et al., 2021) and Emancipation in the American South (Ager et al., 2021)—have been transitory, with the old patterns of inequality quickly reemerging. Likewise, large positive wealth shocks may have no effect on the wealth of the second generation (Bleakley & Ferrie, 2016). Simply put, the initial wealth is of little importance. Despite a strong correlation of wealth across six generations of English families, there is no causal connection between past and present wealth, as wealth mainly derives from sources other than inheritance (Clark & Cummins, 2025). Bequests matter less than other channels of wealth transmission, such as education and parental behaviors passed down to children (Daysal et al., 2023; Pfeffer & Killewad, 2018). Consistent with this paper, several studies find that racial income differences explain most of the racial wealth gap (Aliprantis et al., 2022; Barsky et al., 2002; İmrohoroğlu et al., 2025), while

intergenerational transfers contribute little (Sabelhaus & Thompson, 2026).[1] Ashman & Neumuller (2020) agree that eliminating the racial income gap would close the wealth gap, although they estimate that bequest motives and unequal intergenerational wealth transfers together account for 54% of the wealth gap in levels.

This paper also builds on an extensive literature documenting the economic assimilation of European immigrants during the Age of Mass Migration. Lieberson (1980) highlights how immigrants from Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe were "largely unskilled, minimally educated, poor, [and] relegated to undesirable jobs and residences" yet quickly caught up to the earlier-established white population (p. 1). Immigrants tended to be negatively self-selected from their countries of origin (Abramitzky et al., 2012; Connor, 2019), and household wealth discouraged migration (Abramitzky et al., 2013). Despite difficult starts, some immigrant cohorts experienced intragenerational income convergence with natives (Collins & Zimran, 2023), and certain groups—including those from Southern and Eastern Europe—fared well relative to natives as soon as they arrived (Abramitzky et al., 2014). Importantly, intergenerational upward mobility was been higher for immigrants from nearly every sending country compared to natives (Abramitzky et al., 2021), and there is strong evidence of intergenerational convergence (Collins & Zimran, 2019). By the second generation, European immigrants caught up to native-born whites in educational attainment, and by the third generation, they surpassed them (Lowrey et al., 2021).

2 Demographic change driven by immigration

Analyses of long-run wealth accumulation in the United States necessarily depend on aggregated data (Derenoncourt et al., 2023, 2024; Dray et al., 2023; White, 2007). Historical

[1]Miller (2020) is an exception, showing that former slaves in the Cherokee Nation, where freed slaves had been allocated land, were more likely to own land in 1900 than Blacks elsewhere in the South. Collins et al. (2024) find, descriptively, that sons of Black families who owned land in 1880 were more likely to own land in 1900, though they stress that these advantages were small compared to the racial gaps in measures of economic status. Darity et al. (2018), responding to Sabelhaus & Thompson (2026), argues that income is endogenous to wealth, so family wealth matters beyond inheritance.

wealth data are often difficult to obtain, and available sources, such as state tax reports, lack microdata or disaggregated measures of property. Recent pioneering efforts to construct long-run trends have provided valuable insights into wealth distribution across time, regions, and groups, but their aggregation can obscure important dynamics.[2]

In particular, understanding the determinants of wealth accumulation is challenging in the context of mass immigration, which brings about a substantial change in the composition of the population. For instance Derenoncourt et al. (2024) model wealth accumulation according to Saez & Zucman (2016) but require Black and white wealth to grow independently. The framework emphasizes three distinct factors: (1) initial conditions, (2) savings-induced wealth accumulation, and (3) capital gains. Specifically, average wealth for each group evolves according to

$$W_{t+1}^j = (1+q^j)[W_t^j + s^j Y_t^j], \quad \text{with } Y_t^j = (1+g^j)Y_{t-1}^j \tag{1}$$

where W_t^j is the real per capita wealth of group j at time t. $j = \{b, w\}$ represents the two racial groups (b for Black, and w for white). q^j is the capital gains rate, and s^j is the savings rate. Y_t^j is per capita income, which grows at rate g^j.

By design, wealth is passed down from one time period to the next within each group. The model abstracts from generational dynamics, but a reasonable interpretation is that wealth is bequeathed to future generations: whites at time t inherit the wealth from time $t-1$. Of course, this model intentionally simplifies wealth accumulation, but a process where parents pass on wealth to their children is plausible.

One challenge with this approach is that a large share of white Americans' ancestors were not yet in the US—they were still in Europe. There is no obvious mechanism for transferring wealth to immigrants comparable to intergenerational wealth transfers. Intermarriage is a plausible mechanism for integration and wealth-sharing, but it does not

[2]Dray et al. (2023) discuss migration and its effect on spatial wealth convergence, but they do not observe immigrant wealth directly.

occur instantaneously, and marriages between old and new white ethnic groups were initially extremely rare (see Section 4.3). While it may be reasonable to assume that white immigrants and their descendants eventually integrated into white society and benefited from similar wealth-accumulating conditions, it is less justifiable to attribute pre-established wealth to newcomers. In any case, allowing for such integration would require incorporating European immigrants and their wealth into the model prior to their arrival in the United States.

Immigration occurred on a scale too large to ignore when modeling intergenerational wealth accumulation. The United States was by far the leading recipient of European immigrants during the era commonly known as the Age of Mass Migration, taking in nearly two-thirds, or 30 million people (Hatton & Williamson, 1998). As Bandiera et al. (2013, pp. 23-24) write, "These individuals are those who laid the foundations for modern America—there are an estimated 100 million living descendants of... Ellis Island immigrants today." At least half of the entire US population can trace its ancestry to immigrants who arrived during the Age of Mass Migration (Abramitzky & Boustan, 2022).

Figure 1a shows the number of immigrants entering the United States each year from 1820 to 1940. These data exclude Europeans who arrived earlier, but the Age of Mass Migration (roughly 1850-1924) stands out as the peak period of European immigration. Treating long-settled Americans and newly arriving Europeans as a single group hides this large influx of newcomers with no claim to the wealth held by the existing population.

Figure 1b highlights the dramatic shift in source countries over time, using the classifications adopted throughout this paper: old (Northwestern) and new (Southern and Eastern) Europe. This distinction between "old" and "new" source countries is well-established in the historical literature and was used by the Dillingham Commission. Although there is overlap in timing, immigrants from the new source countries generally arrived much later.

Still, Figure 1b understates the difference in arrival dates between the two groups because most old-stock Americans descended from countries classified as "old" but arrived before the

period depicted. An analysis of surnames in the first census in 1790 suggests that 83.5% of whites were of English descent, 6.7% Scottish, and 5.6% German (United States Bureau of the Census, 1909). By the time of the Civil War, the ethnic composition of the white population had changed little, except for an increase in the share from Ireland. In 1860, 13% of the population was foreign-born, of whom about 39% were Irish, 31% German, and 14% British (Gibson & Lennon, 1999). Only 1% of the foreign-born population had been born in Southern or Eastern Europe, equivalent to just 0.2% of the total white population.

How consequential is the issue of mass migration for the wealth accumulation model? There is no straightforward method for measuring this, as censuses do not provide data on the birthplaces of ancestors beyond parents. Instead, a simple approach is to examine the adult population of the United States near the end of the Age of Mass Migration. Figure 2 shows the nativity of white individuals aged 50 in the 1920 census. Age 50 is a useful benchmark because foreign-born individuals in this cohort arrived during the Age of Mass Migration, and those with foreign-born parents likely had parents who arrived then too. Older cohorts possibly had foreign-born parents who arrived earlier, while younger cohorts could include third-generation Americans whose grandparents arrived during the Age of Mass Migration. Either scenario would underestimate the true scale of the change. In any case, expanding the age range does not qualitatively alter the results (see Figure A1). Age 50 is also a useful cutoff because it avoids overstating the immigrant share of the population by excluding individuals who later returned to their home countries; most return migration occurred at younger ages (e.g., 71% by age 45 in Ward (2017)).

In 1920, only about half (50.1%) of white 50-year-olds were native-born with both parents also native-born. I assume that they are direct descendants of those present in the United States before the Age of Mass Migration. Another 5.5% were native-born with one native-born parent and one foreign-born parent. For simplicity, I attribute half of this group to those present in the United States in 1850. In addition, 28.9% were foreign-born, and 15.5% were native-born with two foreign-born parents. I group these individuals together

as not descending from whites present in 1850. Thus, a back-of-the-envelope calculation suggests that 47% of white adults are not attributable to the stock of whites in 1850. Since these adults gave rise to future generations of Americans, we can say that by the early 20th century, just under half of the white population did not descend from those present around the time of the Civil War.[3] This represents, without exaggeration, a seismic demographic change, making it difficult to infer wealth accumulation by assuming intergenerational bequests within a homogeneous white group, even in a highly stylized model.[4]

3 Immigrants' initial conditions

Clearly, there was a major compositional change in the white population, but the key question now is whether this affects inferences about initial conditions and wealth convergence. Specifically, did white immigrants differ significantly in terms of wealth upon arrival? In an ideal scenario, European arrivals would resemble their native-born counterparts, allowing them to be seamlessly integrated into both the numerator and denominator without altering the group's average wealth. Although an implicit assumption of intergenerational wealth transfers would not strictly hold, models are not intended to perfectly capture reality, and immigrants would still benefit from the same wealth conditions.

Wealth data are scarce, particularly in historical contexts. Therefore, the compilation of long-term wealth estimates represents major contributions by Derenoncourt et al. (2023, 2024) and Dray et al. (2023), who lay the foundation for understanding wealth dynamics over time. Unfortunately, their sources do not disaggregate wealth by nativity, making it difficult to distinguish between the wealth of established Americans and newcomers. According to Derenoncourt et al., microdata are not readily available for the period 1870 to 1950, which

[3]This figure is comparable to an estimate of the foreign stock of the US population in 1920 (34.7%) which is calculated based on the entire population and excludes third- and later-generation individuals from the foreign stock, even if their families had arrived relatively recently (Gibson & Jung, 2006). It is even closer to Angrist (2002), who finds that the "foreign stock" among young adults exceeded 40%.

[4]In a broader sense, the problem is even larger. Since 1920, more than 10 million European immigrants have arrived in the United States, along with millions from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, who were presumably mostly also of European descent (US Department of Homeland Security, 2013).

encompasses most of the Age of Mass Migration. To my knowledge, state tax reports do not provide separate property valuations for foreign- and native-born individuals.

Instead, I use data on the cash declared by immigrants upon arrival, as documented in the Dillingham Commission Reports. These data provide a highly informative measure of immigrants' wealth. While the law did not mandate a minimum financial requirement for immigrants, their financial resources significantly influenced their admissibility, as those deemed likely to become a public charge were barred from entering. A 1893 immigration law required steamship manifests to indicate whether each alien possessed $30, and if less, the exact amount. A 1903 law raised the threshold to $50. Therefore, although the recorded aggregate amounts do not reflect all money possessed, "[i]t seems probable... that the figures fairly represent the amount possessed in most cases where the money shown is less than the [threshold]..." (United States Immigration Commission, 1911, p. 103).[5] For this reason, I first evaluate the share of immigrants below the threshold rather than money per capita.

Aside from possibly some jewelry, immigrant wealth can reasonably be proxied by their cash holdings. By assumption, immigrants arrived with no US real estate, and real property alone accounted for 42% of total wealth in 1860 (Derenoncourt et al., 2024). According to the 1870 census, personal property includes "bonds, stocks, mortgages, notes, live stock, plate, jewels, or furniture; but exclusive of wearing apparel."[6] Given the notoriously crowded conditions on steamships, immigrants could not have arrived with many physical possessions. Stocks and bonds from the European periphery were presumably of limited value. In short, immigrants arrived with few assets beyond cash.

Table 1 displays the share of immigrants possessing less than $30 (1899-1903) and less than $50 (1904-1910) across various groups. The new arrivals tended to be poor.[7] The

[5]The source of the data, the Dillingham Commission Reports, use these figures to describe immigrants' financial condition, as does Lieberson (1963, 1980).

[6]See https://usa.ipums.org/usa-action/variables/PERSPROP.

[7]To avoid confusion, I only include Southern, Central, and Eastern Europeans in Table 1. However, as a simple quality check, it is worth noting that the patterns in cash holdings across countries in the Dillingham Commission Report, as in the Canadian data that follow, align with the broader economic development trends in Europe at the time: Britons and Germans were more likely to exceed the specified amount compared to those from the poorer periphery.

two largest groups, Southern Italians and Jews, were no exception: of the individuals who showed money, 93.1% of Southern Italians and 87.1% of Jews had less than $30 ($1,050 in 2024, adjusted for inflation). In the later period, 94.6% of Southern Italians and 88.2% of Jews had less than $50 ($1,680 in 2024).

According to the Dillingham Commission Report (1911, p. 179), for Southern and Eastern Europeans, "the total amount shown by immigrants. . . is probably a close approximation of the total amount in their possession on admission to the United States," since the vast majority fell below the reporting threshold. Therefore, Table 1 also reports the average cash holdings of Southern and Eastern European immigrants at arrival from 1899 to 1910. These figures further demonstrate that the new immigrants were very poor. Even in the most favorable light, where the average is computed based only on the number of people who showed money, Southern Italians arrived with just $17 ($574 in 2024 dollars), and Jews arrived with $29 ($979). For reference, $30 was roughly two weeks' wages in the United States. Assuming that individuals who did not show money had none, as they were generally children or other dependents, the average declines to $13 ($449 in 2024) for Southern Italians and $13 ($433) for Jews.

Canadian immigration records offer an alternative source of information, based on the reasonable assumption that immigrants to Canada and the United States coming from the same source countries were broadly similar. Notably, a 1925 Canadian law required immigrants to declare their cash holdings upon arrival, providing more reliable data on average holdings than comparable American records. Table A1 of the appendix displays the mean cash on arrival for several groups of European immigrants to Canada from 1925 to 1929, based on Armstrong & Lewis (2017). These immigrants, too, were very poor. Immigrants from Italy and Poland, both major sources of American immigration, arrived with an average of $75 and $46 ($1,370 and $840 in 2024 dollars), respectively.[8]

One concern with interpreting these figures as initial conditions is that around 30% of

[8]Canadian dollars were on par with US dollars in these years.

migrants moved back to Europe, and return migrants tended to be negatively self-selected from the pool of immigrants (Abramitzky et al., 2014; Abramitzky & Boustan, 2017; Ward, 2017). However, even in the unlikely extreme scenario in which all eventual return migrants had arrived in the United States with no money, the conclusion would remain that migrants were poor. That is, if we adjust the Canadian figures based on that assumption, the average Italian would have arrived with $107 ($1,950 in 2024) and the average Pole would have arrived with $65 ($1,190).[9] To put these figures in perspective, per capita Black wealth in 1904 was about $4,000 in 2024 dollars and $6,190 in 1929 (Derenoncourt et al., 2024).

