Timing is Everything: Identifying how the Legacy of Slavery Relationship Changed Over Time

Heather A. O'Connell[1], Katherine J. Curtis[2], Alex Mikulas[2], Jack DeWaard[3], and Junho Lee[4]

[1]Louisiana State University, [2]University of Wisconsin-Madison, [3]University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, [4]Baylor University

Funding: Wisconsin Agricultural Experiment Station; University of Wisconsin Center for Demography and Ecology center (P2C HD047873) and training grants (T32 HD007014); Minnesota Population Center (P2C HD041023)

Legacy of Slavery Research

Previous research indicates a positive relationship between reliance on enslaved labor and contemporary Black-White inequality

Historical Reliance on Slavery → Institutionalized Racism → Greater Inequality (e.g., poverty, school segregation, mortality, etc.)

However, recent evidence suggests this link is **weakening over time** due to the spread of practices associated with the legacy of slavery and **uniformly high inequality**

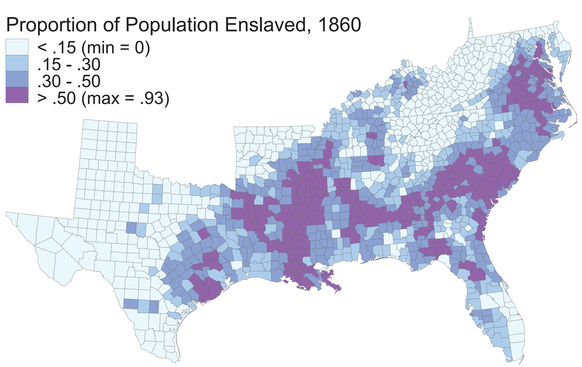
We focus on **when** changes occur to illumiate the dynamics underlying this spread

While a perennial concern, recent protests in the US suggest an even greater need to **understand the historical foundations of Black-White inequality**

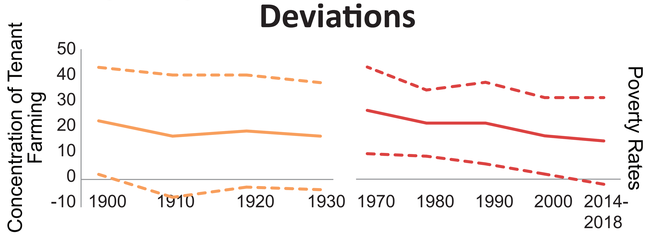
Research Questions

1) Does the slavery-inequality relationship change over time?
2) Do temporal changes vary across states?

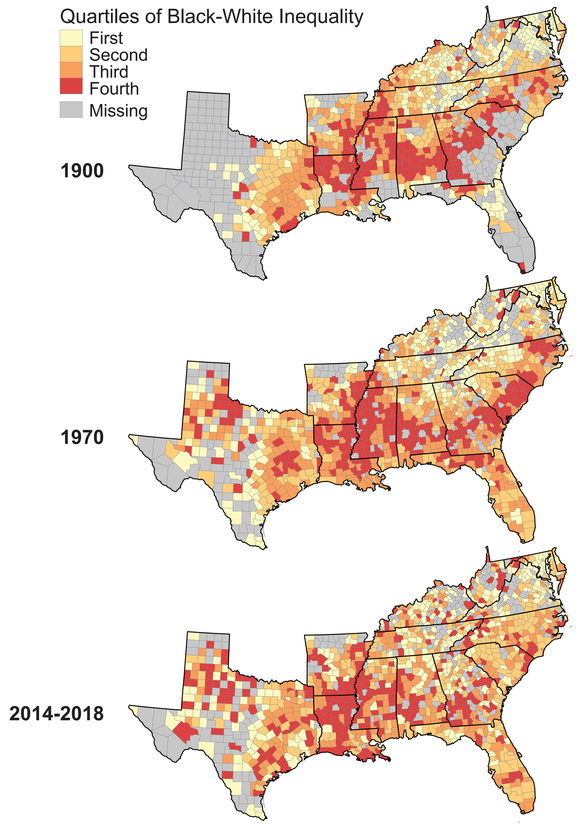
Enslaved Population Concentration in Southern Counties



