THE SOCIOECONOMIC ATTAINMENTS OF NIGERIAN AND GHANAIAN AMERICANS: EVIDENCE FROM THE 2014 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY*

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ABSTRACT

Much prior research has investigated the socioeconomic outcomes of African Americans as an overall category but ethnic differentials have received far less systematic attention. We use the 2014 American Community Survey to study the educational attainment and labor market outcomes of 1.5-generation and native-born Ghanaian Americans and 1.5-generation and native-born Nigerian Americans. Among persons aged 25 to 34, Ghanaian Americans and Nigerian Americans have higher levels of educational attainment than non-Hispanic whites or Asian Americans. Among persons aged 25 to 54, Ghanaian men do not differ from white men while Ghanaian and Nigerian women do not differ from white women in terms of occupational status after controlling for education, age, marital status, and the presence of children, but Nigerian men achieve higher occupational status than comparable white men. In terms of hourly wages, Ghanaian men do not differ from white men while Ghanaian and Nigerian women do not differ from white women after controlling for the covariates, but Nigerian men are disadvantaged by about 9 percent. The theoretical implications of these research findings are discussed. Overall, they could be interpreted to suggest that darker skinned tones are no longer an insurmountable barrier to high socioeconomic achievement in the U.S. and that the African American population is increasingly becoming diverse in terms of ethnicity and socioeconomic circumstances.

INTRODUCTION

As a nation of immigrants, research on the U.S. has paid considerable attention to immigrants and their descendants. The study of immigrants regarding their socioeconomic assimilation is a well-established area in social science research (Portes and Zhou 1993; Farley and Alba 2002; Xie and Goyette 2004; Sakamoto et al 2009). Contemporary immigrants from Africa, however, have been much less studied in this literature (Kamya 1997; Sakamoto et al 2010). This neglect is unfortunate due to the theoretical significance of black immigrants (e.g., Waters 1990) as well as the demographic reality that they are one the fastest growing immigrant groups in the U.S. (Capps et al 2012).

The presence of African immigration in the U.S. has a long history, dating back to the colonial era when African immigration was driven by the slave trade (Capps et al 2012). The recent wave of African immigrants, starting during the 1970s, is mostly comprised of voluntary immigrants who emigrate in order to seek better life chances. African immigrants make up a small but growing share of foreign-born persons in the U.S. Today, immigrants from Africa comprise 3 percent of the total foreign-born population in the U.S., but the number of African immigrants tripled during the 1980s and 1990s and almost doubled during the 2000s (Capps et al 2012).

Consistent with findings from the international migration literature in general, contemporary African immigrants are a more selected group in terms of socioeconomic and educational attainments. They have relatively higher educational levels. Many immigrants from Ghana or Nigeria, in particular, have comparable levels of education as to Asian immigrants. Prior studies have suggested that a large proportion of emigrants leaving Nigeria and Ghana are medical doctors leading to a “brain drain” in these two African countries (Reynolds 2002;

Hagopian et al 2004; Hagopian et al 2005). Based on a qualitative analysis, Reynolds (2002) suggests that seeking educational opportunities is the key force that motivates middle-class Nigerian to emigrate. Reynolds concludes her study by stating that unlike Filipino, European, or Mexican immigrants who move to the U.S. by means other than receiving education, education is one of the limited ways for Nigerians to enter the U.S. (Reynolds 2002). In this regard, one generally comparable group are Asian immigrants who also tend to have higher socioeconomic and educational characteristics in the U.S. and who are therefore sometimes thought of a "model minority" (Sakamoto et al. 2009) although this reference is usually seen as being quite controversial (Chou and Feagin 2015).

Immigration assimilation theory suggests that first generation immigrants face many obstacles in the host country. For example, they might lack language proficiency, network, cultural understandings, and educational credentials from the host society, which might attribute to their lower level of occupation and income compared to the native-born persons in the host society (Kim and Sakamoto 2010). The children of immigrants, however, usually have high mobility because their parents provide them many resources to achieve high educational attainment (Alba and Nee). In addition, children of immigrants often possess two cultures, their parents' ethnic culture and the host country's culture which may facilitate higher achievement in the host society. However, comparatively little is known about outcomes for the offspring of African immigrants.

However, Sakamoto et al. (2010) used from the Current Population Survey and the 2000 Census to the study of the attainments of second-generation African immigrants. Sakamoto et al. (2000) find that second generation African Americans have higher educational and income levels than third and higher generation African Americans. They also find that second generation

African American women make similar levels of wage compared to white women, whereas second generation African American men lag behind white men by 16% in terms of wages.

