Legacy of Slavery Research

Previous research indicates a positive relationship between reliance on enslaved labor and contemporary Black-White inequality. The historical foundations of Black-White inequality are suggested by an even greater need to understand the historical foundations of the US, implying an even greater need to illuminate the dynamics underlying this spread.

We focus on when changes occur to illuminate 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

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 illuminate the dynamics underlying this spread.

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Methods

Integrated Nested Laplace Approximation (INLA)

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

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).

However, 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.