These findings are consistent with Dray et al. (2023), who examine the history and geography of wealth accumulation in the United States since the early 1800s and conclude that migration tends to reduce spatial inequality. While wealthier regions attract more migrants, newcomers typically arrive with lower wealth, diluting per capita wealth: "Immigrants and settlers arriving in the US were usually not bringing large amounts of physical property and capital" (p. 19). Immigrants' poverty is perhaps not surprising, given that data collected by the Ellis Island Foundation shows that 44 percent of immigrants reported escaping financial hardship as their reason for coming to America, while 34 percent cited joining family members (Abramitzky & Boustan, 2022), probably in large part following those who came for financial reasons.

Other studies similarly find that immigrants possess less wealth on average than those born in the United States. Today, the median US-born single has roughly three times the wealth of their foreign-born counterparts, primarily due to immigrants from poorer countries (Cobb-Clark & Hildebrand, 2006). In 1860 Boston, controlling for age and occupation, immigrants held significantly less wealth than natives (Herscovici, 1993). This pattern was generally true in the East but not in the Midwest (Conley & Galenson, 1998). However, the latter finding does not necessarily reflect wealth at the time of arrival, as early censuses did not record the year of immigration; immigrants accumulated wealth rapidly, with their real

[9]Note that the corresponding US figures in Table 1 require no such adjustment, as the rightmost column includes only individuals who reported money in the denominator.

wealth growing by 10 percent per year of residence between 1840 and 1860 (Ferrie, 1994).

4 Convergence among old and new immigrant groups

Wealth studies typically do not differentiate between various groups of white Americans, likely in part because the descendants of Europeans from the Age of Mass Migration are assumed to have successfully assimilated. According to Lieberson (1980, p. 1), "By all accounts, their education, occupations, and incomes are all presently close to—or even in excess of—white Americans from the earlier Northwestern European sources." Nevertheless, it is possible that initial differences in wealth contributed to a wealth gap between the descendants of earlier and later groups of European immigrants.

To explore this issue, I use data from two surveys: the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79). I divide whites into "old" and "new" ancestry groups according to Lieberson's (1980) classification, defined below. The analysis relies on self-reported ancestry, which has been used prominently in economics research (e.g., Algan & Cahuc (2010), Borjas (1992, 1994), Darity et al. (2001), Galor & Wainstock (2025), Guiso et al. (2006)).

4.1 Survey of Income and Program Participation

The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) is a nationally representative, household-based longitudinal survey conducted by the US Census Bureau. It collects detailed information on income dynamics, employment, household composition, and participation in government programs. In select years, topical modules also provide data on assets and liabilities. The SIPP began in 1983 and continues to the present with new panels introduced periodically. It is well-suited for measuring wealth among small groups due to its large sample size, which ranges from 11,400 to 19,916 households per panel in the sample years used, 1984 to 1993. However, the very wealthy are underrepresented in the SIPP (Hao,

2007), making it more useful for studying the middle class (Wolff, 1998).[10] Hence, I examine median wealth in addition to mean wealth.

Due to the constraints of the SIPP questionnaire, the old European ancestry group includes Dutch, English, French, German, Irish, Norwegian, Scottish, Swedish, and Welsh, while the new European ancestry group comprises Italian, Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian. All other ancestral groups are excluded from the regressions.[11] Table 2 presents summary statistics for the relevant sample. Immigrants arriving after the 1920s are excluded.

Once again, this classification of "old" and "new" immigrant groups is standard in the literature (e.g., Lieberson (1980)) and appears in the Dillingham Commission Reports (United States Immigration Commission, 1911). The SIPP data support this distinction: members of the "new" group are 2.5 times more likely to have been born outside the United States than those in the "old" group, and nearly four times more likely to have immigrant parents. Overall, 51.4% of the new group is of foreign origin—that is, either born outside the United States or born to immigrant parents, with individuals having only one immigrant parent counted as one-half foreign—compared to 13.3% of the old group.[12]

Figure 3a presents kernel density estimates of household wealth (in 2024 dollars) by ancestry, using SIPP data pooled from 1984 to 1993. The inverse hyperbolic sine transformation is applied to facilitate visualization of the highly skewed distribution. The similarity in wealth distributions between old and new European ancestry groups is striking, especially when contrasted with the distributions for ethnic minorities (Black, Cuban, Mexican, and Puerto Rican). The visual evidence points to convergence in wealth among

[10] The Survey of Consumer Finances (SCF), by contrast, does not report ancestry and is too small for disaggregated analysis of most population subgroups.

[11] Of white respondents, 50.1% are coded as "Another group not listed," 2.2% as "Don't know," and 7.0% as other ethnicities such as Cuban. The large share in "Another group not listed" partly reflects those reporting "American" ancestry (10.6% in NLSY79), especially old stock British descendants in Appalachia and the South. Others may have reported vague or multiple ancestries (e.g., Eastern European or German-Irish). These responses do not pose obvious concerns, though in a robustness check I include them in the reference group, as they may be more likely of mixed ancestry and longer US residence (see Table A2).

[12] Data on parents' birthplace in the SIPP are available only for 1985, so it is not possible to directly observe and compare families that arrived earlier with those that came later.

white ethnic groups by the 1980s and early 1990s. Figure 3b provides a complementary comparison using box plots. The same pattern holds: white ancestral groups exhibit nearly identical wealth distributions, especially when compared to other ethnic groups.

Based on a preliminary visual assessment, there appears to be little difference between new and old white ancestral groups. Table 3 formally compares these groups using regression analysis, controlling for the age, age squared, sex, and marital status of the household's reference person, along with survey year fixed effects. The results show that the new group has *greater* wealth, a difference that is statistically significant at the 1% level (column 1).[13] The difference is positive and significant at the 10% level when the dependent variable is transformed using the inverse hyperbolic sine (column 2). The quantile regression (column 3) indicates that the new group has a higher median net worth by $21,980 (in 2024 dollars), significant at the 1% level. For reference, the median household wealth of the included sample is $181,051. Quantile regressions across the wealth distribution show that the new group has significantly higher net worth than the old group from the 20th percentile onward (see Figure A2).

Disaggregating the new group, the last three columns show that Americans of Russian descent are significantly wealthier than the reference group, both on average and at the median. Those of Italian and Polish descent also have a significantly higher median net worth, while individuals of Ukrainian descent are statistically indistinguishable from the reference group. All results are robust to including white respondents in the reference group who answered "Don't know" or "Another group not listed" for their descent (see Table A2).[14] Although net worth is conceptually a household measure, the results are also robust when using per capita net worth as the dependent variable, calculated by dividing household net worth by the number of members (see Table A3). The results also hold when using gross wealth instead of net worth as the dependent variable (see Table A4). These results

[13] Including state fixed effects renders the difference statistically insignificant, suggesting that location choice explains much of immigrants' relative success (results not shown).

[14] This may be important since Americans whose families have been in the United States longer may know less about their ancestry and/or have mixed ancestry.

reinforce the visual patterns described above and support the conclusion that descendants of later-arriving groups have converged with those of earlier arrivals.

4.2 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth

The NLSY79 is a nationally representative sample of young men and women born between 1957 and 1964 and living in the United States in 1979. The initial sample included an intentional oversampling of Hispanic individuals, economically disadvantaged non-Hispanic, non-Black participants, and military youth. The military sample was discontinued after 1984, while the economically disadvantaged non-Hispanic, non-Black group was removed after 1990. After these groups were excluded, the survey included 9,964 eligible participants. Data collection occurred annually between 1979 and 1994 and on a biennial basis thereafter.

Net worth estimates are derived from self-reported assets and liabilities and are top-coded. I focus on net worth in 2020, the last year of available data, by which time survey respondents were nearing retirement and likely had received any inheritances. Importantly, the results are consistent across various years of analysis, helping to alleviate concerns about attrition bias (see Figure A3). Due to the constraints of the NLSY79 questionnaire, the old European ancestry group includes American, English, French, German, Irish, Scottish, and Welsh, while the new European ancestry group comprises Greek, Italian, Polish, and Russian.[15] All other ancestral groups are excluded from the regressions. The NLSY allows respondents to report multiple ancestries; in such cases, I use the ethnic origin with which they most closely identify, following convention (e.g., Borjas, 1992), although I allow for mixed ancestry in a robustness check (see Table A9).

Figure 4a presents kernel density estimates of household wealth (in 2024 dollars) by ancestry, and Figure 4b shows the corresponding box plots. Respondents of Greek and Italian ancestry, Polish and Russian ancestry, and all British subgroups are grouped together to ensure sufficiently large sample sizes. As before, the inverse hyperbolic sine transformation

[15]Those who self-identify as having American ancestry are typically of old-stock British origin.

is applied. The results from the NLSY79 are qualitatively similar to those from the SIPP: individuals of old and new European ancestry appear indistinguishable in terms of wealth, especially when compared to ethnic minorities.

The results in Table 4 confirm that descendants of new European immigrant groups are not worse off; if anything, they appear slightly wealthier. There is no statistically significant difference in household wealth between the descendants of old and new European groups in most regressions, although the coefficient for the latter is positive in most cases. When applying the inverse hyperbolic sine transformation, those of Greek and Italian ancestry show a modest wealth advantage, significant at the 10% level (column 5). However, results based on averages should be viewed with some caution since the data are top-coded. Once again, although net worth is conceptually a household measure, the results are also robust when using per capita net worth as the dependent variable, calculated by dividing household net worth by the number of members (see Table A5). Overall, these findings are qualitatively consistent with results from the SIPP, reinforcing the conclusion that later-arriving European groups achieved wealth parity with other white Americans by the late 20th century.

4.3 Ancestry misreporting and intermarriage

There are two related concerns when interpreting the results above. First, self-reported ancestry may be misreported, especially if respondents have limited knowledge of their family history. Second, intermarriage means that individuals may have ancestry from multiple groups, including both old and new, making it increasingly arbitrary to classify them as belonging to any single ethnic group. In both cases, observed similarities in wealth across ethnic groups in the SIPP and NLSY79 may not reflect true economic convergence, but rather the erosion of meaningful ethnic distinctions over time.

It is worth emphasizing, however, that at the time of these surveys, ethnic identity was more salient and ancestry better known than it is today, at least prior to the recent rise in at-home DNA testing. Moreover, given the recency of immigration, there would also have

been less ethnic mixing. Respondents in the SIPP were interviewed between 1984 and 1993, and my sample includes individuals between the ages of 30 and 93. The median respondent was around age 50—born in the 1930s, just after the Age of Mass Migration had ended. In the one year of SIPP data that reports both respondent and parental birthplaces, 58% of the new group and 17% of the old group are of foreign birth or parentage. Such people are likely to have known their ancestry. In the NLSY79, respondents were between ages 14 and 22 when first surveyed in 1979, meaning they were born in the 1950s and 1960s. Although only 4.5% had immigrant parents, many doubtlessly had immigrant grandparents, and they too presumably would have known their ancestry.

There is reason to believe that mismeasurement is not driving the results, as Americans descended from more recent arrivals tend to report their ancestry accurately and consistently.[16] Of the first- and second-generation Americans in the 1985 SIPP—once again, the only year which provides information on parents' birthplaces—a conservative estimate is that 89% have a birthplace or parentage consistent with their reported ancestry (see Table A6). The estimate is conservative because it does not account for cases in which a US-born parent shares the respondent's reported ancestry, nor does it allow for the possibility that a birth in Country X reflects heritage from Country Y, except in specific cases noted in the table. The latter case may partly explain the relatively low match rate for British descendants, as some families may have come from other parts of the empire (other than Canada, which is excluded from the analysis).

Such correspondence between reported ancestry and birthplaces is reassuring but also not surprising: first- and second-generation Americans—which includes a large share of the new European SIPP respondents—report ancestry with high accuracy (Farley, 1991). For example, the aggregate number of Greek descendants reported in the 1979 Current

[16]The leading scholars of ethnic self-reporting, while documenting changes in how American whites report their ethnicity, nonetheless conclude: "To be sure, at this point there is still reason to take the ethnic data at face value more often than not. Hence one can still examine the social characteristics of different ethnic groups and have confidence that the associations do indeed largely reflect the influence of the latter on the former" (Lieberson & Waters, 1986, pp. 90-91).

Population Survey (CPS) and the 1980 Census is statistically indistinguishable, similar to patterns observed for other groups with more recent immigration, suggesting a high degree of consistency in ancestry reporting. Among respondents matched in the March 1971 and March 1972 Current Population Surveys (CPS), 88% of Italian Americans consistently reported their ancestry, roughly on par with Mexican Americans (Johnson, 1974). Polish Americans were not far behind, with a consistency rate of 79%. In contrast, old European groups were considerably less consistent in their reporting.

Somewhat surprisingly, despite their recent arrival, individuals of Russian descent are relatively inconsistent in self-reporting ancestry, only marginally better than British Americans (Farley, 1991). This may reflect the shifting borders of Eastern Europe in the early 20th century: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania all declared independence from Russia in 1918 but were later annexed by the Soviet Union. Many immigrants from Russia spoke Yiddish as a first language, which may have weakened their descendants' identification with Russia as a national origin. Reporting would likely be more consistent if respondents used a broader regional label such as "Eastern Europe." For example, the number of Russian-Americans drops sharply between the 1979 CPS and the 1980 Census, while Ukrainian-Americans increase correspondingly (Farley, 1991). Given the shared history of these countries—and the fact that the (Jewish) Pale of Settlement encompassed parts of several present-day nations, including Russia and Ukraine—it is plausible that individuals reporting Eastern European ancestry do so consistently, even if they vary in how they name a specific country.

Given the nature of the comparisons being made, mismeasurement should not be a major concern. The primary goal of the analysis using the SIPP and NLSY79 is to show that the descendants of later waves of European immigrants are no poorer than other white Americans, so what matters is that those later groups are accurately reported. In particular, the regression results in Tables 3 and 4 are unaffected by, for example, whether a Scotch-Irish descendant reports his ancestry as British, Irish, or American. Regardless, such individuals are correctly classified as old European.