Prior research has grouped all recent African immigrants into one category (often due to limited sample sizes) to analyze their socioeconomic profiles and assimilation process in the U.S. The heterogeneity of the African immigrant population, however, has been neglected. Immigrants from different African countries have different emigration motivation, socioeconomic background, and race that they identify themselves. For example, many of the Nigerian and Ghanaian immigrants are medical doctors and are from middle class. 50% of the immigrants from South Africa identify themselves as white. Immigrants from Kenya are mostly refugees. Therefore, the present study extends previous literature by focusing on socioeconomic attainments of native-born and 1.5 generation Ghanaians and Nigerians. It hopes to shed some lights on assimilation, labor market inequality, and racial/ethnic inequality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

RESEARCH METHODS

Data, Measures, and Target Population

We investigate data from the 5 percent file of the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS is a nationally representative dataset constitutes of the non-institutionalized population in the U.S. We choose to use the 5 percent file in order to obtain as large amount sample for Ghanaians and Nigerians. ACS is a suitable dataset because it is currently the largest available survey that includes information on place of birth, ancestor, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic characteristics, which are key variables in the present study.

As a customary in labor force studies, we limit our sample to persons who were aged 24-54 at the time of the survey. It should be noted that we limit our ages to under 54 instead of 64 to reflect the recency of the contemporary African immigrants in the U.S. As is also common in the literature, we delete those who were not in the labor force, entirely unemployed, or did not report any positive earnings during the previous year. We include several mutually exclusive racial/ethnic groups in the study, native-born non-Hispanic whites (N=2,738,715), native-born non-Hispanic blacks (not including persons of Ghanaian or Nigerian) (N=338,196), second generation and 1.5 generation non-Hispanic Asian Americans (N=86,182), second generation and 1.5 generation Ghanaian Americans (N=239), as well as second generation and 1.5 generation Nigerian Americans (N=667)[1]. We delete those Ghanaians and Nigerians who identify themselves as non-black or Hispanic. In addition, all the demographic groups are "single-race" and "non-Hispanic". It should be noted that we include Asian men and women for comparative purpose because Asian Americans are one other minority group that have comparable educational attainments as Nigerians and Ghanaians. Asian Americans, however, have attracted researchers' attention on their educational and labor market achievement. Including Asian Americans in the study for Nigerians and Ghanaians will help us better understand and interpret the results.

Our dependent variables of interest include hourly wage and the occupational prestige scores for the target population. We obtain hourly wage by using ACS data on annual earnings during the previous year, the hours usually worked per week during the previous year, and the total weeks worked during the previous year. We estimate the total hours worked by multiplying usual hours worked per week by the total weeks worked. We then obtain the hourly wage by

[1] We define 1.5 generation immigrants as foreign-born persons who migrated to the U.S. at the age of 13 or under.

dividing total annual earnings by the total hours worked. We transfer the variable of hourly wage by using the natural logarithm of the hourly wage (log-wage) in the regression models. Because the hourly wage has a high positive skew, the log transformation is applied in order to obtain a more normally distributed dependent variable. The estimated coefficients (when they are not very large in absolute value) are approximately equal to percentage effects. On the grounds of probable measurement error and to ensure more robust estimates by ameliorating the consequences of having extreme outliers, we recode to $1.00 any calculated values on the hourly wage that were originally less than $1.00, and to $750.00 any calculated values on the hourly wage that were more than $750.00. We use the occupational prestige scores provided by Nakao and Treas (1994). We transform the prestige scores to square root of prestige scores in order to obtain a normally distributed variable.

The independent variables of key theoretical interest are the dichotomous variables for the demographic groups including blacks, 1.5 generation and native-born Asian immigrants, 1.5 generation and native-born of Ghanaian immigrants, and 1.5 generation and native-born Nigerian immigrants, while native-born non-Hispanic whites serve as the reference group. We also include a set of control variables indicating demographic (i.e. age, a quadratic for age, marital status, and presence of children in the household), educational attainment in terms of highest level completed (i.e. less than high school, high school or GED, some college or associate degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, and professional degree or doctorate degree), and regional characteristics (i.e. New England, Mid-Atlantic, East North Central, West North Central, South Atlantic, East South Central, West South Central, Mountain, and Pacific). W also included a dichotomous variable live in metro (yes is coded 1 and no is coded 0) to indicate if the respondents lived in a metropolitan area when answering the survey.

