NBER WORKING PAPER SERIES

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Working Paper 32681
http://www.nber.org/papers/w32681

NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH
1050 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02138
July 2024

We would like to thank Shawn Kantor, Marianne Wanamaker, Trevon Logan, John Parman, and Paul Rhode for sharing data. We benefited from the comments of participants in the 2022 Japan Socio-Economic History Society Meetings, the University of Arizona Economics 2020 Summer Workshop, the University of Victoria 2020 workshop, the IPUMS 2021 Data Intensive Research Projects, the NBER Summer Institute, the Yale Conference on Resilience in Economic History, the Virtual Economic History Seminar Sponsored by the EHA and the Cliometrics Society, LERA 2019 Session at the ASSA meetings, 2018 Social Science History Meetings, and the 2018 World Economic History Conference. We received valuable feedback from Dan Herbst, Maggie Jones, Shawn Kantor, Juan Pantano, and Tiemen Woutersen. The authors have no current relevant financial relationships or funding sources to disclose. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Local Administration and Racial Inequality in Federal Program Access: Insights from New Deal Work Relief

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NBER Working Paper No. 32681
July 2024
JEL No. J08,J45,J78,N32,N42

ABSTRACT

We examine racial discrimination in the New Deal by examining access to work relief. The Federal Government prohibited racial discrimination in work relief programs. However, eligibility was determined by local and state administrators. We estimate Black-white gaps in work relief access separately by county. The results show that about 40 percent of Blacks resided in counties with equal or better access than similar whites. Access for Black men was much worse in the South. We find that Black access was better in areas where Black and white workers were complementary and where more public and private resources were available.

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1. Introduction

From the nation's founding well into the 20th century, United States government officials and policies at the national, state, and local level routinely and unabashedly discriminated against Blacks. The numerous ways included support for slavery, Jim Crow Laws, segregated and unequal schools, inadequate protection of civil and property rights, and discrimination in government employment. At some point during the 20th century, parts of the federal government began to disavow discrimination, but it was a slow process. The New Deal offers several examples. The Unemployment Relief Act of March 31, 1933 declared, "in employing citizens for the purposes of this Act no discrimination shall be made on account of race, color, or creed" (U.S. Congress 1933). Harold Ickes, who ran the Public Works Administration (PWA), issued declarations in September 1933 to local contractors that there be no discrimination on PWA programs. The PWA wrote public housing contracts that established requirements that the share of the skilled-worker payroll going to Black workers reflect the local Black share of skilled labor in the 1930 census (Hill 2005, Anderson 2004, 11-13). In Executive Order 7046 establishing employment conditions for the Works Progress Administration (WPA), President Franklin Roosevelt (1935) declared that "workers who are qualified by training and experience to be assigned to work projects shall not be discriminated against on any grounds." After the Federal Works Agency became the umbrella agency for the WPA, PWA, and other public works agencies, they sought to "guard against any discrimination based on race."[1] The Roosevelt administration continued to make anti-

[1]Roosevelt provided for non-race related exceptions that gave preference to people on public relief roles and prevented those in prison, people unable to work, and more than one member per family from being hired by the WPA. The Federal Works Agency (1940, p. 23) stated: "With a view to coordinating racial relations policies of the constituent agencies, in order that all citizens might share in the opportunity for work and in the benefits of its programs, the Federal Works Agency seeks to guard against any discrimination in employment based on race or discrimination in the receipt of benefits flowing from the programs of the constituent agencies." The Federal Works Agency included the Works Projects Administration, Public Works Administration, Public Roads Administration, Public Building Administration, and US Housing Authority.

discriminatory claims during World War II and created the Fair Employment Practices Committee to prevent discrimination by employers against Black workers in defense and government jobs (Collins 2001).

Broad claims at the national level about racial equality were a first step, but were these goals met in practice? We examine how much success the New Deal work relief programs had in guarding against racial inequality in access to emergency work relief jobs. The WPA was the primary organization offering these jobs and it accounted for at least 30 percent of all New Deal unrepayable grants distributed across the country between fiscal years 1936 and 1939 (Fishback, Table 2, 2015a). At its peak, the WPA employed over 3 million people. Although the WPA was expected to guard against discrimination, its success relied upon overcoming the prejudices of local administrators, who determined the eligibility of people for work relief jobs. During the New Deal, the federal government was participating in massive relief policies for the first time and heavily relied on the local and state relief officials already in place. There were contemporary discussions about problems with discrimination on WPA projects in the South and debates among WPA administrators about whether to establish more centralized authority over projects (Donald Howard 1943; Sterner 1943). However, these debates generally relied on state-level aggregate statistics and could not take advantage of the individual data on the characteristics of households available in the 1940 census. To capture variation in treatment across local areas, we examine Black-white differences in each of over one thousand counties with a significant number of unemployed Black males.

Quantifying the differential access to work relief between Black and white workers empirically is complex. This complexity stems not only from regional variations in program administration but also from differences in the characteristics of the Black and white populations.

These characteristics include occupation, education level, family composition, and the degree of economic disadvantage faced during the Great Depression. Public works legislation mandated that jobs should be allocated to those "in need," implying that individuals facing greater economic hardship should have been more likely to secure these positions. Additionally, officials considered other factors such as household size, educational attainment, and recent mobility when distributing jobs (Howard, 1943).

We use data from the 1940 full census to systematically examine racial differences in male unemployment and access to and take-up of New Deal work relief programs, controlling for a wide array of individual and family factors collected by the Census. Because program administration happened at the local level, we estimate the Black-white disparity in access to emergency work relief separately for each county with at least 20 unemployed Black workers. We use those county estimates to summarize the relative access that Black workers experienced nationwide and by region. Then, we explore how local racial disparities relate to local political, economic, and demographic observables.

To set the stage for our main analysis and to provide some historical context, we begin with a descriptive analysis of racial differences in employment and occupational standing in 1940. County-by-county estimates of the propensity of workers to be in the eligible pool for work relief (i.e., either unemployed or on relief) in 1940, adjusting for individual characteristics, show that Black men outside of the South were much more likely to be unemployed than white men in that region. In the South, unemployment rates between Black and white workers were similar.

We next examine differences in access to New Deal work relief between Black and white men in the pool of eligible workers, again separating our analysis by region. We find that in counties outside the South, unemployed Black men were more likely than unemployed white men

to have work relief jobs. In the South, by contrast, only 24 percent of Black men resided in counties in which Black workers had equal or more access than their white counterparts, while 76 percent were in counties with less access. Overall, we estimate that about 40 percent of Black men lived in counties where the New Deal work relief programs in 1940 provided at least as much access to Black men as white men. Compared to previous eras, this is a substantial change in the experience of Black Americans in dealing with governments at all levels. However, our results show that most Black workers in the South had substantially less access to work relief jobs than observably similar white workers. Furthermore, we note that access to work relief at the extensive margin might mask other measures of racial inequality. Black workers on work relief might still have been funneled into lower-skilled work relief assignments with consequent lower earnings.[2]

To better understand the cross-county reasons for racial disparities in work relief access, we estimate the relationship between county-level relative Black access to work relief and a wide range of political, economic, and demographic factors that might have influenced the racial distribution of work relief at the county level. Specifically, we estimate a set of regression specifications in which the dependent variable is the Black coefficient from the county-by-county regression as a function of a set of locality-specific covariates that proxy for factors such as the relative political and economic power of Black residents, discriminatory attitudes, and total amount of government resources.