Likewise, it makes no difference whether that individual also has, e.g., Dutch, German, French, or Norwegian ancestry, so long as there was no intermarriage across the old-new divide. Although intermarriage eventually blurred distinctions between ethnic groups, endogamy rates were high initially. Indeed, endogamy was "almost absolute" among new immigrants in the early twentieth century, and marriages between old and new European ethnic groups were particularly rare (Pagnini & Morgan, 1990, p. 416). In the 1910 Census, only 1% of first- and second-generation immigrants married across the old-new divide. Similarly, in a sample of New York City marriage licenses from 1908 to 1912, just 1.3% of first-generation immigrants and 4.8% of the second generation married across that divide. Angrist (2002) finds similarly high endogamy rates.

Of the reference persons in the SIPP who specify their European ancestry, 91% are not intermarried across the old-new divide at the time of the survey—45% do not live with a spouse, and 46% live with a spouse of the same (old or new) European ancestry. Among married reference persons, 84% are not married across the old–new divide. Among the marriages within these broad groups, 49% are between individuals of the same specific ethnicity (see Table A7). If spouses coded as "Another group not listed" are included, the share of reference persons not intermarried across the old/new divide falls to 78%.[17] As expected, these percentages rise with age, suggesting that the reference persons themselves are not the products of extensive intermixing. In the NLSY79, where respondents can report up to six ancestries, 71% identify as either entirely old or entirely new European ancestry, even though the sample is, on average, a generation later than the SIPP.[18] At any rate, the SIPP results are robust to excluding households in which households have mixed (old/new) ancestry (see Table A8), and NLSY79 results are robust to treating new European ancestry as a continuous variable reflecting the reported share of ancestry (see Table A9).

[17] I assume here that a reference person married to a spouse whose ancestry is "Another group not listed" married across the old/new divide, which must not always be true.

[18] If each reported ancestry is weighted equally, respondents who identify most with an old European group are, on average, 90% old European, 2% new European, and 8% other. Among respondents who identify most with a new European group, their reported ancestry is on average 64% new European, 28% old European, and 7% other.

To further illustrate that the results are not driven by misreporting and/or intermarriage, consider the special case of Jews. Most American Jews descend from Eastern Europeans who arrived during the Age of Mass Migration, yet Jews were wealthier than any other religious group in the United States by the late 20th century (Chiswick, 2009; Keister et al., 2015). Jews are just over 2% of the population but account for more than 20% of the *Forbes 400* richest Americans (Temin, 2009). Jewish ethnoreligious identity is unique among the groups considered, as it transcends national origins and facilitates ancestry identification even after multiple generations. That is, even if a survey respondent does not know their ancestors' countries of origin, their Jewish identity strongly indicates that their family originated from Eastern Europe between roughly 1881 and 1924. Moreover, Jewish intermarriage with non-Jews was historically extremely low: in New York City, intermarriage rates were 0.64% for the first generation and 4.51% for the second generation (Drachsler, 1921). A 1957 Census survey estimated that 7.2% of married couples with at least one Jewish partner included a non-Jewish partner—which implies an intermarriage rate of 3.7% for individuals—although this figure does not account for conversion to Judaism or abandonment of Jewish identity (Schwartz, 1970). In sum, Jews represent a population whose lineage can be reliably tracked through successive surveys, who presumably did not inherit substantial wealth from other white Americans, yet in terms of wealth are not behind the white Americans whose arrival preceded theirs.

4.4 The Homestead Acts and the GI Bill

A separate concern is whether New Europeans caught up through government transfers rather than market earnings, which would render their initial wealth disadvantage irrelevant to the argument. There are two large programs that warrant special attention.

First, we must consider the Homestead Acts, which granted 160 acres of public land to citizens for homesteading. Other than a small filing and commission fee, the land was free to those who remained on it for five years, built a home, and cultivated the land.

The Homestead Act ultimately transferred 246 million acres of public land to US citizens (Muhammad et al., 2023). Because immigrants were eligible to claim land if they declared an intention to naturalize, these large-scale transfers raise the possibility that the federal government may have offset some immigrants' initial wealth disadvantages.

To be sure, many immigrants did receive free land. However, these were primarily those who arrived early in the Age of Mass Migration, particularly Germans and Scandinavians, as well as Britons and Irish, settling on the Great Plains (Dovring, 1962). Southern and Eastern Europeans did not settle in large numbers in areas with land for homesteading (Luebke, 1977). For example, in 1930, just 63,508 Italians (foreign-born and of foreign parentage) lived in the nine states with the most homesteaded land (1.4% of all Italians), along with 58,427 Jews (1.3%) (Linfield, 1928; United States Census Bureau, 1933). By contrast, 3,191,943 Scandinavians (15.7%) lived in these states. Even these figures overstate the importance of homesteading, since not all those who lived in these states lived on homesteaded land, and more land was transferred through private sales in the three decades following the Homestead Act than through homestead claims (Muhammad et al., 2023).[19]

To the extent that free land facilitated wealth accumulation among Old European immigrants, these land grants actually strengthen the argument that New Europeans converged in wealth without direct government assistance. When comparing the modern net worth of Old and New Europeans, one might worry that the reference group—Old Europeans—is partially "contaminated" by immigrants who also began at a wealth disadvantage. But the Old Europeans received free land from the federal government, which may have helped close that gap; New Europeans largely did not. That New Europeans nonetheless caught up therefore makes their convergence all the more striking.

In any case, it is important not to overstate the economic benefits of the Homestead Act. As Muhammad et al. (2023, p. 103) emphasize, "[I]t is not clear that land allocated under the Homestead Act improved the circumstance of the average homesteader." Homesteading

[19]Ethnic breakdowns of homesteaded land are not readily available.

was risky, capital-intensive, and far from a guaranteed path to prosperity. Although the land itself was free, successful settlement required substantial upfront resources for transportation, housing, draft animals, tools, fencing, and seed. Much of the land available for homesteading was located on the Great Plains, where arid conditions and volatile climates made farming difficult. In many cases, the standard 160-acre allotment was insufficient to support a viable long-term farming enterprise.

In sum, the Homestead Acts cannot explain convergence. Only a small share of the foreign stock obtained homesteaded land, those who did were disproportionately Old Europeans rather than New Europeans, and free land itself does not appear to have conferred substantial long-run economic advantages.

Second, we must consider the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, or the GI Bill, which provided substantial federal transfers to World War II veterans, most notably through generous subsidies for education and housing; similar benefits were extended to veterans of later conflicts. The GI Bill is often credited with expanding the postwar middle class and facilitating wealth accumulation in the twentieth century, raising the possibility that it disproportionately benefited New European households.

However, existing evidence suggests that the long-run wealth effects of the GI Bill were modest. Although the program appears to have conferred meaningful advantages to the children of veterans, Meschede et al. (2022) document essentially no difference—just $2,758 in 2019 dollars—in median household wealth between white veterans and non-veterans in 1984, the same period observed in the SIPP. Similarly, Collins & Zimran (2025) find no evidence that World War II military service generated especially strong outcomes for the children of European immigrants relative to other groups, concluding that the GI Bill largely helped veterans recover from wartime disruption rather than serving as a springboard to previously unattainable economic opportunities. Abramitzky et al. (2024) likewise find that the GI Bill did little to increase the representation of lower- and middle-income students at elite colleges. Consistent with this interpretation, while the GI Bill did increase homeownership,

an important vehicle for wealth accumulation, it accounts for only 7.4% of the overall rise in homeownership between 1940 and 1960 (Fetter, 2013).

More importantly, in Table A10, I rerun the analysis using the SIPP data and include an indicator for veteran status. Veteran status is not associated with a statistically significant difference in net worth, mirroring the findings in Meschede et al. (2022), and is in fact negatively associated when wealth is measured using the inverse hyperbolic sine transformation. Controlling for veteran status has virtually no effect on the coefficient for New Europeans, which remains similar in magnitude and statistical significance across specifications. Thus, even after accounting for any wealth attributable to military service, New Europeans not only caught up to Old Europeans but modestly surpassed them.

In short, the GI Bill does not explain the observed convergence in wealth between Old and New Europeans.

4.5 Robustness check: Immigrant wealth

In this paper, my main empirical strategy for assessing whether new groups of European immigrants assimilated in wealth relies on self-reported ancestry. This approach is necessary because the available data do not provide detailed family histories or arrival dates; only in one year of the SIPP is there information on parents' birthplaces.

In this subsection, I pursue the same question more directly by comparing immigrants to non-immigrants. Among reference persons with self-reported European ancestry who arrived before 1930, 4.9% are immigrants. Columns 1 to 3 of Table A11 compare the net worth of these immigrants to that of the native-born, irrespective of national origin. The results indicate that, by the late 20th century, immigrants were no worse off than natives. If anything, they are somewhat wealthier: on average, immigrant households have $22,600 higher net worth, significant at the 10% level. Columns 3 to 6 show that the first and second generations, collectively, are no worse off than longer-established Americans, though these comparisons rely only on data from 1985. These findings are consistent with Hao (2004), who

shows that immigrants from Northern, Western, and Southern Europe compare favorably both to other immigrant groups and to native-born Americans.

Table A12 replicates the main analysis while excluding individuals of old European ancestry who are immigrants, or who, in the 1985 data, have immigrant parents. This restriction addresses the concern that including recent arrivals in the reference group could bias the coefficient of interest upward. The results, however, suggest otherwise: qualitatively they are unchanged, and the positive point estimates are somewhat larger than in Table 3.

5 Simulating wealth convergence

5.1 Conceptual framework and parameters

In this section, I use a stylized model to make sense of the convergence in wealth between new and old European ethnic groups in the United States. I adopt the theoretical framework of Derenoncourt et al. (2024), which builds on Saez & Zucman (2016), but apply the wealth accumulation function in Equation 1 separately to the two groups. The simulations that follow illuminate the underlying drivers of wealth convergence. Following Derenoncourt et al., I make the simplifying assumption that the capital gains rate (q^j), savings rate (s^j), and income growth rate (g^j) are fixed over time.

Combining the law of motion for average old (o) and new (n) white wealth, and taking logs, the growth rate of the wealth ratio (WR) between these groups from t to $t+1$ is

$$\log\left(\frac{WR_{t+1}}{WR_t}\right) \approx (q^w - q^b) + \left[s^w \frac{Y_t^w}{W_t^w} - s^b \frac{Y_t^b}{W_t^b}\right] \tag{2}$$

Therefore, the evolution of the wealth gap is determined by differences in capital gains, savings, and initial wealth. For my baseline simulation, I use almost all the same parameters as Derenoncourt et al. for equal wealth-accumulating conditions—importantly, $q = .01$ and $s = .05$—altering only the income process to reflect immigrants' labor market trajectories.

Since Abramitzky et al. (2014) find that the average immigrant did not face a substantial occupation-based earnings penalty upon first arrival and experienced occupational advancement at the same rate as natives, I further assume that Y^j are equal for n and o upon arrival and that the two groups' incomes grow at the same rate.[20] The wealth ratio then grows as follows:

$$log\left(\frac{WR_{t+1}}{WR_t}\right) \approx sY_t\left(\frac{1}{W_t^o} - \frac{1}{W_t^n}\right) \tag{3}$$

Hence, the "hockey-stick" shape of convergence, where initial convergence is rapid but soon decelerates, can be explained entirely by the initial wealth gap, even if savings rates and income are equal.

5.2 The role of initial wealth under equal accumulation conditions

I begin the simulation of the wealth gap in 1900, around the peak of the new immigration, to approximate a representative migrant. For the initial wealth of old Europeans, I use the estimate of per capita white wealth in 1900 from Derenoncourt et al. (2024). Because immigrants were generally poor, though their exact initial wealth remains uncertain (see Section 3), I assign them \$40, the midpoint of the reporting thresholds at arrival. Per Equation 3, immigrants' little wealth implies rapid initial convergence, followed by a deceleration.

In Figure 5, the thin line shows the simulated evolution of the wealth gap under the assumption of equal incomes and savings rates—that is, all equal conditions other than initial wealth holdings. At arrival, the native-immigrant wealth ratio is 22:1—as high as the white-Black gap in 1870. Just six years later, that ratio has fallen by half. Assuming the

[20] While Abramitzky et al. (2014) do not observe income and instead use occupational scores, Chiswick (1992) observes wages and finds that Jewish immigrants in manufacturing and mining reached parity with native-born whites after 4.5 years and exceeded them thereafter. Eastern Europeans, both immigrants and their descendants, earned more than native-born whites in 1950, while Southern Europeans earned only slightly less (Hirschman & Kraly, 1988). Additionally, in Tables A13 and A14 of the appendix, I use the SIPP and the NLSY79 to confirm that the new group's descendants earn incomes that are, on average, no less than those of the old group's descendants and, in some cases, exceed them.

immigrant arrived at age 20 and lived into their early 60s, the wealth ratio at the end of their life would be 2.8:1. By the late 1980s, around the midpoint of the SIPP data, the ratio is 1.8:1, and by the end of the simulation, the ratio would be 1.5:1—not closed, but not so far off, either. For comparison, the Black-white wealth gap in the United States today is 6:1. This simulation clearly demonstrates the importance of income as a determinant of the wealth gap: if newcomers catch up in income, they can rapidly close the gap despite a large initial disparity in wealth holdings.

5.3 Higher savings rate

If $s^n > s^o$, convergence occurs even more rapidly. Immigrants are believed to have saved a larger share of their incomes than native-born workers, using these savings to purchase homes, open small businesses, and invest in their children's education (Hirschman & Mogford, 2009).[21] Immigrants' higher average savings rates may have been partly motivated by the possibility, however small, of return migration, which would likely involve a large drop in wage income (Abramitzky et al., 2019; Ejermo et al., 2025; Galor & Stark, 1990). Also, immigrants who intended to settle permanently in the United States may have had a particularly strong life-cycle motive for saving—that is, the modern strategy of accumulating assets during one's working years to finance consumption later in life, rather than relying on family or community support, which immigrants often lacked (Sutch, 2013). At arrival, most immigrants held very little tangible wealth, partly because they had spent much of it on passage to America. As a result, they may have saved aggressively in order to accumulate assets more in line with their new, higher American incomes (Carter & Sutch, 1997).

While data on savings and consumption patterns are limited, the available evidence supports the conclusion that immigrants saved a higher share of their incomes. Using Commissioner of Labor data for 1889-1890, Haines (1985) estimates that immigrants saved

[21] Some of these savings may have left the United States in the form of remittances—at least temporarily, if family members in Europe later joined immigrants in the United States—but most migrants sent money home only during the first five years after arrival (Esteves & Khoudour-Castéras, 2011).

1.6 percentage points more of their income than comparable native-born Americans.[22] In a survey of 19th-century family budgets in Massachusetts, Modell (1978) observes that Irish immigrants consumed less than native-born Americans, although their spending habits converged over time. According to Wegge et al. (2017, p. 145), who also study 19th-century Irish immigrants, "[E]ven the poorest immigrants were keen to save and often able to accumulate substantial sums—even those who had arrived virtually penniless..."