Regression Models and Estimation

We estimate four OLS regression models to predict hourly wage and occupational prestige for black, Asian, Ghanaian, and Nigerian persons relative to non-Hispanic white persons. Model 1 is the baseline model without controlling for any covariates. Model 2 controls for the demographic variables. Model 3 introduces educational level to Model 2. Model 4 adds regional characteristics to Model 3. Men and women are analyzed separately. All the results are weighted using personal weight.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Men and Women Aged 25-54

	Men					Women				
	White	Black	Asian	Ghanaian	Nigerian	White	Black	Asian	Ghanaian	Nigerian
Hourly wage ($ of mean)	30.09	21.30	34.28	26.03	25.92	23.42	19.53	30.90	22.94	34.13
Hourly wage ($ of median)	22.75	16.49	25.49	19.93	22.42	18.36	15.44	23.91	15.44	21.80
Log-hourly wage (mean)	3.12	2.78	3.22	3.04	3.01	2.90	2.72	3.15	2.86	3.08
Age (mean)	40.24	39.39	36.38	33.77	33.27	40.50	39.66	36.22	34.36	33.20
Married (%)	61.40	41.65	51.49	37.58	35.94	61.06	31.36	54.03	33.49	42.48
No child (%)	50.93	63.52	60.16	73.18	75.17	44.53	41.50	53.72	56.64	57.98
Highest level of education (%)										
Less than high school	5.54	9.43	3.83	2.19	1.41	3.24	7.03	2.53	1.37	1.41
High school and GED	28.38	37.53	14.29	19.32	14.38	22.21	27.95	11.18	14.75	7.90
Some college or Associate degree	30.48	34.56	26.09	21.87	21.49	33.12	38.75	23.50	25.46	19.06
Bachelor's degree	24.11	13.29	36.02	37.96	37.97	26.60	16.67	38.74	16.64	34.95
Master's degree	7.81	4.03	11.06	12.26	15.24	11.45	7.91	13.64	22.88	23.74
Professional or Doctorate degree	3.68	1.16	8.71	6.40	9.51	3.38	1.68	10.41	8.90	12.94
Total	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)
Region (%)										
New England	5.62	1.72	3.11	4.11	3.13	6.05	1.56	3.30	5.73	3.54
Middle Atlantic	13.21	11.29	13.73	37.71	12.51	13.58	11.49	14.35	34.39	16.16
East North Central	18.24	13.65	6.92	8.89	13.50	18.47	14.37	6.61	5.85	9.17
West North Central	9.18	3.46	3.01	2.11	2.31	9.43	3.22	3.18	0.00	2.92
South Atlantic	18.10	34.90	10.99	24.74	31.77	18.04	35.68	10.61	38.84	19.48
East South Central	6.70	10.53	1.16	0.00	4.18	6.71	10.77	1.18	0.50	2.42
West South Central	9.97	15.11	6.63	5.72	17.96	9.68	15.33	6.42	7.25	21.90
Mountain	7.49	2.41	5.16	6.43	3.09	7.07	1.70	4.89	1.43	1.08
Pacific	11.48	6.94	49.28	10.29	11.54	10.97	5.89	49.46	6.01	13.32
Total	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)
Live in metro area (%)	74.50	85.38	94.94	95.21	95.24	73.44	86.71	95.00	98.23	98.20
Sample size	1,437,162	156,035	44,887	120	313	1,301,553	182,161	41,295	119	354

Note: data is from ACS 2014 5% file. The sample is comprised of respondents who were not enrolling in school when answering the survey.