[2]We had hoped to use the census to compare weekly and hourly earnings for Black and white emergency relief workers for 1939, but measurement error and problems with selection were too large. The census question asked whether someone was on work at the end of March 1940. However, the income and weeks worked questions referred to the entire year 1939. During 1939, the WPA fired a large share of the people on work relief, so many people on work relief in March 1940 likely had earnings for jobs aside from work relief in 1939. Margo (1991) suggested comparing earnings for men who were continuously on work relief for at least 16 months, but this is a highly selected sample. The average Black-white gap in weekly earnings for this sample was -17.9 percent for the nation as a whole, -14.8 in the Northeast, -12.5 in the Midwest, -19.9 in the South, and -8.9 in the West.

The results from this political economy analysis reveal that Black men had more access to work relief jobs in counties where the occupational composition of the white workforce was less like that of the Black workforce. Where the occupational composition was more similar, there was increased competition between Black and white workers for scarce work relief jobs, which increased racial disparities. We also find that when the white population was wealthier, as proxied by home values and tax returns per capita, Black workers also had better access to work relief. Higher relief spending and higher local tax revenue led to relatively better outcomes for Black men. Finally, demographics played an important role. Racial gaps were lower in counties where the percentage of the population that was Black was smaller and where the percentage of whites that were foreign-born was higher, likely because foreign-born whites were also discriminated against. Taken together, our results demonstrate that local administration of a federal program can lead to dramatic geographic variation in program administration and racial disparities in program access.

2. Background

Our paper contributes to a broader literature documenting the disparate impacts of New Deal programs by race. The national pension system in the Social Security Act of 1935 seemed to establish race-neutral rules. Yet, the system excluded workers in domestic service and agriculture, as well as those who were self-employed, which meant that 65 percent of all Black workers in 1930 were excluded, compared with 45 percent of native white workers (Sterner 1943, 214-215).[3] Meanwhile, Black farm workers were disproportionately burdened by the Agricultural

[3] Lieberman (1998, 80-111) describes how eligibility expanded to eventually include Black workers. Alston and Ferrie (1999) and Ira Katznelson (2013) discuss the role of race and southern leaders' opposition to Social Security in the political disputes over the Social Security Act. Fishback (2015b) broadens the discussion to show that southern leaders were joined by leaders from other parts of the country in opposing the act.

Adjustment Administration programs to pay farmers to take land out of production contributed to a drop in the number of share tenants and sharecroppers (Depew, Fishback, and Rhode 2013).

Recent work by economists and economic historians has sought to examine the roles played by the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) mortgage refinance program and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) mortgage insurance programs in contributing to housing segregation. When refinancing troubled mortgages, the HOLC appears to have been helpful to Black borrowers because Black households in 1940 accounted for 4.5 percent of the HOLC loans compared with only 2.5 percent among all other types of lenders.[4] On the other hand, the percentage of Black mortgages insured by the FHA in the 1930s was lower than these percentages. The FHA focused on higher-valued homes and new construction in suburbs, while explicitly avoiding desegregating neighborhoods and focusing on "race and rent" in their instruction for grouping economic areas from block-level information in city property inventories.[5]

In a study of New Deal relief programs, Richard Sterner (1943, 213–323) used state-level means and frequencies from a wide variety of surveys to develop a complex picture of the extent to which Black families had access. He found racial differences in the participation in New Deal programs that varied across programs and states. Sterner also found from surveys in 1933 and 1935 that the share of the Black population receiving relief was higher than the white share of the

[4] There is an ongoing debate about whether the HOLC mapping program developed after they finished their refinancing of a million loans was a significant contributor to later housing segregation. There is no doubt that the segregation documented in the HOLC maps persisted and influenced later housing patterns. The debate centers on how much the creation of the maps themselves contributed to the later segregation. Since the HOLC was essentially done lending and worked hard to keep the maps created from late 1935 through 1941 confidential, the primary mechanism for the influence of the maps would have had to come through use of the maps by FHA officials. The writings of FHA officials show they started their mapping programs well before the HOLC and relied on much more detailed block-level property inventories. Further, they actively promoted access to their maps and information to the private housing sector. In the three cities where comparisons of FHA and HOLC lending has been done, FHA distributions did not change after the creation of the HOLC maps. See Aaronson, Hartley, and Mazumdar (2021), Fishback, LaVoice, Shertzer, and Walsh (2023) and Fishback, Rose, Snowden, and Storrs (2022)

[5] See also Fishback, LaVoice, Shertzer, and Walsh (2023) and Fishback, Rose, Snowden, and Storrs (2022) and many sources cited within.

population in southern cities, but it was lower in southern rural areas. Notably, Black families seem to have fared the worst from the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program, which was largely administered by state and local agencies. Sterner (1943, 282–286) found that the percentage of Black children accepted for ADC in the late 1930s in nearly every southern state was smaller than the Black percentage of children under age 16, even though Black families were more likely to have low incomes. Meanwhile, ADC benefits per child recipient were lower for Black families than for white families in 11 of 24 states with more than 100,000 Black residents, mostly in the South.[6]

Our paper focuses on the role of local program administration in creating racial disparities in access to New Deal public emergency work relief programs in 1940 because the population census from that year provides individual information on who was on work relief, unemployed, working, or out of the labor force in March 1940. It also provides many individual and household characteristics that influenced whether someone was chosen to be on relief. Such rich data are not available for other periods.[7] [8] There were three major federal public emergency work relief programs at the time: the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which started in 1935; the National Youth Administration (NYA) for students and young people ages 16 to 24; and the

[6] Robert Lieberman (1998) added information to the Sterner study by examining the statistics for ADC and Old Age Assistance from state reports for 1940, 1950, and 1960. Unfortunately, he could not obtain race-specific information about the benefits in those years.

[7] There may have been even more scope for local variation in program implementation and racial disparities in access with earlier work relief programs. Under FERA, the national government distributed grants to the states, and then the state and local governments determined how to distribute the funds within the states. FERA head Harry Hopkins became dissatisfied with this system and fought with several states about their internal distributions. Hopkins' dissatisfaction was one of several reasons why the FERA was replaced by the Works Projects Administration (WPA) in 1935 as the primary source of relief (Wallis, Fishback, and Kantor 2006). Under the WPA, state and local officials still played an important role because they determined whether someone was eligible for work relief, while the federal government retained control of the project and its payroll (Howard, 1943). Another important difference is that the federal government made explicit statements about not discriminating with the WPA, but we have found no such statements for FERA.

[8] Robert Margo (1991) used a 1940 Census sample to show that non-whites accounted for a higher share of nonfarm males on work relief than they did for the employed or the unemployed at the national level.

Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) for young men between the ages of 17 and 24 from relief and "marginal" families; about 85 percent were under 21 in 1939 and 1940 (Federal Security Agency, 1940, p. 16). A large share of WPA workers were household heads, while the CCC and NYA workers were secondary earners in the household.[9] In 1939-40, the WPA typically paid about half to two-thirds of the hourly wages paid for jobs on Public Works Administration projects and in the industrial sector depending on the state. Monthly earnings on the CCC of $30 per month were roughly half of the average monthly WPA earnings of $57.50 in 1940. The CCC earnings were mostly paid to the young men's families, but they also received food, bunk beds, and medical care in-kind. The NYA workers typically worked many fewer hours per month with monthly earnings of $4.55 for high schoolers, $12.75 for college workers, $21.14 for graduate students, and for out-of-school workers were $22.10 if in residence or $15.80 if not residence.[10]

Eligibility for each of the programs was determined by state or local agencies. Eligibility for WPA work relief required certification by a state or local relief agency that a person was "employable" and "in need" (Howard 1943, p. 356). In 1940, 97 percent of all WPA workers were certified, the rest were provided exemptions because they were managers or brought special skills to the project (Howard 1943, p. 360). The agencies investigated and determined need by comparing family income to a standard budget that was adjusted for the composition of the family.

[9]Tabulations from the full 1940 census, which asked the question about public emergency work during the week of March 24-30, 1940, shows a total of 1,759,888 workers over the age of 24; 1,318,342 were household heads, and 441,546 were not. There were another 605,385 workers under age 25; 91,114 were household heads and 514,241 were not. Thus, the total number of emergency workers reported was 2,365,273. The Works Progress Administration (1946, p. 37) reported 2,204,009 workers on the WPA on March 27, 1940. The Committee on Long-Range Work and Relief Policies Reporting to the National Resources Planning Board (1943, p. 558) reported the number of non-administrative workers for March 1940 on public employment; 1,734,000 workers were on the WPA, 240,000 were on the CCC, 313,000 worked on the NYA student program, and 269,000 on the NYA out-of-school program. The total was 2,556,000, which is larger than the census report. We believe that the difference of 320,707 between this total and the full census total is largely composed of the 313,000 working in the NYA student program because only 92,320 public emergency workers who were not household heads under age 25 reported that they were attending school.

[10]To compare earnings, see Federal Works Agency (1940, pp. 206, 312, 424-5) and Federal Security Agency (1943, pp. 57, 115-116).

The local schools determined eligibility for NYA school programs and state and local relief agencies certified eligibility of the NYA out-of-school workers and selected the CCC workers (Federal Security Agency, 1940, pp. 13-15, 67-70; Federal Security Agency, 1943, pp. 49 and 85).

The budgets and incomes used by agencies for certifying eligibility varied substantially across the country and in many parts of the South, the agencies defined budget needs differently by race (Howard, 1943, 380-7, 390). The CCC started out selecting from relief families and then expanded the definition to include "boys who were 'unemployed and in need of employment' and who, being otherwise suitable enrollees, 'need the employment, the job training, the educational and other opportunities offered by the CCC; and who themselves, or whose families, due to financial limitations are not in a position to secure or provide comparable experience and training'" Brown 1940, pp. 234, 363-367). The definitions of need and eligibility were hazy enough to vary greatly across areas. In 1936, federal relief administrator Harry Hopkins was asked how many eligible people were not on work relief and replied that it was "a matter of opinion and not a matter of statistical data. One person might say that 100 people are employable and eligible, while another person of equal ability might say that only 50 are employable" (Howard, 1943, p. 448).

3. The Labor Market for Black and White Workers Before and During the New Deal

Because eligibility for work relief was conditional on unemployment and selection into work relief jobs was more likely in certain occupations, we summarize the state of the labor market for Black and white workers in 1940. The data are from the full Census sample for 1940 available from IPUMS (Ruggles, Steven, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, and Matthew Sobek). We restrict our sample to male US citizens between the ages of 18 and 65 years old because only citizens aged 18 and over were officially eligible for work relief.

Table 1 shows unemployment rates (counting and not counting individuals on work relief), prime-age employment rates, and work relief participation by race and region. The work relief participation share is the number of people on work relief divided by the number of unemployed (including those on work relief). The table shows that the unemployment rate in 1940 was nearly 14 percent when including unemployed workers who had relief jobs and just over 9 percent excluding them.

Table 1 reveals important regional differences in the relative labor market status of Black workers. Outside the South, the Black unemployment rate was higher, the Black employment rate was lower, and Black work relief access (as a fraction of eligible) was higher than among white workers. Meanwhile, in the South, the black and white employment rates were the same and the Black-white gap for unemployment was 0.9 or 1.3 percentage points, while the take-up rate for Black workers was 6.8 percentage points lower. These regional differences are illustrated with scatter plots in Figure 1, where each county is represented by a circle that expands with the size of the Black population and a 45-degree line is included as a point of reference. Notably, the raw data visualization in the bottom right panel of Figure 1 previews our later finding that Black workers had higher work relief take-up rates in nearly all counties outside the South and lower take-up rates in most counties within the South.

Education strongly influenced both unemployment rates and take-up rates for both races. In Figure 2 unemployment rates declined steeply with years of schooling, although the slope for Black men in the South was flat through about 12 years. Regional patterns in unemployment rates by educational attainment in Figure 2 are striking. Black men with few years of education faced unemployment rates of up to 40% in the North, where they primarily worked in industrial jobs. In

the South, unemployment rates were kept relatively low across the education spectrum because a large share worked in agriculture.

The relationship between work relief take-up rates and education in Figure 2 shows a reversed J shape with the take-up rate bottoming out around 12 to 13 years of schooling. The pattern likely reflects the nature of work relief employment, which consisted mostly of low-skilled work with only a few managerial positions. Black workers had higher unemployment and take-up rates than whites at all levels of education in the North. In the South, the white unemployment rate was higher than the Black rate below 7 years of education and lower at higher years, while the Black take-up rate for work relief was lower at all levels of education.

To better understand regional differences in labor markets and differences between the two groups of eligible workers, Table 2 summarizes differences in occupational composition among employed workers, workers on work relief, and unemployed workers by race and region in 1940. A few key patterns emerge. First, large fractions of Black and white workers in the South were employed in farming in columns 1 and 2, with almost 50 percent of Southern Black workers employed in agriculture. In other regions, Black workers were primarily employed as non-farm laborers, service workers outside the household, and operatives, while the occupational distribution of white workers was more heavily skewed toward skilled and managerial positions. Columns 3 and 4 show the occupational distributions of workers with work relief jobs in 1940, which are quite different by race but remarkably similar across regions. Though a large share of the unemployed were farm laborers, farming jobs were only a very small share of work relief jobs. The vast majority (75 and 81 percent) of Black workers on work relief worked as non-farm laborers. That occupation makes up a smaller share (56 and 59 percent) of white workers on work relief. Roughly 36 and 39 percent of the white experienced unemployed not on work relief

in column 5 were craftsmen and operators and 34 and 30 percent were laborers, while 18 and 22 percent of the Black group in column 6 were craftsmen and laborers and 59 and 46 percent were laborers.

