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White & Undocumented: The Undocumented Experience of Eastern European Dreamers

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WHITE & UNDOCUMENTED: THE UNDOCUMENTED EXPERIENCE OF EASTERN EUROPEAN DREAMERS

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Undocumented immigration has been an increasingly popular topic of conversation in both politics and academia over the past several decades. Studies have shown that undocumented immigrants deal with an array of distinctive difficulties as a result of their lack of legal status. The objectives of this research are to obtain a better understanding of the white undocumented experience through testimonials of young Eastern European immigrants and assessing what role white privilege plays in these experiences. This research is a steppingstone for academic work on undocumented immigration, as very few studies acknowledge the presence of white undocumented immigrants in the United States, or work on understanding their experiences and how they differentiate from the Latinx undocumented experience. Current research focuses almost exclusively on undocumented immigrants from Latin American countries, and the experiences of migrants who came to the United States as adults. It is imperative that we research migrants who came to the United States without status as minors, also known as Dreamers or the “1.5 Generation”, as this subgroup of undocumented people were raised and spent the majority of their lives in the United States and therefore have a much different story from those who came to the country as adults. It is also critical that we speak more about non-Latinx undocumented communities in order for us to better understand the issue of undocumentedness holistically and potentially answer the question of why the United States chooses to focus on Latinx undocumented migrants. This study brings the white undocumented experience to light by interviewing four undocumented immigrants from Eastern Europe for their testimonials on living in the United States without legal status. These testimonials are then compared to previous research that has been done on the Latinx undocumented experience. It is hypothesized that Eastern European undocumented migrants are able to “live in the shadows” more securely due to their whiteness, as much of American society affiliates undocumented immigration solely with the Latinx population.