Average County-Level Black-White Inequality for the South with Standard Deviations



Black-White Inequality Declined over Time, but also Dispersed by 2014-2018



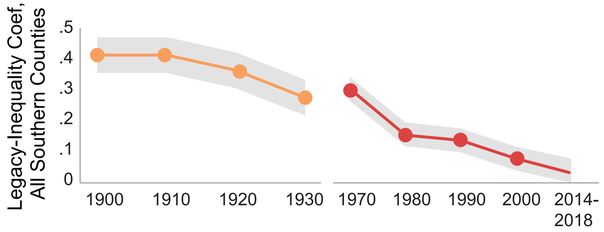
Maps for each of the 9 decades are available at the following website: apl.wisc.edu/shared/changing-legacy

Methods

Integrated Nested Laplace Approximation (INLA)

We allow the slavery-inequality coefficient to vary over time (RQ1) and over time and space (RQ2)

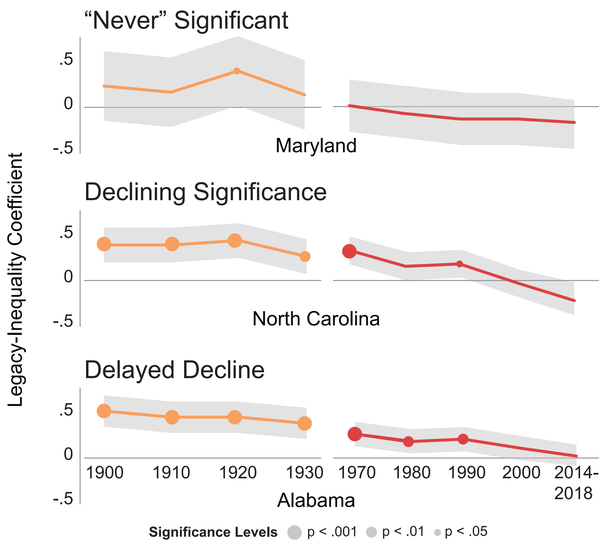
Legacy Persists, but the Relationship Declined substantially by 1980



Time-varying models for the whole region indicate a highly significant (p > .001) relationship throughout until 2014-2018

However, the magnitude declines significantly and is half of what it was in 1900 by 1980 (RQ1)

State Variation in Changes suggest Three Distinct Patterns

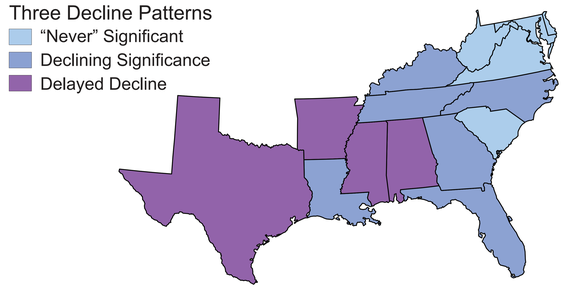


Graphs for each of the 15 states are available at the following website: apl.wisc.edu/shared/changing-legacy

We find significant variation across southern states in the extent and timing of this relationship decline (RQ2)

These distinct temporal trends in the legacy-inequality relationship also exhibit a strong spatial patterning

Geographic Clustering of Decline Patterns



County-Level Census and ACS Data

Focus on differential economic vulnerability

The **official poverty measure** is available starting in 1970

Tenant farming is a reasonable historical alternative given the **precarity** of tenancy

Measures of county-level Black-White inequality were unavailable for 1940, 1950, and 1960

Measures:

Difference in tenant farming concentration
(Black tenant farmers / All tenant farmers)
minus
(White tenant farmers / All tenant farmers)

Difference in poverty rate
Black poverty rate - White poverty rate

Legacy of slavery
Enslaved / Total population (1860)

We identify consistent county boundaries within each period and adjust historical data to match

Conclusions

The local legacy-inequality relationship has **persisted**

But it has also **weakened** over time

Critically, there is **spatial differentiation** in this persistence and weakening

Future research can draw on these findings to identify the pathways supporting the historical foundations of Black-White inequality