Black and white work relief take-up rates by state for the 28 states with at least 10,000 Black men in the labor force are presented in Table 3. Outside the South, the Black-white gap in take-up rates ranged from a strongly positive 21.4 percent in Michigan to 2.9 percent in Pennsylvania. Within the South, Washington, DC, Delaware, and Maryland had positive Black-white gaps in take-up rates, while negative Black-white gaps in take-up rates ranged from -2.8 percent in Oklahoma to -15.4 in Mississippi.

To summarize, our analyses of labor market data for Black and white workers in 1940 generate several important insights:

i. In 1940, outside the South, Black workers experienced higher rates of unemployment than white workers and were more likely, conditional on unemployment, to receive work relief.

ii. In Southern counties, by contrast, unemployment rates were similar between Black and white workers and white workers were more likely to be employed by work relief programs.

iii. Work relief jobs were overwhelmingly concentrated in non-farm labor, particularly for Black workers, and the distribution of work relief jobs by occupation is very similar in the South and elsewhere.

iv. Even within regions, there was substantial variation across local areas in the Black-white gap in work relief take-up.

4. County by County Estimation with Individual Data

To examine the determinants of work relief take-up and the role of race in access to relief, we limit the IPUMS 1940 Census sample to Black and white male citizens who reported to the Census that they were on emergency work relief or unemployed during the last week of March in 1940. These are the men who would have been eligible for work relief. Local government officials determined eligibility for work relief, so we estimate separate regressions for each US county with 20 or more Black male household heads and white male household heads who were either on work relief or unemployed. We have a total of 1,413 counties that satisfy this minimum sample size requirement. The sample is limited to US citizens and men aged 18-65 as non-citizens and men under 18 were not eligible for work relief.

In each county, the linear probability model estimating equation is:

$$R_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Black_i + X_i \beta_2 + \varepsilon_i. \quad (1)$$

where R_i is a dummy with value 1 for on work relief and 0 for unemployed. $Black_i$ has value 1 for Black men and 0 for white men; other races were left out of the sample. We include a vector of correlates, X_i, that likely influenced relief officials' decisions about whether to offer work relief or not. Relief officials were directed to give jobs to individuals from households that were most "in need." The controls include a dummy for whether the individual was the household head, household size, number of own children and number under age 5, and number of other household members who were working. Also included were age, years of schooling, home ownership, location on farms, and whether married with spouse present. Many local governments imposed residency requirements, so we include dummies for individuals born in the same state, those living in the same house as in 1935, and people who had moved but still resided in the same state as in 1935. While non-citizens were excluded from work relief, naturalized immigrants were eligible and may also have faced discrimination, so we include a dummy for foreign-born.

4.1 Selection into the Pool of Eligible Workers

To document Black-white differences in the probability that someone ends up eligible for work relief after controlling for correlates, we estimate an equation similar to Equation 1 for each county with at least 20 unemployed Black and white men. The observations for each county include all males in the labor force and the dependent variable is equal to one when the individual was unemployed or on work relief and zero when they were employed in non-work relief jobs. We interpret these regressions as purely descriptive and do not make any claims about how much of the gaps in unemployment were due to labor market discrimination versus other unmeasured factors.

Nationwide, the results show that conditional on observable characteristics, Black workers were much more likely than white workers to be unemployed, and this was especially true outside of the South. The means of the county coefficients weighted by the Black male population in the labor force aged 18 to 65 are shown for different areas in Table 4. A Black man in the labor force was around 12 percentage points more likely not to have a regular job in the Northeast, around 16 percentage points more likely in the Midwest, and 13 percentage points more likely in the West. Meanwhile, in the South, there was virtually no difference in mean unemployment rates between Black and white workers. These results suggest that the raw gaps in unemployment rates outside of the South were largely not driven by differences in observable characteristics.

The regional differences that we observe in unemployment propensity are likely due to differences in industrial structure. In the South, Black men were primarily employed in agriculture, which had low unemployment rates. Outside of the South, Black men were roughly twice as likely to work as craftsmen and manufacturing operatives than in the South. These jobs

paid much better than Southern agricultural work but were also hit especially hard by the Depression. Since many of these men had migrated to obtain jobs in the late 1910s and 1920s, they were often the "last hired, first fired" (Sundstrom 1992). Coefficients from these selection regressions across counties are shown in Appendix Figure C1. The distribution is shown in Figure C2. Outside of the South, 99.2% of Black men lived in a county where the unemployment rate (adjusted for observables) was higher for Black men than white men. In the South, unemployment rates are similar between Black and white men.

4.2 Black-White Differences in Access to Work-Relief

To give a sense of the relationships between take-up rates and the correlates in the analysis we estimate Equation 1 for the nation, the South as a whole, and the area outside the South as a whole. The Black coefficients in Table 5 show that the Black-white gaps in take-up rates still tell the same story as in the raw gaps in Table 1 but are smaller in absolute value after controlling for correlates. At the national level, the raw gap was 5.4 percent in Table 1 compared with a gap after controlling for correlates of 2.17 percentage points. In the South, the two gaps were -6.8 to -4.59 percentage points, and outside the South, they were 11.2 and 7.66 percentage points.

The coefficients on observable characteristics are largely similar between the South and non-South and have the sign predicted by the eligibility requirements for the program. Household heads, men in larger households, and men in households with more children were more likely to obtain relief. Consistent with residency requirements, men who were living in the same state and in the same house as in 1935 were more likely to obtain relief. Men on farms were more likely to receive relief. Relief was less available to people with more resources, including men with more education and men in households that owned the home and had other people employed. Foreign-

born citizens fared worse than Black citizens with take-up rates that were 10 to 12 percent lower than native white workers.

We used the national regressions largely to show how the correlates influenced work relief. We have emphasized that the decisions about who was eligible for work relief were being made by local relief officials and Figure 1 shows the large variation in access across counties. To estimate the Black-white gaps by county after controlling for relevant correlates, we run regression (1) separately for each of the 1,413 counties in our sample. The results, summarized in Table 6, also show the stark regional differences of gaps in work relief take-up. In the Northeast, Midwest, and West, Black men had more access to work relief in counties with 77, 94, and 90 percent of the Black labor force. In the South, only about a quarter of Black men were in counties where they had more access. The county-level coefficients were strongly correlated at 0.94 with the raw gap in work relief take-up.

Figure 3 shows a map of county coefficients, and Figure 4 shows the distribution of the coefficients in the South and outside the South. Both figures clearly show the concentration of Black advantage in work relief outside the South and their disadvantage in work relief access in large parts of the South. Within the South, the counties where Black men had better access to work relief were mostly concentrated in the Piedmont region that stretched from Delaware and Maryland into southeastern Alabama, an area with more mountains that was less conducive to large-scale slave agriculture before the Civil War. Racial gaps in access were largest in Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Kentucky.