There is also indirect evidence. Notably, immigrant homeownership rates substantially exceeded those of the native-born when adjusted for city size and other factors, although groups with high rates of return migration did not, especially Italians (Haines & Goodman, 1991, 1992; Sutch, 2013). Immigrants also had differentially high rates of self-employment, which requires physical and human capital acquisition (Carter & Sutch, 1997). Newly arrived immigrants tended to begin their careers in the United States as wage earners and gradually transitioned into self-employment, suggesting high saving rates in the years following arrival.

The thick line in Figure 5 represents an alternative scenario in which immigrants save at a higher rate. The new group saves an extra 1.6% of income relative to the old group, per Haines (1985), through the life of the first generation (which I assume ends in 1945), then matches the established group's savings rate thereafter. In this case, the wealth gap halves after five years and falls to 2.2:1 by the end of the first generation. By the time of the SIPP, the ratio is 1.6:1, and by the end of the sample period, it is 1.4:1. Thus, the rapid convergence of new to old white ethnics can be parsimoniously explained by the combination of income convergence and, to a lesser extent, a higher savings rate.

5.4 Reaching wealth parity

Of course, even a 1.4:1 ratio does not represent full convergence. In this model, with equal savings and capital gains rates, complete wealth parity is impossible by construction if the group that starts with less wealth cannot surpass the earnings of the other group.

[22] Higher savings may explain the rapid wealth accumulation of an earlier generation of immigrants (Ferrie, 1994).

Even so, recognizing that the model does not perfectly capture reality, how is wealth parity achieved?

Once again, New Europeans earned higher incomes on average, in part because immigrants tend to cluster in areas that offer better prospects for their children (Abramitzky et al., 2021). Tables A13 and A14 imply an advantage of 6-21%. For simplicity, I assume that by the second generation, New Europeans earned 10% higher income, as depicted by the dashed line. Under this assumption, the ratio falls to 1.5:1 in 1990 and to 1.3:1 in 2020.

It is also reasonable to assume that New Europeans experienced higher capital gains rates, given that they tended to settle in major metropolitan areas with better access to financial institutions. For example, as of 1950, nearly half of American Jews lived in New York City, the financial capital of the United States (Seligman, 1951). Even today, household participation in the stock market varies widely by state, from 10.5% in Mississippi to 26.6% in Connecticut (Chien & Morris, 2017), and presumably this gap was even larger historically, before the advent of online financial services. These differences persist even after controlling for household income. This matters greatly: from 1928 to 2016, the average annual return on stocks exceeded that of three-month Treasury bills by eight percentage points.[23] Assuming that New Europeans earn one percentage point higher capital gains beginning in the second generation, complete convergence is achieved by 1997, as shown by the dotted line.

5.5 Beyond initial wealth

This interpretation of wealth convergence in the presence of large initial disparities is closely related to, and helps clarify, the findings of Derenoncourt et al. (2024). Despite beginning with a comparably large wealth disadvantage—though not facing the same constellation of other disadvantages—as Black Americans, New European immigrants experienced relatively rapid catch-up (see Figure 6). In contrast, under a counterfactual in which wealth-accumulating conditions are held equal from 1870 to 2020, Derenoncourt et

[23] $100 invested in stocks and in Treasury bills in 1928 would have yielded roughly $329,000 and $2,000, respectively, after 88 years (Chien & Morris, 2017).

al. show that the Black–white wealth gap would remain substantial, at roughly 3:1, declining much more slowly than the new-old European gap shown in Figure 5. In their simulations, the Black-white gap does not reach 1.4 until approximately 2200, more than a century later than the convergence observed among European-origin groups.

An important distinction between these results lies in how "equal wealth-accumulating conditions" are operationalized. In Derenoncourt et al., savings and capital gains rates are held constant across groups, while income paths are allowed to differ based on historical data. Because income constrains saving, persistent income differences mechanically limit the scope for wealth convergence under this definition of equality. Income plays a central role in shaping long-run wealth dynamics, as shown by Aliprantis et al. (2022), Ashman & Neumuller (2020), Barsky et al. (2002), İmrohoroğlu et al. (2025), and Sabelhaus & Thompson (2026). Moreover, the assumption of identical savings rates—treated as fixed rather than responsive to economic circumstances—necessarily limits the extent of catch-up within this framework. By contrast, the simulations presented here highlight how the joint evolution of income growth and savings behavior can generate relatively rapid convergence even from very large initial wealth gaps.

Importantly, these contrasting convergence patterns are consistent with well-documented structural differences in opportunity between European immigrants and Black Americans. Jim Crow institutions significantly impeded the long-term economic progress of Black Americans (Althoff & Reichardt, 2024). Northern employers favored European immigrants over Blacks, delaying the Great Migration by several decades and leaving most Blacks as agricultural workers in the South (Collins, 1997). When Blacks did leave the South, their opportunities were limited by educational and residential segregation, and cities responded with increased policing (Derenoncourt, 2022). As Blacks moved North, whites left for the suburbs (Boustan, 2010). Segregated housing markets eroded Black wealth, as homes in Black neighborhoods lost value (Akbar et al., 2025). The racial income gap has not closed (Bayer & Charles, 2018), as Black Americans experience lower rates of upward mobility and

higher rates of downward mobility than white Americans (Chetty et al., 2020; Collins & Wanamaker, 2022; Jácome et al., 2025). These factors, among others, may help to explain both the lack of racial wealth convergence at the rapid wealth convergence among immigrants and native-born whites.

6 Conclusion

The United States absorbed roughly 30 million Europeans during the Age of Mass Migration. The fact that social scientists rarely distinguish between whites whose ancestors arrived during this period and those whose families came earlier reflects the success of economic assimilation. This remarkable achievement is by no means guaranteed, as illustrated by the persistence of poverty among the Irish in England (Cummins & Ó Gráda, 2025). This paper provides further evidence of that success, showing that immigrants and their descendants overcame substantial initial deficits in wealth holdings, converging with old Americans by the late 20th century. Their relative success compared to minority groups that continue to hold persistently less wealth sheds light on the determinants of wealth accumulation. Income convergence emerges as a key driver of wealth convergence, as large initial wealth gaps proved to be surmountable over time.

References

Abramitzky, R., & Boustan, L. (2017). Immigration in American economic history. *Journal of Economic Literature*, *55*(4), 1311-1345.

Abramitzky, R., & Boustan, L. (2022). *Streets of gold: America's untold story of immigrant success*. New York: PublicAffairs.

Abramitzky, R., Boustan, L., & Eriksson, K. (2019). To the New World and back again: Return migrants in the Age of Mass Migration. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, *72*(2), 300-322.

Abramitzky, R., Boustan, L., Jácome, E., & Pérez, S. (2021). Intergenerational mobility of immigrants in the United States over two centuries. *American Economic Review*, *111*(2), 580-608.

Abramitzky, R., Boustan, L. P., & Eriksson, K. (2012). Europe's tired, poor, huddled masses: Self-selection and economic outcomes in the Age of Mass Migration. *American Economic Review*, *102*(5), 1832-1856.

Abramitzky, R., Boustan, L. P., & Eriksson, K. (2013). Have the poor always been less likely to migrate? Evidence from inheritance practices during the age of mass migration. *Journal of Development Economics*, *102*, 2-14.

Abramitzky, R., Boustan, L. P., & Eriksson, K. (2014). A nation of immigrants: Assimilation and economic outcomes in the Age of Mass Migration. *Journal of Political Economy*, *122*(3), 467-506.

Abramitzky, R., Kowalski, J., Pérez, S., & Price, J. (2024). *The GI Bill, Standardized Testing, and Socioeconomic Origins of the US Eductional Elite Over a Century.* (Working Paper 33164). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Ager, P., Boustan, L., & Eriksson, L. (2021). The intergenerational effects of a large wealth shock: White southerners after the Civil War. *American Economic Review*, *111*(11), 3767-3794.

Akbar, P. A., Hickly, S. L., Shertzer, A., & Walsh, R. P. (2025). Racial segregation in housing markets and the erosion of Black wealth. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, *107*(1), 42-54.

Alesina, A. F., Seror, M., Yang, D. Y., You, Y., & Zeng, W. (2021). *Persistence Despite Revolutions.* (NBER Working Paper 27053). National Bureau of Economic Research. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved from http://www.nber.org/papers/w27053

Algan, Y., & Cahuc, P. (2010). Inherited trust and growth. *American Economic Review*, *100*(5), 2060-2092.

Aliprantis, D., Carroll, D. R., & Young, E. R. (2022). *The Dynamics of the Racial Wealth Gap.* (Working Paper No. 19-18R). Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland.. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.26509/frbc-wp-201918R

Althoff, L., & Reichardt, H. (2024). Jim Crow and Black economic progress after slavery. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *139*(4), 2279-2330.

Angrist, J. (2002). How do sex ratios affect marriage and labor markets? Evidence from America's second generation. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *117*(3), 997-1038.

Armstrong, A., & Lewis, F. D. (2017). Transatlantic wage gaps and the migration decision: Europe-Canada in the 1920s. *Cliometrica*, *11*, 153-182.

Ashman, H., & Neumuller, S. (2020). Can income gap differences explain the racial wealth gap? A quantitative analysis. *Review of Economic Dynamics*, *35*(2), 220-239.

Bandiera, O., Rasul, I., & Viarengo, M. (2013). The making of modern America: Migratory Flows in the age of mass migration. *Journal of Development Economics*, *102*, 23-47.

Barsky, R., Bound, J., Charles, K. K., & Lupton, J. P. (2002). Accounting for the black-white wealth gap: A nonparametric approach. *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, *97*(459), 663-673.

Bayer, P., & Charles, K. K. (2018). Divergent paths: A new perspective on earnings differences between black and white men since 1940. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *133*(3), 1459-1501.

Blau, F. D., & Graham, J. W. (1990). Black-white differences in wealth and asset composition. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *105*(2), 321-339.

Bleakley, H., & Ferrie, J. (2016). Shocking behavior: Random wealth in antebellum Georgia and human capital across generations. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *131*(3), 1455-1496.

Borjas, G. J. (1992). Ethnic capital and intergenerational mobility. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *107*(1), 123-150.

Borjas, G. J. (1994). Long-run convergence of ethnic skill differentials: The children and grandchildren of the Great Migration. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, *47*(4), 553-573.

Boustan, L. P. (2010). Was postwar suburbanization 'white flight'? evidence from the black migration. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *125*(1), 417-443.

Carter, S. B., & Sutch, R. (1997). *Historical Perspectives on the Economic Consequences of Immigration into the United States.* (NBER Historical Paper 106). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Chetty, R., Hendren, N., Jones, M. R., & Porter, S. R. (2020). Race and economic opportunity in the United States: An intergenerational perspective. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *135*(2), 711-783.

Chien, Y., & Morris, P. (2017). Household participation in stock market varies widely by state. *The Regional Economist*, *25*, 4-5. Retrieved from https://www.stlouisfed.org/-/media/project/frbstl/stlouisfed/publications/regional-economist/2017/third_quarter_2017/stock_market.pdf

Chiswick, B. R. (1992). Jewish immigrant wages in America in 1909: An analysis of the Dillingham Commission Data. *Explorations in Economic History*, *29*(3), 274-289.

Chiswick, B. R. (2009). *The Economic Progress of American Jewry: From 18th Century Merchants to 21st Century Professionals*. (IZA Discussion Paper No. 4590). Bonn: Institute for the Study of Labor.

Clark, G., & Cummins, N. (2025). *How Long do Wealth Shocks Persist? Less than Three Generations in England, 1700-2025*. (EHES Working Paper No. 284). European Historical Economics Society.

Cobb-Clark, D. A., & Hildebrand, V. A. (2006). The wealth and asset holdings of US-born and foreign-born households: Evidence from SIPP data. *Review of Income and Wealth*, *52*(1), 17-42.

Collins, W. J. (1997). When the tide turned: Immigration and the delay of the Great Black Migration. *Journal of Economic History*, *57*(3), 607-632.

Collins, W. J., Holtkamp, N., & Wanamaker, M. H. (2024). Black Americans' landholdings and economic mobility after Emancipation: Evidence from the Census of Agriculture and linked records. *Journal of Economic History*, *84*(4), 963-996.

Collins, W. J., & Holtkamp, N. C. (2025). *The Geography of Opportunity after the Civil War: Black and White Americans' Intra- and Intergenerational Mobility into Property Ownership*. (NBER Working Paper 33860). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Collins, W. J., & Wanamaker, M. H. (2022). African American intergenerational economic mobility since 1880. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, *14*(3), 84-117.

Collins, W. J., & Zimran, A. (2019). The economic assimilation of Irish Famine migrants to the United States. *Explorations in Economic History*, *74*.

Collins, W. J., & Zimran, A. (2023). Working their way up? US immigrants' changing labor market assimilation in the Age of Mass Migration. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, *15*(3), 238-269.

Collins, W. J., & Zimran, A. (2025). World War II service and the GI Bill: New evidence on selection and veterans' outcomes from linked census records. *Explorations in Economic History*, *96*.

Conley, T. G., & Galenson, D. W. (1998). Nativity and wealth in mid-nineteenth-century cities. *Journal of Economic History*, *58*(2), 468-493.

Connor, D. S. (2019). The cream of the crop? Geography, networks, and Irish migrant selection in the Age of Mass Migration. *Journal of Economic History*, *79*(1), 139-175.

Cummins, N. J., & Ó Gráda, C. (2025). The Irish in England. *Journal of Econmic History*, *85*(1), 180-214.

Darity, W., Dietrich, J., & Guilkey, D. K. (2001). Persistent advantage or disadvantage?: Evidence in support of the intergenerational drag hypothesis. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, *60*(2), 435-470.

Darity, W. J., Hamilton, D., Paul, M., Aja, A., Price, A. E., Moore, A., & Chiopris, C. (2018, April). *What we get wrong about closing the racial wealth gap* (Tech. Rep.). Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity & Insight Center for Community Economic Development. Retrieved from https://narrowthegap.org/images/documents/Wealth-Gap---FINAL-COMPLETE-REPORT.pdf

Daysal, N. M., Lovenheim, M. F., & Wasser, D. N. (2023). *The Intergenerational Transmission of Housing Wealth.* (NBER Working Paper 31669). National Bureau of Economic Research. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved from http://www.nber.org/papers/w31669

DeCanio, S. J. (1979). Accumulation and discrimination in the postbellum South. *Explorations in Economic History*, *16*(2), 182-206.

