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'Ethnic wealth inequality in England and Wales, 1858-2018'

Contemporary data reveal substantial socio-economic inequities by ethnicity in England and Wales. However, we know little about the history of this. This paper presents an analysis of ethnic wealth inequality using the universe of death and probate records in England and Wales from 1858 to 1992, and 1996 to 2018. The data report wealth at death for apx. 90 million individuals dying in England. I use these individual records to assign a probable ethnicity to every surname. I normalize the observed wealth of ethnic groups to the average of those with English surnames. The resulting patterns, over time, reveal new evidence on the integration of ethnic groups into the English wealth structure over the 20th century. Relative to the English, migrants are *on average* an elite group with wealth 2-5 times that of the English. However, this advantage has steadily decreased over the 20th century. However, three groups that report consistently lower wealth throughout are those with Swedish, Bangladeshi and Irish surnames. Irish surnames have wealth around 50% of the average English, 1900-1992. The Irish improve their relative status 1858-1900 but persist as an underclass, on average, until at least 1992. Swedish and Bangladeshi surnames present a similar pattern. Using evidence on the living population from the 1999 electoral roll, I report the average house value of all registered voters. Here the relative advantage of migrants is confirmed for 1999, with the Irish now being modestly below the English. The modern picture of concentrated poverty within certain ethnic groups is thus a relatively new feature and represents a reversal of the typical high average status of ethnic groups in England and Wales, 1858-1999. I also present a Theil Index decomposition of inequality into an *individual* component and a *between* ethnic group component. Despite the large differences in the levels of average wealth between groups, the vast majority of variation, 97.5% is between individuals. Finally I argue that this paper represents a n innovation in the use of surnames in historical datasets that can be replicated elsewhere and thus enlighten our understanding of the history of ethnic inequalities.