5. Political, Economic, and Demographic Factors That Influenced the Differences in Black Access to Work Relief

Thus far, we have focused our discussion on broad comparisons between the South and other regions of the US. However, within each region, the degree of disadvantage faced by Black workers seeking work relief varied across localities. Local administrators distributed opportunities and funds between Black workers and white workers based on the interests of the voting public, key economic stakeholders, and their own personal interests and ideology. In the South, restricted voting rights for Black individuals meant that the electorate was dominated by white voters with an array of discriminatory attitudes. White voters were always the median voters and the voters at higher percentiles of the electorate in situations where the winning candidate was seeking to claim a larger mandate to follow through with policies.[11] The same was true outside the South, but Black people had some political clout as swing voters. In all areas of the country, major economic actors—employers, the wealthy, and other organizations like churches, unions, and clubs—likely influenced political decisions through donations and the ability to stimulate turnout during elections and support between elections.

This way of organizing thinking about the political process suggests a series of correlates that can be grouped in the following way: political power and agency of Black residents, factors related to white attitudes toward Black people, factors that influence the economic interests of white residents based on the extent to which Black workers were complements or substitutes to white workers, the extent of the downturns during the 1930s, the presence of foreign-born workers, attitudes associated with political parties, and the availability of resources to combat the problems in the form of local and state revenue and of federal funds to the area.

[11] We do not emphasize a median voter model because we believe the political economy of local governments involves a mixture of winning elections, seeking mandates in elections, and satisfying key interest groups, like employers, who have economic power but account for relatively small shares of the electorate, such as employers. While people on relief boards were not elected, they were generally appointed by elected officials.

To estimate the relationships between access to work relief and various political and economic variables, we look at correlations between the county-level Black coefficient estimates from equation 1 and county-level variables that capture many of the factors described above. The sources of data for the covariates in this analysis are listed in Appendix A and the variables are described in detail below.[12]

For each correlate, we estimate the following cross-sectional regression for the U.S., the South, and the non-South,

$$Access_c = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 X_c + \alpha_2 South_c + \epsilon_c \quad (2)$$

$Access_c$ represents the estimate of the access to work relief for Black men compared to white men in county c. It is the coefficient on the dummy variable $Black_i$ from individual-level regressions for county c in equation 1. X_c is a county-level variable that may have influenced the decisions of local relief officials, and ϵ_c is a stochastic error term that includes unmeasured factors. We estimated each regression separately for each correlate. These regressions are meant to be descriptive and not causal. Because many of the variables are strongly correlated with each other, we find separate univariate regressions to be easier to interpret than multivariate regressions including all variables. This is similar to the descriptive results used by Chetty et al. (2020), which correlate attributes of neighborhoods with their upward mobility by race

Because of the different voting environments in the South and the rest of the country, we include a South dummy in the national regression. The equations are estimated using weighted least squares with the number of adult Black males in the county as weights. We did not include

[12] We do not have political and economic data on all counties. In the analysis below we use a sample of 1,308 counties where we have all covariates available.

state fixed effects to capture correlations across all counties within the region and not just correlations within state borders.

Figure 5 shows results from each of these regressions on the national level. Figure 6 shows the coefficients separately for the South and non-South (in these we remove the South dummy). Each of the X_c correlates variables has been normalized by its standard deviation, and each coefficient in Figures 5 and 6 comes from a separate regression. Unless stated otherwise, the coefficients discussed below are statistically significantly different from zero. The discussion of the variables and results are organized by theme in the subsections that follow.

5.1 Political and Economic Power of the Black Population

Jim Crow laws kept most Black citizens from voting in southern states, but Black people outside the South could vote. Although they composed a relatively small percentage of voters, they had power as swing voters. Doug McAdam (1999, pp. 98) and Ralph Bunche (1973, 572-606) find that Black voters had a significant influence on elections in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia in the 1920s and 1930s. Prior to the New Deal Black support primarily went to Republicans. After the start of the New Deal, Jill Watts (2020, pp. 142-3, 192-3) and Bunche (1973, pp. 572-606) provide evidence that both Democrats and Republicans competed more to woo Black voters. Higher Black population shares would have given them more swing voting clout.

On the other hand, discriminatory attitudes also were likely influenced by the Black share of the population. In his studies of labor market discrimination, Gary Becker (1971) argued that higher Black shares of the population would lead to more wage discrimination because Black workers would be forced to accept more jobs from employers with stronger tastes for discrimination. Similarly, white voters faced with a large Black population share and limited

budgets likely feared that whites would not get the desired level of government resources if Black people and white people were given the same treatment.

The evidence is more consistent with Becker's theory of discrimination, particularly outside the South. A one-standard deviation (OSD) increase in the Black population percentage was associated with a 3 percentage-point drop in relative Black access to work relief in the South. In regions outside the South, it was associated with nearly a 10 percentage-point drop.

While a higher Black population share led to lower work relief access for Black men, other measures of Black political and economic power correlate positively with better access. We use Years since first NAACP Chapter, the Black Homeowner Share, and the Percentage of Black Workers that are Professional as proxies for Black political and economic power. All three have positive and statistically significant relationships with Black access to work relief in the national regression; the relationships are stronger in the South than outside the South. In the national regression counties with an OSD higher percentage of Black workers had relative Black access that was over 4 percentage points higher, the strongest of all the relationships shown in Figure 5. The OSD effect was even higher in the South, where it was the second strongest relationship.

5.2 Discriminatory Attitudes

White attitudes toward Black people varied across the country and likely influenced the local relief processes. We have two measures that capture negative attitudes of whites toward Blacks. The first measure is based on the number of Black individuals lynched in each county from 1900 to 1939, using data compiled by Beck and Tolnay (2021) and Sequin and Rigby (2019). The second measure is a housing segregation index from 1930, developed by Trevon Logan and John Parman (2017), which quantifies residential separation between races in both rural and urban

areas. We expect that higher levels of housing segregation would be consistent with more discriminatory attitudes and less access to work relief.

Black relief access was negatively associated with lynching in the national and South regressions, but the OSD relationship was less than one percentage point. Outside the South where lynchings of Blacks were much rarer, the relationship was positive but with a much wider confidence interval. [13]

Contrary to our expectations, Black access was higher by about 2 percentage points in areas with an OSD higher segregation index. This finding might reflect a peculiarity in white attitudes toward Blacks in which they were less opposed to providing relief benefits to Blacks when they were assured that the Blacks were confined to housing areas that were not close by.

5.3 Occupational Distribution

Attitudes towards Black workers receiving work relief jobs were likely influenced by the extent of differences in the occupational distribution of local whites and Blacks. In areas where Black workers were complements in production for a significant number of whites, whites and their employers would have tended to press local governments for better access to work relief for unemployed Black households to keep Black workers in the area so that they could be rehired when the economy turned upward. In contrast, white workers who were competing as substitutes for Black workers likely would have pressed for reduced work relief access for Blacks because they would have seen these workers as competitors for their jobs in the short and long run.