Derenoncourt, E. (2022). Can you move to opportunity? Evidence from the Great Migration. *American Economic Review*, *112*(2), 369-408.

Derenoncourt, E., Kim, C. H., Kuhn, M., & Schularick, M. (2023). Changes in the distribution of Black and white wealth since the US Civil War. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *37*(4), 71-90.

Derenoncourt, E., Kim, C. H., Kuhn, M., & Schularick, M. (2024). Wealth of two nations: The US racial wealth gap, 1860-2020. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *139*(2), 693-750.

Dovring, F. (1962). European reactions to the Homestead Act. *Journal of Economic History*, *22*(4), 461-472.

Drachsler, J. (1921). *Intermarriage in New York City: A statistical study of the amalgamation of European peoples.* New York: Columbia University Press. (Columbia University Studies in the Social Sciences, No. 94)

Dray, S., Landais, C., & Stantcheva, S. (2023). *Wealth and Property Taxation in the United States.* (NBER Working Paper 31080). National Bureau of Economic Research. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved from http://www.nber.org/papers/w31080

Ejermo, O., Enflo, K., Eriksson, B., & Prawitz, E. (2025). Home sweet home: Returns to returning in the Age of Mass Migration. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, *17*(4), 29-59.

Esteves, R., & Khoudour-Castéras, D. (2011). Remittances, capital flows and financial development during the mass migration period, 1870–1913. *European Review of Economic History*, *15*(3), 443-474.

Farley, R. (1991). The new census question about ancestry: What did it tell us? *Demography*, *28*(3), 411-429.

Feir, D. L., Jones, M. E., & Redish, A. (2024). American Indian wealth in the early 20th century. *AEA Papers and Proceedings*, *114*, 210-214.

Ferrie, J. P. (1994). The wealth accumulation of antebellum European immigrants to the US, 1840-60. *Journal of Economic History*, *54*(1), 1-33.

Fetter, D. K. (2013). How do mortgage subsidies affect home ownership? evidence from the mid-century gi bills. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, *5*(2), 111-147.

Galor, O., & Stark, O. (1990). Migrants' savings, the probability of return migration and migrants' performance. *International Economic Review*, *31*(2), 405-432.

Galor, O., & Wainstock, D. C. (2025). *Anatomy of US Inequality*. (NBER Working Paper 34558). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Gibson, C., & Jung, K. (2006). *Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born Population of the United States: 1850 to 2000*. (Population Division Working Paper No. 81). Washington, DC: US Census Bureau.

Gibson, C. J., & Lennon, E. (1999). *Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born Population of the United States: 1850-1990*. (Population Division Working Paper No. 29). Washington, DC: US Census Bureau.

Guiso, L., Sapienza, P., & Zingales, L. (2006). Does culture affect economic outcomes? *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *20*(2), 23-48.

Haines, M. R. (1985). The life cycle, savings, and demographic adaptation: Some historical evidence for the United States and Europe. In A. S. Rossi (Ed.), *Gender and the life course* (pp. 43–63). New York: Aldine.

Haines, M. R., & Goodman, A. C. (1991). *A home of one's own: Aging and homeownership in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries* (Historical Paper No. 21). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Haines, M. R., & Goodman, A. C. (1992). Housing demand in the United States in the late nineteenth century: Evidence from the commissioner of labor survey, 1889/1890. *Journal of Urban Economics*, *31*(1), 99-122.

Hamilton, D., & Darity, W. (2010). Can 'baby bonds' eliminate the racial wealth gap in putative post-racial America. *Review of Black Political Economy*, *37*(3-4), 207-216.

Hao, L. (2004). Wealth of immigrant and native-born Americans. *International Migration Review*, *38*(2), 518-546.

Hao, L. (2007). *Color lines, country lines: Race, immigration, and wealth stratification in 21st century America*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Hatton, T. J., & Williamson, J. G. (1998). *The Age of Mass Migration: Causes and economic impact*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Herscovici, S. (1993). The distribution of wealth in nineteenth century Boston: Inequality among natives and immigrants, 1860. *Exporations in Economic History*, *30*(3), 321-335.

Hirschman, C., & Kraly, E. (1988). Immigrants, minorities, and earnings in the United States in 1950. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *11*(3), 332-365.

Hirschman, C., & Mogford, E. (2009). Immigration and the American industrial revolution from 1880 to 1920. *Social Science Research*, *38*(4), 897-920.

Jácome, E., Kuziemko, I., & Naidu, S. (2025). Mobility for all: Representative intergenerational mobility estimates over the twentieth century. *Journal of Political Economy*, *133*(1), 306-354.

Johnson, C. E. (1974). *Consistency of reporting of ethnic origin in the Current Population Survey* (Technical Paper No. 31). Washington, DC: US Bureau of the Census.

Kalsi, P., & Ward, Z. (2025). *The Gilded Age and Beyond: The Persistence of Elite Wealth in American History*. (NBER Working Paper 33355). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Keister, L. A., Agius Vallejo, J., & Borelli, E. P. (2015). Mexican American mobility: Early life processes and adult wealth ownership. *Social Forces*, *93*(3), 1015-1046.

Lieberson, S. (1963). *Ethnic patterns in American cities*. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe.

Lieberson, S. (1980). *A piece of the pie: Blacks and white immigrants since 1880*. University of California Press.

Lieberson, S., & Waters, M. C. (1986). Ethnic groups in flux: The changing ethnic responses of American whites. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *487*, 79-91.

Linfield, H. (1928). Jewish population in the United States. *The American Jewish Yearbook*, *30*, 101-198.

Lowrey, K., Van Hook, J., Bachmeier, J. D., & Foster, T. B. (2021). Leapfrogging the melting pot? European immigrants' intergenerational mobility across the twentieth century. *Sociological Science*, *8*, 480-512.

Luebke, F. C. (1977). Ethnic group settlement on the great plains. *Western Historical Quarterly*, *8*(4), 405-430.

Menchik, P. L., & Jianakoplos, N. A. (1997). Black-white wealth inequality: Is inheritance the reason? *Economic Inquiry*, *35*(2), 428-442.

Meschede, T., Eden, M., Jain, S., Jee, E., Miles, B., Martinez, M., ... Madison, M. (2022). *Final report from our GI Bill study* (Research Brief / Technical Report). Institute for Economic and Racial Equity (IERE), The Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University. Retrieved from https://heller.brandeis.edu/iere/pdfs/racial-wealth-equity/racial-wealth-gap/gi-bill-final-report.pdf

Miller, M. C. (2020). "the righteous and reasonable ambition to become a landholder": Land and racial inequality in the Postbellum South. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, *102*(2), 381-394.

Modell, J. (1978). Patterns of consumption, acculturation, and family income strategies in late nineteenth-century America. In T. K. Haraven & M. A. Vinovskis (Eds.), *Family and population in nineteenth-century America* (pp. 206–240). Princeton University Press.

Muhammad, A., Sichko, C., & Olsson, T. C. (2023). African Americans and federal land policy: Exploring the Homestead Acts of 1862 and 1866. *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy*, *46*(1), 95-110.

Nekoei, A., & Seim, D. (2023). How do inheritances shape wealth inequality? Theory and evidence from Sweden. *Review of Economic Studies*, *90*(1), 463-498.

Pagnini, D. L., & Morgan, S. P. (1990). Intermarriage and social distance among U.S. immigrants at the turn of the century. *American Journal of Sociology*, *96*(2), 405-432.

Pfeffer, F. T., & Killewad, A. (2018). Generations of advantage. Multigenerational correlations in family wealth. *Social Forces*, *96*(4), 1411-1442.

Piketty, T., & Zucman, G. (2014). Capital is back: Wealth-income ratios in rich countries 1700-2010. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *129*(3), 1255-1310.

Ruggles, S., Flood, S., Sobek, M., Backman, D., Cooper, G., Rivera Drew, J. A., ... Williams, K. C. (2025). *IPUMS USA: Version 16.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS.* (Data retrieved from https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V16.0)

Ruggles, S., Nelson, M. A., Sobek, M., Fitch, C. A., Goeken, R., Hacker, J. D., ... Warren, J. R. (2024). *IPUMS Ancestry Full Count Data: Version 4.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS.* (Data retrieved from https://doi.org/10.18128/D014.V4.0)

Sabelhaus, J., & Thompson, J. (2026). What role for "generational wealth" in explaining racial wealth disparities? *Economic Inquiry*, *64*(1), 325-349.

Saez, E., & Zucman, G. (2016). Wealth inequality in the Unied States since 1913: Evidence from capitalized income tax data. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *131*(2), 519-578.

Schwartz, A. (1970). Intermarriage in the United States. *The American Jewish Year Book*, *71*, 101-121.

Seligman, B. B. (1951). Changes in Jewish population in the United States, 1949-50. *The American Jewish Year Book*, *52*, 3-16.

Sutch, R. (2013, March). Immigrant homeownership, economic assimilation, and return migration during the Age of Mass Migration to the United States. Berkeley, CA. (Economic History Seminar, University of California, Berkeley)

Sutch, R. (2016, January). The accumulation, inheritance, and concentration of wealth during the Gilded Age: An exception to Thomas Piketty's analysis. Riverside, CA. (UCR Emeriti/ae Association)

Temin, P. (2009). An elite minority: Jews among the richest 400 Americans. In D. Eltis, F. D. Lewis, & K. L. Sokoloff (Eds.), *Human capital and institutions: A long run view* (pp. 248–263). Cambridge University Press.

United States Bureau of the Census. (1909). *A century of population growth from the first census of the united states to the twelfth, 1790-1900.* Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.

United States Census Bureau. (1933). *Fifteenth census of the united states: 1930. population. section ii, chapter 6. country of origin of the foreign white stock.* Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office. (Available at: https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1930/population-volume-2/16440598v2ch07.pdf)

United States Immigration Commission. (1911). *Reports of the Immigration Commission* (Vol. 1-42). Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office.

US Department of Homeland Security. (2013). *Yearbook of immigration statistics, 2012.* Washington, DC: Office of Immigration Statistics.

Villareal, A., & Tamborini, C. R. (2018). Immigrants' economic assimilation: Evidence from longitudinal earnings records. *American Sociological Review*, *83*(4), 686-715.

Ward, Z. (2017). Birds of passage: Return migration, self-selection and immigration quotas. *Explorations in Economic History*, *64*, 37-52.

Ward, Z., Buckles, K., & Price, J. (2025). *Like Great-Grandparent, Life Great-Granchild? Multigenerational Mobility in American History.* (NBER Working Paper 33923). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Wegge, S. A., Anbinder, T., & Ó Gráda, C. (2017). Immigrants and savers: A rich new database on the Irish in 1850s New York. *Historical Methods*, *50*(3), 144-155.

White, T. K. (2007). Initial conditions at Emancipation: The long-run effect on black-white wealth and earning inequality. *Journal of Economic Dynamics and Control*, *31*(10), 3370-3395.

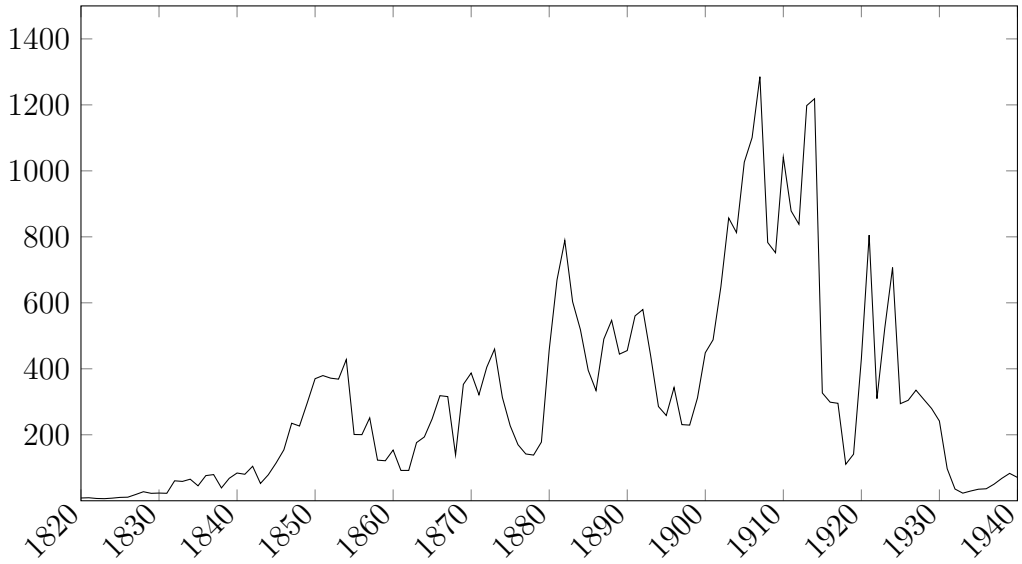
Wolff, E. N. (1998). Recent trends in the size distribution of household wealth. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *12*(3), 131-150.

İmrohoroğlu, A., Kumru, C. S., & Lian, J. (2025). *Racial Disparities in Crime and Wealth*. (Working Paper).