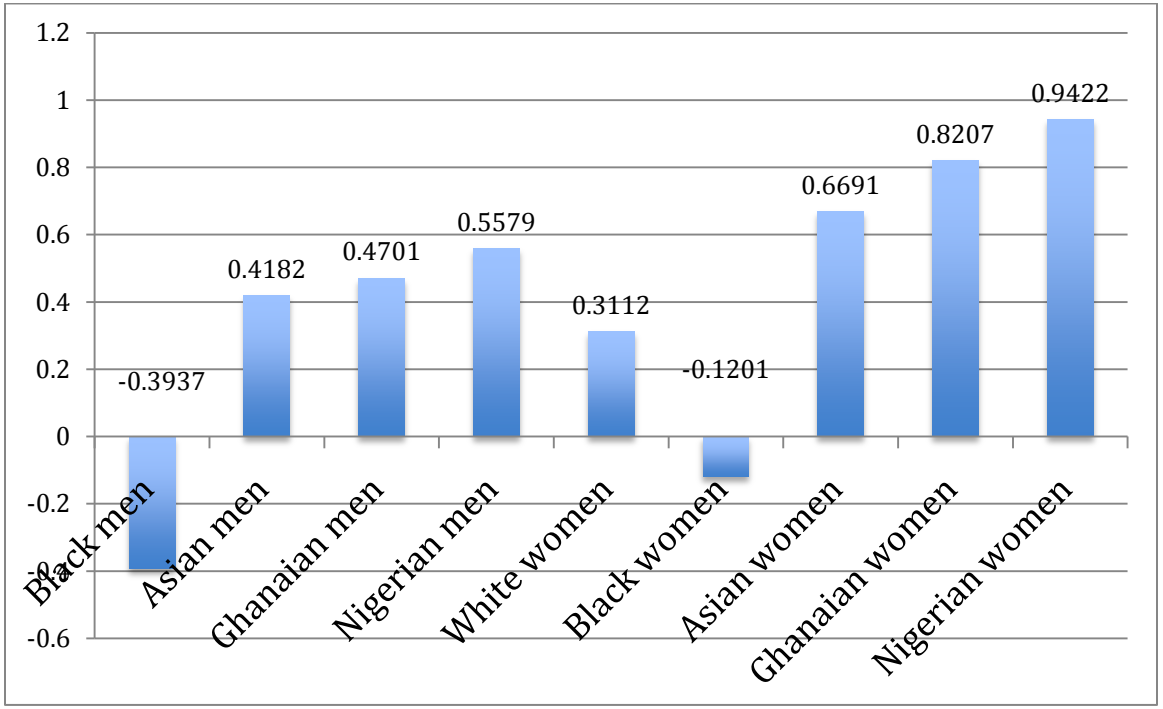
Table 2. Highest Level of Educational Attainment Among Persons Aged 25-34

	Men					Women				
	White	Black	Asian	Ghanaian	Nigerian	White	Black	Asian	Ghanaian	Nigerian
Less than high school	5.30	9.38	3.46	0.23	1.61	2.96	6.73	1.92	1.27	1.33
High school and GED	24.97	32.97	13.54	14.63	10.67	15.78	22.98	8.77	3.35	4.35
Some college or Associate degree	33.56	38.86	28.61	26.61	27.27	33.31	43.39	24.91	29.92	20.10
Bachelor's degree	27.00	14.61	38.50	45.44	41.76	32.61	18.72	42.23	35.86	40.69
Master's degree	6.41	3.39	9.08	8.42	12.84	11.94	6.88	12.89	19.12	21.51
Professional or Doctorate degree	2.76	0.79	6.81	4.66	5.85	3.41	1.30	9.28	10.48	12.02
Total	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)
Sample size	455,345	54,601	23,447	86	281	417,045	66,765	22,564	92	318

Note: data is from ACS 2014 5% file

Sample includes persons who were enrolling in school when answering the survey.

Figure 1. Coefficients of Ordinal Probit Regression predicting Educational Attainments



Note: data is from ACS 2014 5% file

Sample includes persons who were enrolling in school when answering the survey.

The reference group is non-Hispanic white men.

All the coefficients are statistically significant at $p<0.001$ level.

Table 3. Estimates of Regression Models of Square-Root of Occupational Prestige Scores for persons 25-54

	Men				Women			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Demographic Groups								
NH-White	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
NH-Black	-0.5052***	-0.4421***	-0.2619***	-0.2741***	-0.3186***	-0.2387***	-0.1015***	-0.1170***
Asian	0.3039***	0.3665***	0.0976***	0.0885***	0.2666***	0.2782***	0.0523***	0.0488***
Ghanaian	0.1282	0.2690	0.006	-0.0224	0.2882*	0.3666**	0.1328	0.1100
Nigerian	0.4563***	0.6103***	0.2390**	0.2217**	0.3877***	0.4371***	0.0775	0.0537
Demographic Variables								
Age		0.0686***	0.0522***	0.0525***		0.0571***	0.0296***	0.0297***
Age2		-0.0008***	-0.0005***	-0.0005***		-0.0007***	-0.0003***	-0.0003***
Married		0.2404***	0.1015***	0.1060***		0.2748***	0.1463***	0.1481***
Not Married		REF	REF	REF		REF	REF	REF
Have children		REF	REF	REF		REF	REF	REF
Do not have children		-0.0706***	-0.0616***	-0.0627***		0.0373***	-0.0433***	-0.0444***
Educational Attainments								
Less than high school			-0.1381***	-0.1325***			-0.3530***	-0.3523***
High school and GED			REF	REF			REF	REF
Some college or Associate degree			0.3468***	0.3405***			0.4575***	0.4570***
Bachelor's degree			1.0378***	1.0182***			1.0125***	1.0055***
Master's degree			1.3184***	1.2955***			1.3850***	1.3776***
Professional or Doctorate degree			2.1369***	2.1131***			2.0034***	1.9942***
Geographic characteristics								
Region								
New England				REF				REF
Middle Atlantic				-0.0040				0.0047
East North Central				-0.0588***				-0.0529***
West North Central				-0.0832***				-0.0274***
South Atlantic				-0.0739***				-0.0012
East South Central				-0.0755***				-0.0289***