To analyze the effects of occupational overlap between Black and white workers on Black relative access to relief, we create an index of occupational difference using the 1930 census. For

[13] In our sample, the average non-Southern county had 0.1 lynchings between 1900 and 1939 and the average Southern county had 1.7 lynchings.

a set of 275 possible occupations, we calculate the difference in each county between the share of employed Black workers in that occupation and the share of employed white workers in that occupation. We then take the absolute values of those differences and sum them across all occupations within each county. The resulting index potentially ranges from 0 when the distributions are identical to 2 when there is no overlap in the distributions. Across counties in our sample the index ranges from 0.19 to 1.64, with a mean of 0.94. Appendix Figure C3 presents kernel densities for this index, separately by region. The figure shows much greater occupational overlap in southern counties than in counties outside of the South. It also reveals substantial variation across southern counties in the degree of occupational overlap between Black and white workers. Appendix Figure C4 shows the raw associations at the county level between our index of occupational overlap and the Black coefficients from the work relief regressions. In both regions, that association is positive---counties with less occupational overlap between Black and white workers have better access to work relief for Black workers.

In counties where the occupational index difference was OSD higher, Blacks had 4 percentage points greater access to work relief relative to whites. This finding largely fits the predicted pattern that support for providing access to work relief for Blacks was higher where they were complementary workers. The results in Figure 6 show that this pattern was more important in the South than in other regions. The OSD effects of the occupational differences were larger than for most other correlates. In the national regressions, the OSD effect of the occupational share was the second largest, and it was the fourth largest in the South regressions.

5.4 Economic Status of White Households

Measures of white wealth and the number of elites in the top part of the income distribution potentially affected Black access to work relief access in several ways. First, a larger number of

poor and unemployed whites would have increased their demand for work relief jobs, potentially at the expense of unemployed Black workers. Second, in counties where whites had higher wealth and income, white elites may have had complementary work relationships with Black workers and thus may have pressed for more favorable treatment of Black people on work relief. Third, higher wealth and income also provided more taxable resources that could be used for work relief and thus relieve some of the Black-white competition for the relief jobs.

Our measures of the economic status of white households are the share of white households that own their home, the average value of white homes, and the number of federal tax returns filed in 1929 per family. The number of tax returns is a good measure of incomes at the top end of the income distribution because the minimum income levels at which households were required to file (2000 for individuals, 5000 for a family of four) were high enough that less than 10 percent of households filed in the 1920s and 1930.

The results in Figures 5 and 6 show that counties where average white home values were higher and where tax returns per family were higher had OSD relationships with Black access of close to 4 percentage points in the national and South regressions, and between 2 and 3 percent in the North regressions. These were among the most positive OSD relationships in the national and South regressions.

5.5 Economic Activity

Given limited government resources, white residents might have been less inclined to support Black work relief access in areas with less economic activity in the long run and in areas hit harder by the Great Depression. Our long-term measure of economic activity is retail sales per capita in 1929 and the measure of the depth of the Depression is the percentage drop in retail sales per capita between 1929 and 1933, which is more positive when retail sales dropped more. Black

relative access was about three or more percentage points higher in areas with an OSD more in retail sales per capita in all three regressions. In the national and South regressions an OSD larger drop in retail sales in the early 1930s was associated with 2 to 3 percentage points lower Black access. The opposite was true in the non-South regressions.

5.6 Party Politics

Through the early 1930s, the Republican party tended to have more support among Black voters going back to President Lincoln and Reconstruction under the Grant administration. It is not clear how much support Republicans provided thereafter, although they were the beneficiaries of Black voting. Franklin Roosevelt was the first Democratic presidential nominee to win a majority of the Black vote. To capture the impact of national attitudes based on political party, we included the mean percentage voting for Democrats for President during the presidential elections from 1896 to 1928 and then a measure of the swing to Roosevelt in 1932 calculated as the percent voting for Roosevelt in 1932 minus mean voting Democrat from 1896 to 1928.

Consistent with Republican support by Black voters, Black access was lower in the areas with more Democratic votes for president in the long run. Meanwhile, the swing to Roosevelt in 1932 was not correlated with Black access in the South, although the OSD effect was between one and two percent outside the South where Blacks had more access to the vote.

5.7 Availability of Government Resources

Another category of variables captures the availability of government resources to deal with the problems of the Depression. From the Census of Governments in 1932, we have estimates of the amount of revenue available at the county level to all local governments (county, town and city, school district). These include grants and subventions distributed by the state government. We included measures of New Deal federal relief payments per capita from 1933 through June

1939, and public works grants per capita from 1932 through June 1939 to give a sense of the federal resources poured into the county during the decade. It is possible that increased resources available in the county would have made it more likely for the white electorate to support work relief for Black people given their own situations.

Areas with an OSD higher work relief per capita had Black access that was about 4 percentage points higher in the South and 1.5 percentage points higher outside the South. Black access was about 2 percentage points higher in the South with an OSD more in public works spending, but the relationship was negative and statistically insignificant outside the South. Local government revenue in 1932 was associated with higher access for Black men. These findings all suggest that more government resources in terms of local tax revenue and federal relief spending led to relatively better access to work relief for Black men.

Finally, AAA spending per capita was negatively associated with relief access for Black men. The AAA spending was designed to take land out of production to reduce output with the goal of raising farm prices. There are numerous narratives from the 1930s that suggest that the demand for farm labor fell and several landowners found ways to ensure that they and not their tenants or croppers received the AAA payments, including by reducing opportunities for tenants and croppers. Depew, Fishback, and Rhode (2013) used county-level data on cotton AAA payments and found that the payments were associated with reductions in the number of white and Black sharecroppers and Black managing tenants even though it was a violation of AAA contracts for landlords to displace these workers. The negative impact of the AAA on relative Black access to work relief in this paper suggests that the disproportionate impact of the AAA found for Black tenants increased the Black share of the pool of unemployed and made it more difficult for Blacks to obtain work relief.

5.8 Population and Foreign-Born

The results from the individual regressions show that foreign-born workers were given even less access to work relief than Black workers. It is possible, therefore, that Black workers would have been more likely to receive work relief when there was a significant share of foreign-born in the population.

Indeed, the results show that Black workers had better access to relief in areas where white residents were more likely to be foreign-born. Within the South, this variable had the highest positive OSD effect on work relief access. The impact was less pronounced outside the South. A higher share of foreign-born in the population, particularly non-citizens, likely relaxed the resource constraints for providing relief to Black and white citizens in the county because non-citizens were ineligible for work relief. With more resources per unemployed citizens, it made it easier to provide Blacks with access.[14] Finally, larger populations were associated with better access to work relief for Black men, perhaps because relief officials in urban areas were relatively less discriminatory than in rural areas.