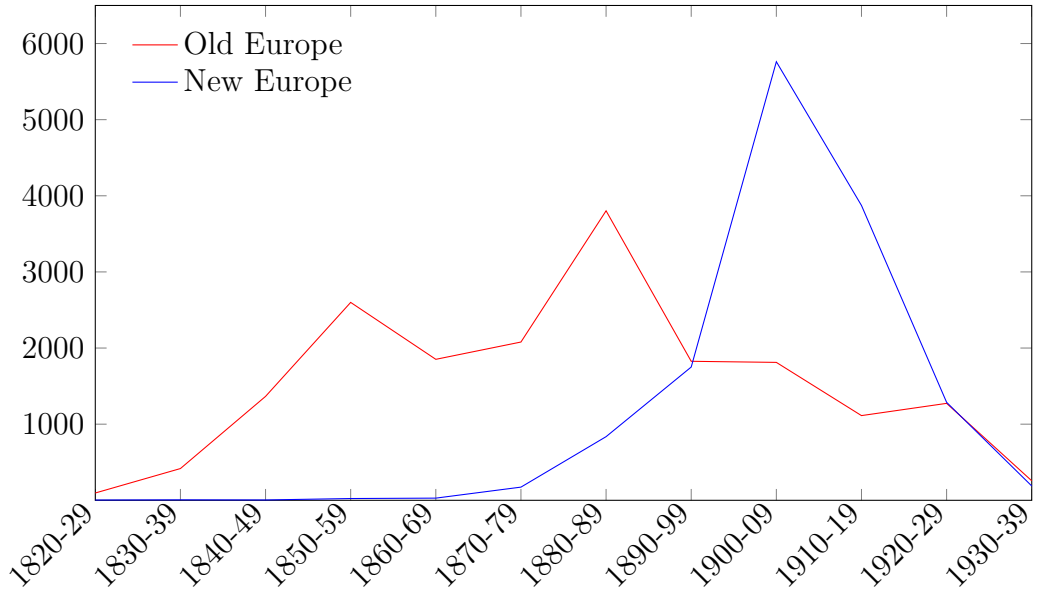
7 Figures

Figure 1: Legal immigrants to the United States, 1820-1940 (thousands)

(a) Total

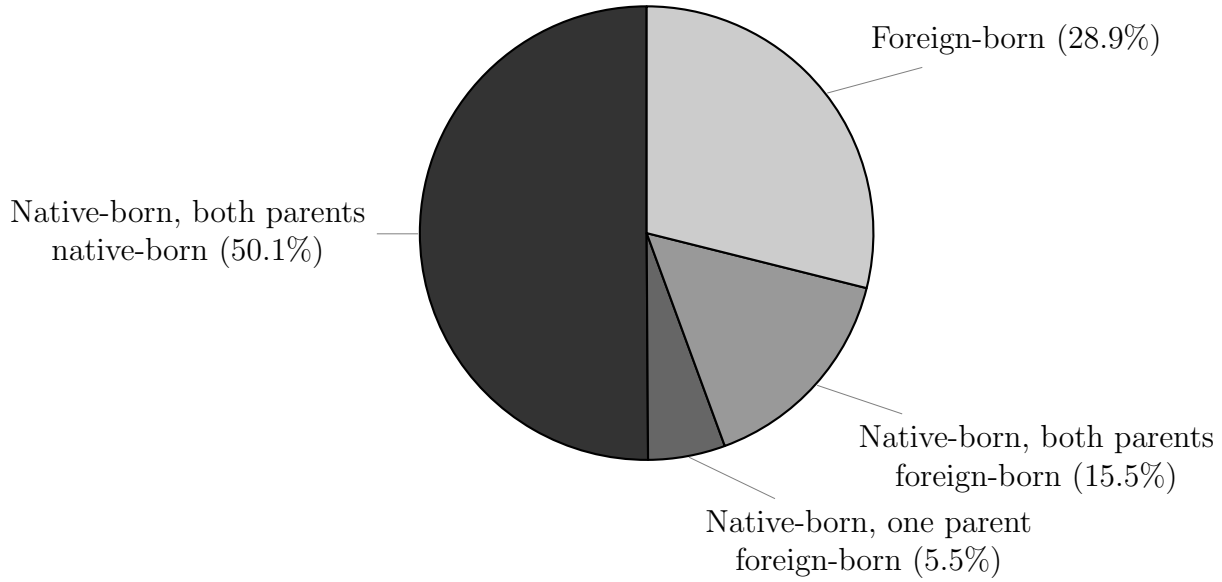


(b) By source region



Source: Author's calculations based on US Department of Homeland Security (2013). "Old" Europe ancestry refers to Northwestern Europe, and "new" Europe refers to Southern and Eastern Europe, following the classification used throughout the paper and based on Lieberson (1980).

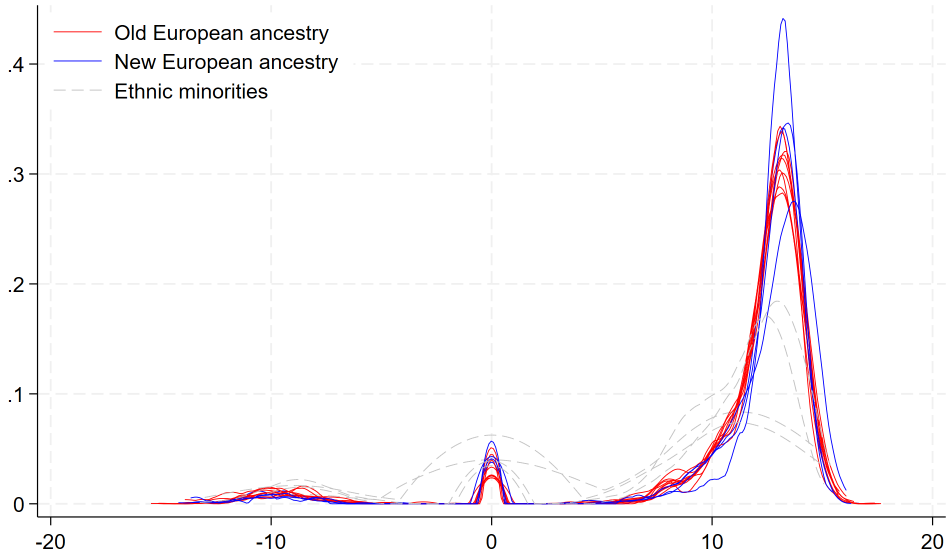
Figure 2: Nativity of whites, age 50, in the 1920 Census



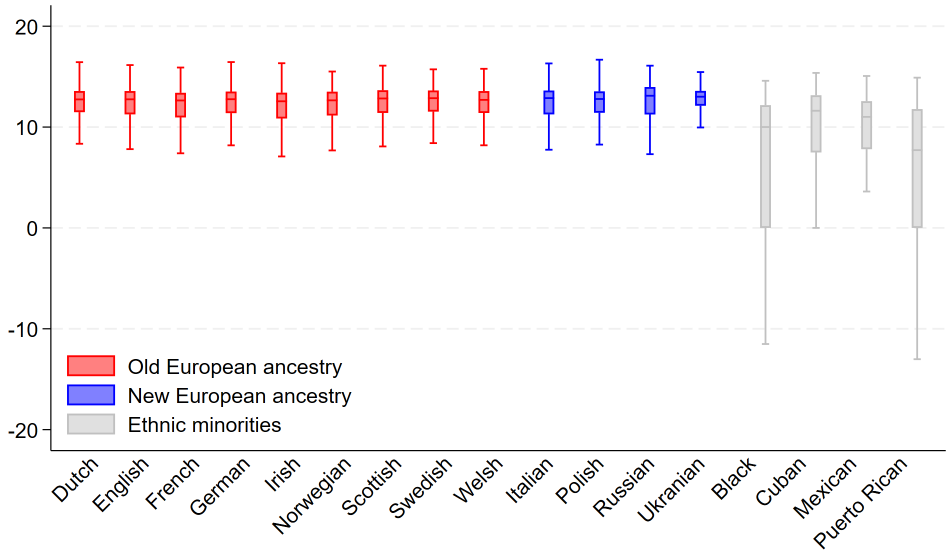
Source: Ruggles et al. (2024), Ruggles et al. (2025)

Figure 3: Household wealth distributions in the SIPP, 1984–1993 (asinh scale)

(a) Kernel density estimates



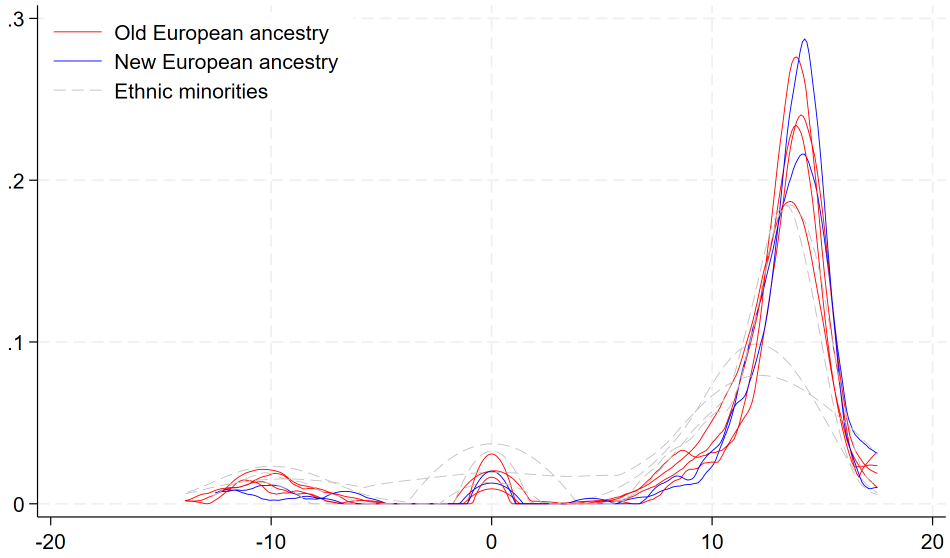
(b) Box plots



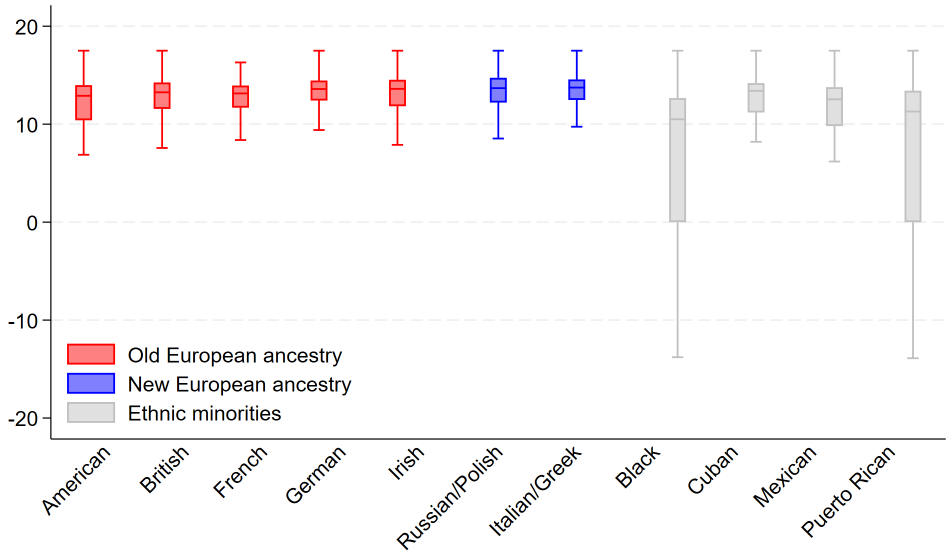
Notes: The figure shows the distribution of the inverse hyperbolic sine of household wealth (in 2024 dollars) for survey reference persons aged 30 and older. Each line in panel (a), and each box in panel (b), represents the wealth distribution for a different ethnic group using SIPP data pooled from 1984 to 1993.

Figure 4: Household wealth distributions in the NLSY79, (asinh scale)

(a) Kernel density estimates

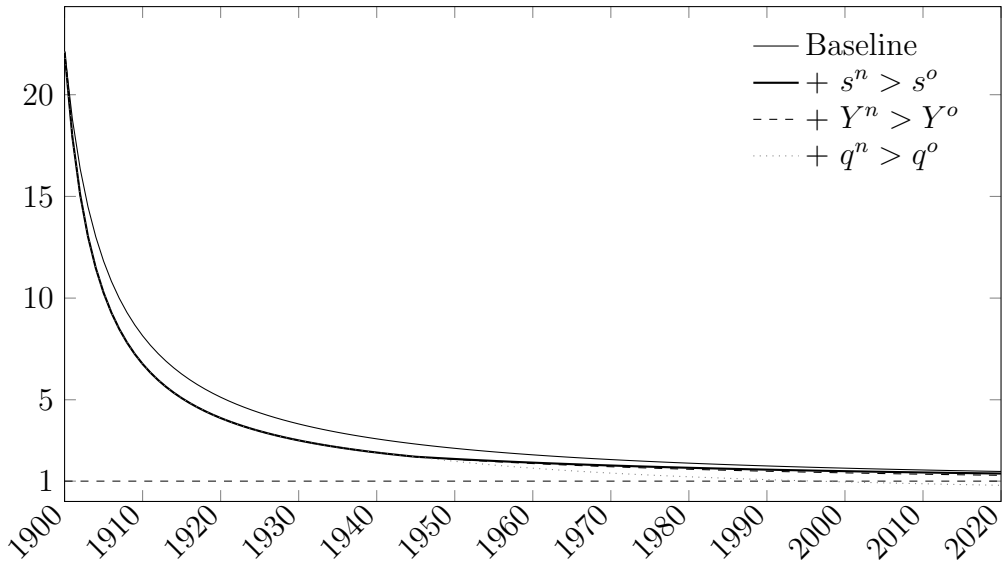


(b) Box plots



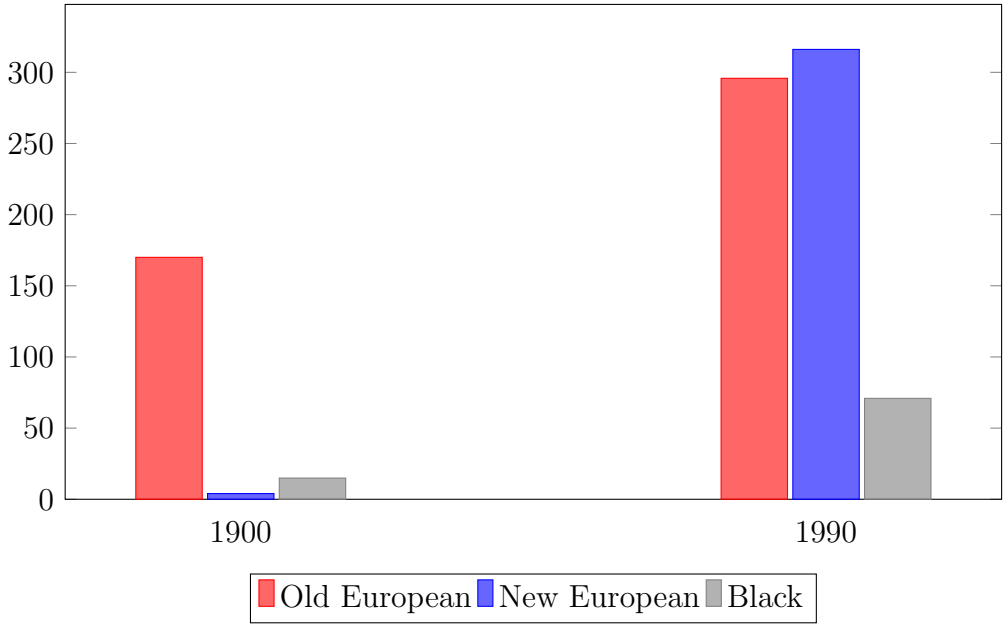
Notes: The figure shows the distribution of the inverse hyperbolic sine of household wealth in 2020 (in 2024 dollars). Each line in panel (a), and each box in panel (b), represents the wealth distribution for a different ethnic group.