West South Central				0.0046				0.0546***
Mountain				-0.0327***				-0.0376***
Pacific				-0.0787***				-0.0328***
Live in Metro or not								
Metro area				0.1006***				0.0431***
Not in Metro area				REF				REF
Intercept	6.6303***	5.0284***	4.8562***	4.8334***	6.8501***	5.5940***	5.4582***	5.4417***
R-squared	0.0194	0.0420	0.2318	0.2337	0.0140	0.0315	0.2863	0.2875
N	1,638,517	1,638,517	1,638,517	1,638,517	1,525,482	1,525,482	1,525,482	1,525,482

Note: + p<0.1 *p<0.01 ** p<0.05 ***p<0.001 (two tailed test)

Table 4. Estimates of Regression Models of Log-Wage for Persons 25-54

	Men				Women			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Demographic Groups								
White	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
Black	-0.3442***	-0.2737***	-0.1815***	-0.1945***	-0.1789***	-0.1331***	-0.0569***	-0.0465***
Asian	0.1013***	0.1887***	0.0591***	-0.0110**	0.2515***	0.2878***	0.1660***	0.0872***
Ghanaian	-0.0877	0.0948	-0.0381	-0.0854	-0.0411	0.0498	-0.0739	-0.1280+
Nigerian	-0.1081*	0.0906+	-0.0926*	-0.1137**	0.1841**	0.2678***	0.0757	0.0424
Demographic Variables								
Age		0.0671***	0.0593***	0.0596***		0.0713***	0.0571***	0.0577***
Age2		-0.0007***	-0.0006***	-0.0006***		-0.0008***	-0.0006***	-0.0006***
Married		0.2252***	0.1541***	0.1643***		0.1346***	0.0642***	0.0777***
Not Married		REF	REF	REF		REF	REF	REF
Have children		REF	REF	REF		REF	REF	REF
Not have children		-0.1146***	-0.1110***	-0.1140***		0.0581***	0.0126***	0.0076***
Educational Attainments								
Less than high school			-0.1861***	-0.1756***			-0.2180***	-0.2064***
High school and GED			REF	REF			REF	REF
Some college or Associate degree			0.1632***	0.1498***			0.1980***	0.1884***
Bachelor's degree			0.5266***	0.4920***			0.5519***	0.5204***
Master's degree			0.6732***	0.6329***			0.7254***	0.6866***
Professional or Doctorate degree			0.9033***	0.8619***			1.0138***	0.0605***
Geographic characteristics								
Region								
New England				REF				REF
Middle Atlantic				-0.0233***				-0.0352***
East North Central				-0.1316***				-0.1460***
West North Central				-0.1514***				-0.1549***
South Atlantic				-0.1161***				-0.1187***
East South Central				-0.1797***				-0.2047***

West South Central				-0.0921***				-0.1521***
Mountain				-0.1191***				-0.1322***
Pacific				0.0015				-0.0051
Live in Metro or not								
Metro area				0.1352***				0.1559***
Not in Metro area				REF				REF
Intercept	3.1227***	1.4606***	1.3780***	1.3809***	2.8967***	1.2634***	1.1991***	1.1932***
R-squared	0.0236	0.1177	0.2523	0.2659	0.0127	0.0395	0.2074	0.2262
N	1,638,517	1,638,517	1,638,517	1,638,517	1,525,482	1,525,482	1,525,482	1,525,482

Note: data is from ACS 2014 5% file

+ p<0.1 *p<0.01 ** p<0.05 ***p<0.001 (two tailed test)