In summary, Black men had higher access to work relief in counties where the occupational distribution of Black and white workers was more dissimilar, in counties where the population share of Blacks was smaller, in counties that were less economically distressed and had wealthier white households, in places that received more relief spending, and in places where the white population had more immigrants. These findings suggest that the primary factor influencing disparities across counties within regions was the competition between Black and white native men for jobs in general, as well as for the limited number of work relief jobs. In places where

[14] It is also possible that relief boards discriminated more against foreign-born citizens than against Blacks. The regression results on take up rates in Table 5 show that foreign born citizens were less likely to receive relief than Black workers, and this was true in a large share of the county level regression results (not shown) as well.

whites had less demand for relief, or where relief was more abundant, unemployed Black men did better. Within-region differences were driven by our racial animus measures to only a small degree. However, it is probable that regional disparities, particularly in the Deep South, were influenced by discriminatory attitudes held by local relief officials.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

In the 1930s, several New Deal relief and public works agencies became the first government organizations in American history to declare a goal of eliminating racial discrimination in the operation of their programs. Their success at reaching this goal, however, depended upon the racial attitudes of the local people who were administering the relief programs in the counties, cities, and towns throughout the U.S. Using the 1940 Full Count U.S. Census, we explored Black-white differences in access to emergency work relief across counties.

The federal government's success at meeting the nondiscrimination goal was mixed, and as expected, it depended heavily on location. The results of the analysis suggest that a goal of at least equal access for Blacks relative to whites with similar observable characteristics was met in areas where roughly 40 percent of the Black population resided. In the Midwest and West, over 90 percent of blacks had at least equal access, the share was 77 percent in the Northeast, and it reached 24 percent in the South.

The relative access to market jobs also varied. Outside the South, Blacks were much more likely than whites to end up without regular jobs. Blacks were often "last hired, first fired." The pattern for Blacks outside the South of higher unemployment but similar or better access to work relief once unemployed might have developed because employers laid off their Black workers and lobbied the government to provide benefits to them to keep them in town to be rehired when the

economy improved. The South did not appear to follow the same path as employment rates for whites and Blacks were roughly equal.

To help explain the variation in relative Black access, we examined the factors that might have contributed to the differences across counties. Successful Blacks had some degree of agency in determining the variation. They had relatively better access to work relief in areas where the NAACP had been active longer and where there was a higher share of Black professionals. Blacks' roles as potential swing voters that aided Republican victories outside the South were rewarded in the sense that they received more relative relief access in areas where fewer people voted Democrat for president. Outside the South where Blacks could vote, we also had thought that a higher Black share of the population might have given them more swing voting power, but Black relative access to work relief was negatively related to the Black population share. The finding is more consistent with Becker's prediction that increases in the Black share of the population led to an increased likelihood of having to deal with discriminators.

Given the limited political power of Blacks, much of the variation was related to factors that would have influenced white attitudes toward their welfare. Black men had better access to work relief in counties where Black and white occupational distributions were more dissimilar. In such settings, Blacks and whites were likely to be complements in production. Whites seeing Blacks as complementary workers would have provided more support to the government to provide work relief benefits to unemployed Blacks. In a similar vein, Blacks also had better access to work relief in areas where whites owned homes with higher value and where more households earned enough income to pay federal income taxes. When the Black and white occupation distributions were similar, the groups competed for jobs as substitute workers with consequent greater white opposition to government benefits for Black households.

The results also show that Blacks had better access to work relief in counties with more economic resources per person available. Black access was higher in counties that fared better economically with higher retail sales per capita in 1929 and less of a drop in retail sales per capita during the Great Depression from 1929 to 1933. Greater New Deal largesse to counties in the form of higher spending per capita on relief and public works also provided more resources that opened the door to better black access. Blacks also fared better when the foreign-born were a higher share of the population, which might partially be due to more resources for people eligible for work relief. Only citizens had access to work relief, which meant that foreign-born non-citizens could not draw work relief jobs away from Black and white citizens.

Before the New Deal, local governments and state governments had the responsibility to provide aid to the poor. When the federal government joined poverty relief efforts during the New Deal, the feds provided the funds but still relied on state and local governments to determine who would have access to relief. The positive findings about access, where roughly 40 percent of Blacks resided in counties with better or equal access, do not imply the complete absence of work relief discrimination in those areas. Blacks might have received unequal treatment on other margins of work relief, like assignment to jobs or differences in pay, although federal administrators had more control of those margins on the WPA projects once the local administrators determined who was eligible. Even though we could only effectively examine access, the findings here show that the New Deal work relief programs were highly unusual among government programs up until that time because they claimed a goal of race neutrality and were able to follow through in areas where many Blacks lived. Although incomplete, this was a significant step forward in government treatment of Blacks.

The issue of state and local administration of poverty programs and many other government programs has continued to influence anti-discrimination efforts ever since the 1930s. The Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* 1954 decision was only the start of a multi-decade process of eliminating segregated schools area by area. The later Civil Rights legislation and court decisions followed a similar path. Eliminating discrimination has therefore required a combination of 1) changing the attitudes of the local population and government administrators, which were partially influenced by the competition between white and Black households for local jobs and economic resources; 2) building the economic and political strength of the Black population; and 3) changing the institutional structure for enforcing the anti-discrimination laws. Measuring the success of anti-discrimination efforts in America therefore requires assessment of the changes not only at the national level but also at the local and state level.

Appendix A - Sources of Political Economy Variables

Variable	Sources:
Percent Black, 1940	Haines ICPSR 2896
South	Census Four Region Definition
Democrats Avg. Percent of Presidential Votes, 1896-1928	Dataset Used by Fishback, Kantor and Wallis (2003), located at Fishback and Kantor Open ICPSR (2018
Swing to Roosevelt in 1932	Dataset Used by Fishback, Kantor and Wallis (2003), located at Fishback and Kantor Open ICPSR (2018
Segregation	Dataset used by Logan and Parman (2017).
Lynching of Black People 1900-39	See Appendix C
Years with NAACP Chapter	Constructed from Listings in dataset from Estrada and Hermida.
% Black Homeowners, 1940	Constructed from 1940 Census, IPUMS V6.0. Ruggles, et. al.
Share of Professionals Among Black People	Constructed from 1940 Census, IPUMS V6.0. Ruggles, et. al.
Per Capita Relief	Dataset Used by Fishback, Kantor and Wallis (2003), located at Fishback and Kantor Open ICPSR (2018)
Per Capita Public Works	Dataset Used by Fishback, Kantor and Wallis (2003), located at Fishback and Kantor Open ICPSR (2018)
Retail Sales Per Capita, 1929	Dataset Used by Fishback, Kantor and Wallis (2003), located at Fishback and Kantor Open ICPSR (2018)
Minus % Chg. Retail Sales per Capita, 1929-1933	Dataset Used by Fishback, Kantor and Wallis (2003), located at Fishback and Kantor Open ICPSR (2018)
Ln (Population), 1930	Dataset Used by Fishback, Kantor and Wallis (2003), located at Fishback and Kantor Open ICPSR (2018)
Black-white occupational differences	Constructed from 1940 Census, IPUMS V6.0. Ruggles, et. al. and authors calculations
Percent Foreign Born among White People	Constructed from 1940 Census, IPUMS V6.0. Ruggles, et. al.
Share of White People Who are Homeowners	Constructed from 1940 Census, IPUMS V6.0. Ruggles, et. al.
Average Value of White Owned Homes	Constructed from 1940 Census, IPUMS V6.0. Ruggles, et. al.
Local tax collections per family	U.S. Bureau of the Census (1935). Financial Statistics of State and Local Governments: 1932. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1935. Tables 1 and 3. Data computerized by Paul Rhode.