Figure 5: Simulation of the old-new white wealth ratio, 1900-2020



Note: The thin line shows the simulated wealth ratio between old and new white ethnic groups where the only difference is initial wealth. The thick line allows for a higher savings rate for the new group through 1945. The dashed line also assigns a higher income to the new group starting in 1945, and the dotted line assigns a higher capital gains rate, too, starting in 1945. See Section 5 for details.

Figure 6: Average household wealth, c. 1900 and 1990 (thousands of 2024 dollars)



Notes: Household wealth in 1900 for Old Europeans is the average household wealth for white Americans, as reported by Derenoncourt et al. (2024). Household wealth for Black Americans in 1900 is also from that study. Household wealth in 1900 for New Europeans is based on a weighted average of cash holdings reported for Southern and Eastern European immigrants from 1899 to 1910 in the Dillingham Commission Report. Household wealth in 1990 is based on net worth from the SIPP (1984–1993).

8 Tables

Table 1: Cash shown at arrival for selected European immigrants to the US, 1899-1910

Origin	**Percentage *of those who showed money* who showed less than**		**Average cash ($)**	
	$30 (1899-1903)	**$50 (1904-1910)**	**showing money**	**admitted**
Bohemian and Moravian	80.1	84.2	41.06	26.94
Croatian and Slovenian	90.0	86.6	16.14	14.64
Dalmatian, Bosnian, and Herzegovinian	69.2	93.6	22.56	19.99
Greek	87.6	93.1	24.10	22.07
Hungarian	94.2	95.1	18.53	14.90
Italian (north)	63.2	85.9	30.76	25.18
Italian (south)	93.1	94.6	17.14	13.34
Jewish	87.1	88.2	29.09	12.85
Lithuanian	94.5	96.5	14.05	11.13
Polish	94.9	97.2	14.76	11.87
Romanian	97.0	97.6	16.82	15.60
Russian	85.8	92.8	23.51	19.16
Slovak	92.5	97.0	16.54	14.08

Source: US Commissioner-General of Immigration

Table 2: Summary Statistics

	SIPP (1984-93)		NLSY79 (2020)	
	%	N	%	N
Old ancestry	81.0	29,716	84.7	1,756
American	-	-	10.6	220
Dutch	2.4	888	-	-
English	19.8	7,269	27.3	566
French	5.0	1,850	4.3	90
German	27.8	10,205	24.8	515
Irish	15.7	5,774	14.9	309
Norwegian	2.7	997	-	-
Scottish	3.9	1,440	2.0	42
Swedish	2.7	989	-	-
Welsh	0.8	304	0.7	14
New ancestry	19.0	6,967	15.3	317
Greek	-	-	0.5	10
Italian	10.2	3,735	9.12	189
Polish	5.9	2,153	4.6	96
Russian	2.2	822	1.1	22
Ukranian	0.7	257	-	-
Year				
1984	15.6	5,721	-	-
1985	10.9	4,013	-	-
1986	9.3	3,418	-	-
1987	9.3	3,416	-	-
1990	14.4	5,277	-	-
1991	10.5	3,846	-	-
1992	16.2	5,932	-	-
1993	13.8	5,060	-	-
	Mean (SD)	Min/Max	Mean (SD)	Min/Max
Age	54.2 (15.8)	30/93	59.3 (2.3)	55/64
Male	0.69	0/1	0.50	0/1
Married	0.78	0/1	0.69	0/1
Net worth	298.4 (459.8)	-2566.8/23474.7	1295.8 (3547.4)	-551.6/19939.4

Notes: This table includes only the observations used in the main analysis (see Tables 3 and 4); that is, respondents who report a specific European ancestry. *Married* equals one if the household reference person is married or widowed and zero otherwise.

Table 3: White household net worth in the SIPP, 1984-1993

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
New European	18.19***	0.12*	21.99***			
	(5.61)	(0.07)	(3.49)			
Italian				3.27	0.07	21.80***
				(6.51)	(0.09)	(4.62)
Polish				-4.54	0.08	9.94*
				(9.02)	(0.11)	(5.35)
Russian				153.31***	0.36**	66.38***
				(20.98)	(0.17)	(17.52)
Ukrainian				-9.11	0.37	23.95
				(19.37)	(0.31)	(22.99)
DV: asinh	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
Method	OLS	OLS	Quantile	OLS	OLS	Quantile

Notes: Net worth is based on self-reported assets and liabilities, adjusted to 2024 dollars using the CPI, and expressed in thousands. The sample includes all survey reference persons aged 30 and over who reported a specific European ancestry. Regressions include controls for age, age squared, sex, marital status, and survey year fixed effects. New European ancestry includes Italian, Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian; the reference group (old European) includes Dutch, English, French, German, Irish, Norwegian, Scottish, Swedish, and Welsh. Standard errors (robust for OLS) shown in parentheses. All regressions include 36,442 observations. Significance levels are denoted by * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01.

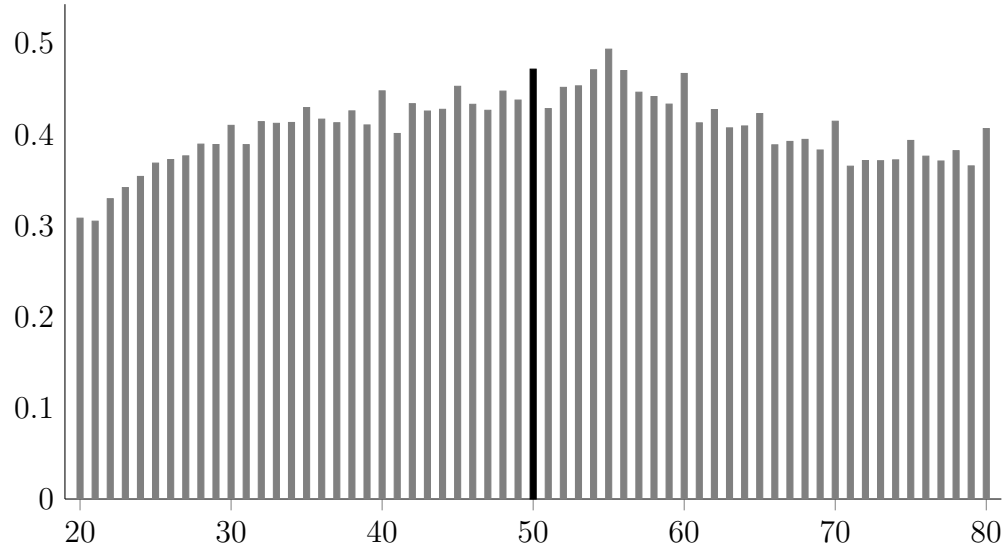
Table 4: White household net worth in the NLSY79, 2020

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
New European	-109.74	0.27	66.67			
	(202.73)	(0.17)	(48.92)			
Greek/Italian				-338.92	0.33*	82.43
				(208.35)	(0.19)	(61.61)
Russian/Polish				269.98	0.17	53.92
				(375.81)	(0.31)	(74.90)
DV: asinh	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
Method	OLS	OLS	Quantile	OLS	OLS	Quantile

Notes: Net worth is based on self-reported assets and liabilities in 2020, adjusted to 2024 dollars using the CPI, and expressed in thousands. The sample includes all survey participants who identify most a specific European ancestry. Each regression controls for sex marital status. New European ancestry includes Greek, Italian, Polish, and Russian; the reference group ("old" European) includes American, British (English, Scottish, and Welsh), French, German, and Irish. Standard errors (robust for OLS) shown in parentheses. All regressions include 2,073 observations. Significance levels are denoted by * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01.

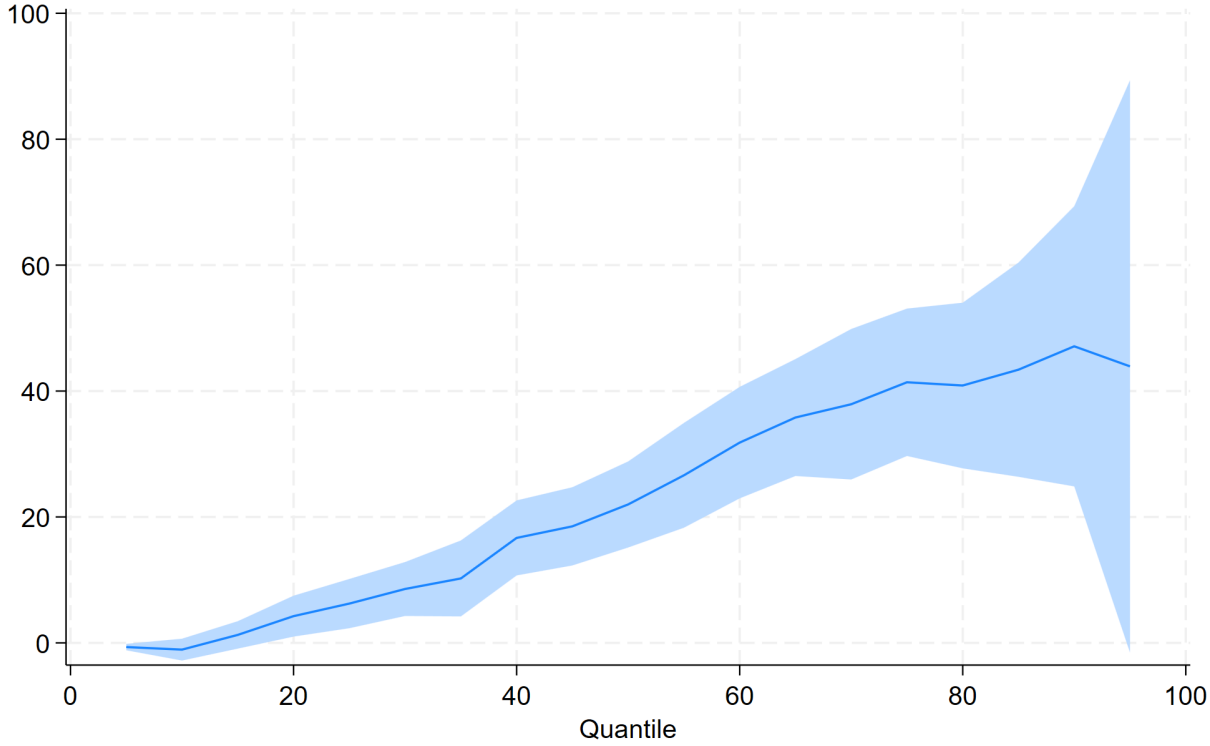
9 Additional Figures

Figure A1: Share of whites of foreign origin, by age, 1920



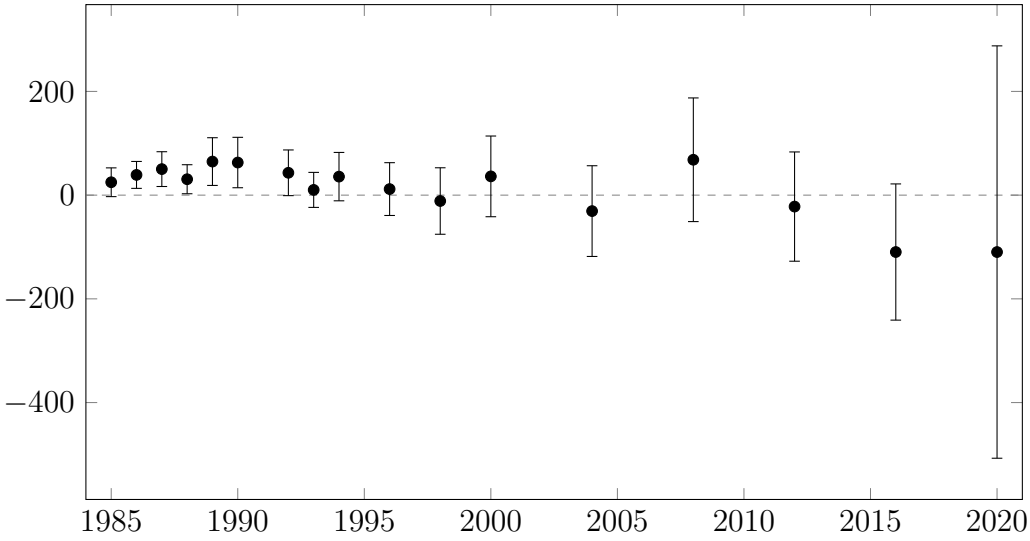
Source: US Census
Notes: "Foreign origin" includes those born abroad or with two foreign-born parents; one foreign-born parent counts as half. Age 50 is shown in black since this age is used to estimate the share of the adult population that is of foreign origin. See Section 2.

Figure A2: Quantile regression coefficient estimates of *New European*, SIPP 1984-1993



Notes: The figure plots estimated quantile regression coefficients for the New European indicator variable at the indicated quantiles of the conditional distribution of household net worth (see Section 4.1). Dashed lines represent 95% confidence intervals based on bootstrap standard errors.

Figure A3: Regression coefficient estimates of *New European*, NLSY79 1985-2020



Notes: This figure reruns the analysis in Table 4 for each panel of the NLSY79 from 1985 to 2020. The dependent variable is household net worth in thousands of 2024 dollars. Error bars are 95 percent confidence intervals. Larger confidence intervals partly reflect the higher nominal cutoffs used for top-coding over time (e.g., $5,422,043 in 2016 vs. $16,449,400 in 2020).

10 Additional Tables

Table A1: Average cash ($) at arrival for selected European immigrants to Canada, 1925-1929

Origin	Dollars
Dutch	163.9
Irish	78.2
Italian	75.3
Polish	45.6
Swedish	74.5

Source: Armstrong & Lewis (2017)

Table A2: White household net worth in the SIPP, 1984-1993 (Expanded reference group)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
New European	37.09***	0.32***	36.70***			
	(5.23)	(0.06)	(3.29)			
Italian				22.32***	0.27***	37.10***
				(6.18)	(0.09)	(5.03)
Polish				14.32	0.28**	22.56***
				(8.76)	(0.11)	(6.69)
Russian				171.36***	0.56***	75.40***
				(20.94)	(0.17)	(17.25)
Ukrainian				10.60	0.56*	41.84**
				(19.16)	(0.31)	(20.87)
DV: asinh	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
Method	OLS	OLS	Quantile	OLS	OLS	Quantile

Notes: Net worth is based on self-reported assets and liabilities, adjusted to 2024 dollars using the CPI, and expressed in thousands. The sample includes all survey reference persons aged 30 and over who reported a specific European ancestry. Regressions include controls for age, age squared, sex, marital status, and survey year fixed effects. New European ancestry includes Italian, Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian; the reference group (old European) includes Dutch, English, French, German, Irish, Norwegian, Scottish, Swedish, and Welsh, as well as respondents who answered "Don't know" or "Another group" for their origin or descent. Standard errors (robust for OLS) shown in parentheses. All regressions include 82,091 observations. Significance levels are denoted by * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01.

Table A3: White per capita net worth in the SIPP, 1984-1993

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
New European	-0.28	0.08	7.22***			
	(3.08)	(0.06)	(1.63)			
Italian				-10.02***	0.02	6.11***
				(3.51)	(0.08)	(2.10)
Polish				-10.62**	0.05	0.73
				(4.93)	(0.11)	(2.93)
Russian				69.02***	0.36**	33.80***
				(11.96)	(0.17)	(6.77)
Ukrainian				5.39	0.39	16.38***
				(13.00)	(0.29)	(5.25)
DV: asinh	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
Method	OLS	OLS	Quantile	OLS	OLS	Quantile

Notes: Net worth per capita is based on self-reported assets and liabilities, adjusted to 2024 dollars using the CPI, expressed in thousands, and divided by the number of persons in the household. The sample includes all survey reference persons aged 30 and over who reported a specific European ancestry. Regressions include controls for age, age squared, sex, marital status, and survey year fixed effects. New European ancestry includes Italian, Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian; the reference group (old European) includes Dutch, English, French, German, Irish, Norwegian, Scottish, Swedish, and Welsh. Standard errors (robust for OLS) shown in parentheses. All regressions include 36,442 observations. Significance levels are denoted by * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01.

Table A4: White household gross wealth in the SIPP, 1984-1993

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
New European	18.40***	0.06**	20.93***			
	(5.62)	(0.03)	(3.46)			
Italian				3.13	0.01	20.85***
				(6.48)	(0.03)	(4.72)
Polish				-5.99	0.04	7.03
				(9.10)	(0.04)	(5.12)
Russian				155.41***	0.26***	68.21***
				(20.97)	(0.08)	(16.07)
Ukrainian				4.07	0.24**	24.98
				(21.32)	(0.11)	(26.25)
DV: asinh	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
Method	OLS	OLS	Quantile	OLS	OLS	Quantile

Notes: Total wealth is based on self-reported assets, adjusted to 2024 dollars using the CPI, and expressed in thousands. The sample includes all survey reference persons aged 30 and over who reported a specific European ancestry. Regressions include controls for age, age squared, sex, marital status, and survey year fixed effects. New European ancestry includes Italian, Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian; the reference group (old European) includes Dutch, English, French, German, Irish, Norwegian, Scottish, Swedish, and Welsh. Standard errors (robust for OLS) shown in parentheses. All regressions include 36,442 observations. Significance levels are denoted by * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01.

Table A5: White per capita net worth in the NLSY79, 2020

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
New European	-68.76	0.25	13.13			
	(97.79)	(0.16)	(22.12)			
Greek/Italian				-177.44*	0.27	7.76
				(99.32)	(0.18)	(25.00)
Russian/Polish				111.29	0.20	46.64
				(179.65)	(0.28)	(49.14)
DV: asinh	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
Method	OLS	OLS	Quantile	OLS	OLS	Quantile

Notes: Per capita net worth is based on self-reported assets and liabilities in 2020, adjusted to 2024 dollars using the CPI, expressed in thousands, and divided by the number of persons in the household. The sample includes all survey participants who identify most with a specific European ancestry. Each regression controls for sex marital status. New European ancestry includes Greek, Italian, Polish, and Russian; the reference group ("old" European) includes American, British (English, Scottish, and Welsh), French, German, and Irish. Standard errors (robust for OLS) shown in parentheses. All regressions include 2,073 observations. Significance levels are denoted by * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01.

Table A6: Correspondence of ancestry with reported birthplaces in the 1985 SIPP (First and Second Generations)

	Reported Ancestry Matches Birthplace of				
	Self	One Parent	Both Parents	No Match	N
British/Irish	19.9	30.1	41.7	28.2	156
Dutch	30.8	38.5	53.8	7.7	13
Eastern European	17.1	21.2	75.3	3.4	146
French	30.0	10.0	30.0	60.0	10
German	16.7	40.7	47.3	11.3	150
Italian	18.1	24.2	71.6	3.7	215
Scandinavian	6.4	41.0	48.7	10.3	78
Total	**17.2**	**29.8**	**58.2**	**11.6**	**768**

Source: Survey of Income and Program Participation

Notes: Sample restricted to first- and second-generation respondents. British, Irish, and French respondents with self or parental birthplace in Canada are excluded. Because of changing borders and/or limited response options, "Other Europe" is treated as a valid match for Dutch, Eastern European, and French ancestries. For Germans, 17% report a self or parental birthplace in the USSR, which is accepted as a match, given large-scale German settlement in the Russian Empire. For Eastern Europeans, Austria is accepted as a match, given the former Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Table A7: Marriages for selected ethnic groups in the SIPP, 1984-93

		Reference person's ethnicity													
		Dutch	**English**	**French**	**German**	**Irish**	**Italian**	**Norwegian**	**Polish**	**Russian**	**Scottish**	**Swedish**	**Ukrainian**	**Welsh**	**Total**
Spouse's ethnicity	**Dutch**	144	54	5	66	43	17	4	9	1	8	12	1	3	367
	English	51	1,964	104	580	277	100	27	59	22	135	57	15	32	3,423
	French	8	102	351	120	115	51	14	31	3	30	12	3	10	850
	German	86	505	122	2,409	446	161	99	119	43	133	100	21	31	4,275
	Irish	47	344	99	556	1,062	192	27	80	22	120	45	9	23	2,626
	Italian	14	102	49	186	157	941	18	69	14	13	12	12	4	1,591
	Norwegian	11	44	9	113	25	11	143	8	3	17	28	1	4	417
	Polish	10	66	24	178	87	68	6	413	41	11	16	17	2	939
	Russian	2	29	4	35	8	14	4	34	201	3	3	3	2	342
	Scottish	15	121	27	127	78	16	12	15	5	161	12	3	8	600
	Swedish	10	56	8	86	44	19	27	9	1	19	83	2	4	368
	Ukrainian	1	11	4	16	8	8	3	12	4	4	1	33	2	107
	Welsh	3	29	3	32	9	5	1	3	1	9	3	0	13	111
	Black or Latin	7	64	18	58	56	30	12	16	9	26	12	3	3	314
	Subtotal*	402	3,427	809	4,504	2,359	1,603	385	861	361	663	384	120	138	16,016
	Another group not listed	142	719	247	1,602	712	572	177	328	87	169	184	27	44	5,010
	Total	544	4,146	1,056	6,106	3,071	2,175	562	1,189	448	832	568	147	182	21,026

*Excludes "Another group not listed."

Table A8: White household net worth in the SIPP, 1984-1993 (excluding households of mixed ancestry)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
New European	-20.33***	-0.27***	-13.99***			
	(2.01)	(0.02)	(0.92)			
Italian				18.80**	0.19*	36.22***
				(7.35)	(0.11)	(5.87)
Polish				14.40	0.40***	18.10***
				(10.89)	(0.14)	(6.70)
Russian				149.31***	0.57***	70.61***
				(23.08)	(0.22)	(15.70)
Ukrainian				41.00*	0.95**	61.17***
				(23.45)	(0.38)	(17.48)
DV: asinh	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
Method	OLS	OLS	Quantile	OLS	OLS	Quantile

Notes: Net worth is based on self-reported assets and liabilities, adjusted to 2024 dollars using the CPI, and expressed in thousands. The sample includes all survey reference persons aged 30 and over who reported a specific European ancestry and are not married to a spouse from outside their broad ancestral group (old or new European). Regressions include controls for age, age squared, marital status, and survey year fixed effects. New European ancestry includes Italian, Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian; the reference group (old European) includes Dutch, English, French, German, Irish, Norwegian, Scottish, Swedish, and Welsh. Standard errors (robust for OLS) shown in parentheses. All regressions include 36,440 observations. Significance levels are denoted by * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01.

Table A9: White household net worth in the NLSY79, 2020 (continuous explanatory variable)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
New European (share)	-91.56	0.30	94.91
	(298.32)	(0.25)	(80.86)
Minority (share)	-811.08**	-0.83*	-69.82
	(407.13)	(0.42)	(93.16)
DV: asinh	N	Y	N
Method	OLS	OLS	Quantile

Notes: Net worth is based on self-reported assets and liabilities in 2020, adjusted to 2024 dollars using the CPI, and expressed in thousands. The sample includes all survey participants who identify most with a specific European ancestry. The explanatory variable shown is the share of respondents' reported ancestry classified as new European, where each reported ancestry is weighted equally. The New European ancestry includes Greek, Italian, Polish, and Russian. Old European includes American, British (English, Scottish, and Welsh), French, German, and Irish. All regressions control for sex, marital status, and the share of reported ancestry from groups not listed above. Standard errors (robust for OLS) shown in parentheses. All regressions include 2,073 observations. Significance levels are denoted by * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01.

Table A10: White household net worth in the SIPP, 1984-1993 (controlling for veteran status)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
New European	18.34***	0.11	22.25***			
	(5.60)	(0.07)	(3.44)			
Italian				3.47	0.06	22.00***
				(6.50)	(0.09)	(4.52)
Polish				-4.47	0.08	9.86*
				(9.02)	(0.11)	(5.55)
Russian				153.52***	0.36**	65.92***
				(20.98)	(0.17)	(17.66)
Ukrainian				-9.14	0.37	25.06
				(19.37)	(0.31)	(23.45)
DV: asinh	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
Method	OLS	OLS	Quantile	OLS	OLS	Quantile

Notes: Net worth is based on self-reported assets and liabilities, adjusted to 2024 dollars using the CPI, and expressed in thousands. The sample includes all survey reference persons aged 30 and over who reported a specific European ancestry. Regressions include controls for age, age squared, marital status, sex, veteran status, and survey year fixed effects. New European ancestry includes Italian, Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian; the reference group (old European) includes Dutch, English, French, German, Irish, Norwegian, Scottish, Swedish, and Welsh. Standard errors (robust for OLS) shown in parentheses. All regressions include 36,439 observations. Significance levels are denoted by * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01.

Table A11: White household net worth in the SIPP, 1984-1993 (based on nativity)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Immigrant	29.83**	0.07	16.88*			
	(12.10)	(0.13)	(10.02)			
First or second generation				-19.92	-0.16	6.17
				(17.48)	(0.18)	(10.14)
DV: asinh	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
Method	OLS	OLS	Quantile	OLS	OLS	Quantile
Observations	29,140	29,140	29,140	3,283	3,283	3,283

Notes: Net worth is based on self-reported assets and liabilities, adjusted to 2024 dollars using the CPI, and expressed in thousands. The sample includes all survey reference persons aged 30 and over who reported a specific European ancestry. Immigrants who arrived later than the 1920s are excluded. Regressions include controls for age, age squared, sex, marital status, and survey year fixed effects. Columns 3 to 6 only include data from 1985. Standard errors (robust for OLS) shown in parentheses. Significance levels are denoted by * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01.

Table A12: White household net worth in the SIPP, 1984-1993 (excluding old European first and second generations)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
New European	18.99***	0.12*	22.48***			
	(5.65)	(0.07)	(3.44)			
Italian				4.08	0.07	21.65***
				(6.54)	(0.09)	(4.63)
Polish				-3.73	0.08	11.12**
				(9.05)	(0.11)	(5.36)
Russian				154.03***	0.37**	65.20***
				(20.99)	(0.17)	(16.57)
Ukrainian				-8.27	0.37	24.20
				(19.40)	(0.31)	(23.41)
DV: asinh	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
Method	OLS	OLS	Quantile	OLS	OLS	Quantile

Notes: Net worth is based on self-reported assets and liabilities, adjusted to 2024 dollars using the CPI, and expressed in thousands. The sample includes all survey reference persons aged 30 and over who reported a specific European ancestry. Immigrants who arrived later than the 1920s are excluded. Individuals of new European ancestry who are immigrants, or who have immigrant parents in the 1985 data, are excluded. Regressions include controls for age, age squared, sex, marital status, and survey year fixed effects. New European ancestry includes Italian, Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian; the reference group (old European) includes Dutch, English, French, German, Irish, Norwegian, Scottish, Swedish, and Welsh. Standard errors (robust for OLS) shown in parentheses. All regressions include 35,225 observations. Significance levels are denoted by * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01.

Table A13: White household income in the SIPP, 1984-1993

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
New European	7.77***	0.06**	7.14***			
	(1.30)	(0.03)	(1.20)			
Italian				4.28***	0.04	4.10***
				(1.57)	(0.03)	(1.54)
Polish				3.59*	-0.00	5.97***
				(2.07)	(0.04)	(2.24)
Russian				36.65***	0.28***	27.17***
				(4.94)	(0.07)	(5.54)
Ukrainian				6.30	0.15**	7.64
				(6.89)	(0.06)	(5.78)
DV: asinh	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
Method	OLS	OLS	Quantile	OLS	OLS	Quantile

Notes: The dependent variable is annualized monthly income, adjusted to 2024 dollars using the CPI, and expressed in thousands. The sample includes all survey reference persons aged 30 to 65 who reported a specific European ancestry. Regressions include controls for age, age squared, sex, marital status, and survey year fixed effects. New European ancestry includes Italian, Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian; the reference group (old European) includes Dutch, English, French, German, Irish, Norwegian, Scottish, Swedish, and Welsh. Standard errors (robust for OLS) shown in parentheses. All regressions include 26,740 observations. Significance levels are denoted by * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01.

Table A14: White household income in the NLSY79, 1990

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
New European	16.04*	0.19***	13.23**			
	(9.67)	(0.06)	(6.65)			
Greek/Italian				19.16*	0.23***	19.24*
				(11.37)	(0.06)	(9.90)
Polish/Russian				10.83	0.12	2.65
				(16.14)	(0.09)	(10.04)
DV: asinh	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
Method	OLS	OLS	Quantile	OLS	OLS	Quantile

Notes: The dependent variable is annual income, adjusted to 2024 dollars using the CPI, and expressed in thousands. The sample includes all survey participants who identify most a specific European ancestry. New European ancestry includes Greek, Italian, Polish, and Russian; the reference group ("old" European) includes American, British (English, Scottish, and Welsh), French, German, and Irish. Standard errors (robust for OLS) shown in parentheses. All regressions include 1,970 observations. Significance levels are denoted by * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01.