Appendix B – Construction of Lynching data

We started with the version of the data set for the South from August 12, 2021, collected by E.M. Beck and Stewart Tolnay (E.M. Beck and Stewart E. Tolnay, Inventory of Southern Lynch Victims as of 12 August 2021, University of Georgia). We contacted them through the CSDE Lynching Database site (http://lynching.csde.washington.edu/#/home), which is operated in conjunction with Amy Kate Bailey. We then added observations from a non-South data set designed to supplement the Beck-Tolnay dataset and developed by Charles Seguin and David Rigby (2019). (Seguin, Charles and David Rigby. 2019. "National Crimes: A New National Data Set of Lynchings in the United States, 1883 to 1941." Socius 5:2378023119841780.). We downloaded it from https://osf.io/kr8yc/ on November 22, 2021.

The non-South data set had some overlap in states with the Beck and Tolnay dataset; therefore, we went through and removed duplicates. Most often the names, dates, and locations were the same. In a few cases, the names and locations were the same, but the dates were off by 1 to 3 days. We treated those as duplicates. In some cases, the names were unknown while the dates and locations were the same, so those were treated as duplicates. In a couple of cases, the non-South data had more unknowns than the South data. In that case, we used the Beck-Tolnay dataset as the data.

The counties reported were the counties at the time of the lynching. There were several county boundary changes between 1900 and 1930. We investigated the situations with those changes. We calculated decade totals for the 1930s, 1920s, 1910s, and 1900s. If the county boundary changes occurred during the decade in question, say the boundary changes were in the 1900s and the lynching occurred in the 1900s, the lynchings were divided by the number of counties involved in the boundary changes. If the county boundary changes occurred after the

decade in question, say the boundary changes were in the 1910s and the lynching occurred in the 1900s, the lynchings were divided by the number of counties involved in the boundary changes. If the county boundary changes occurred after the decade in question, say the boundary changes were in the 1900s and the lynching occurred in the 1910s, the lynchings were assigned to the county where they were stated as occurring.

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Table 1

Labor Market Status of Black and White Males in March 1940

				South		Non-South	
	All	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White
Unemployment Rate, With Relief	13.8	17.0	13.5	12.0	11.1	32.4	14.3
Unemployment Rate, No Relief	8.7	9.9	8.6	7.3	6.0	17.9	9.4
Employment Rate (ages 18-54)	76.8	73.5	77.2	78.9	78.9	57.4	76.6
Work Relief Take-up Rate	37.0	41.8	36.4	39.2	46.0	44.9	33.7
Number in labor force (1,000s)	40,027	3,624	36,404	2,707	9,428	917	26,976

Notes: Work relief refers to employment on any federal emergency relief project. The sample includes men ages 18-65. Work relief take-up rate is calculated as (unemployment including relief workers minus unemployment without relief workers) divided by unemployment including relief workers. Source: authors' calculations using a sample of Black and white men in the 1940 U.S. Full Count Census (Ruggles et al. 2015).

Table 2

Occupational Distributions of Males by Race, Group, and Region in 1940

	Share of Employed Pop		Share of Work Relief Pop		Share of Experienced Unemployed	
South	**White**	**Black**	**White**	**Black**	**White**	**Black**
Professional and Technical	5.2%	1.8%	2.3%	1.3%	2.2%	1.0%
Farmers and Farm Managers	23.4%	25.9%	1.8%	1.0%	3.0%	1.6%
Managers, Officials, and Proprieters	9.6%	1.0%	1.3%	0.1%	2.6%	0.3%
Clerical and Kindred	5.7%	0.6%	5.8%	0.8%	3.9%	0.4%
Sales Workers	6.0%	0.6%	0.4%	0.1%	4.7%	0.5%
Craftsmen	12.7%	3.5%	12.8%	3.2%	16.9%	5.4%
Operatives	15.7%	11.0%	7.9%	4.4%	19.4%	12.8%
Household Service Workers	0.2%	2.8%	0.2%	0.4%	0.4%	4.1%
Service Workers Outside Household	3.3%	8.2%	3.7%	3.1%	3.1%	8.3%
Farm Foremen	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Farm Laborers	10.6%	23.3%	3.2%	3.6%	13.7%	15.6%
Non-Farm Laborers	6.8%	20.6%	59.4%	80.7%	22.4%	43.1%
Unspecified	0.7%	0.6%	1.3%	1.3%	7.7%	6.9%
	Share of Employed Pop		Share of Work Relief Pop		Share of Experienced Unemployed	
Non-South	**White**	**Black**	**White**	**Black**	**White**	**Black**
Professional and Technical	6.6%	3.8%	3.5%	2.2%	3.2%	2.5%
Farmers and Farm Managers	11.2%	1.4%	0.9%	0.3%	0.9%	0.4%
Managers, Officials, and Proprieters	10.5%	3.0%	1.2%	0.2%	2.6%	0.8%
Clerical and Kindred	7.7%	3.8%	7.3%	2.2%	5.2%	1.7%
Sales Workers	7.1%	1.8%	0.7%	0.2%	5.4%	1.2%
Craftsmen	16.7%	7.7%	12.1%	4.4%	18.7%	8.3%
Operatives	19.4%	18.9%	8.2%	4.8%	20.8%	13.6%
Household Service Workers	0.3%	4.1%	0.2%	0.4%	0.3%	2.8%
Service Workers Outside Household	5.8%	26.9%	4.9%	5.1%	4.8%	15.4%
Farm Foremen	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Farm Laborers	5.7%	3.5%	2.9%	3.0%	7.8%	4.8%
Non-Farm Laborers	8.3%	24.2%	56.0%	75.8%	22.4%	41.7%
Unspecified	0.8%	0.9%	2.0%	1.2%	7.8%	6.7%

Notes: Occupations listed for work relief workers are their occupations on the work relief jobs and not their usual occupations. Occupations for the experienced unemployed are their usual occupations when employed. Source: authors' calculations using a sample of Black and white men in the 1940 U.S. Full Count Census (Ruggles et al. 2015).

Table 3
Raw Gaps in Work Relief Take-up in 1940, By State

State	Black Take-up Rate	White Take-up Rate	Gap
Non-South			
Michigan	52.3%	31.0%	21.4%
Illinois	56.1%	35.0%	21.2%
New Jersey	48.6%	28.6%	19.9%
New York	37.3%	19.8%	17.5%
Ohio	54.7%	38.2%	16.5%
California	43.6%	27.8%	15.8%
Indiana	48.1%	39.5%	8.6%
Massachusetts	45.2%	38.9%	6.2%
Missouri	44.8%	40.2%	4.6%
Kansas	46.0%	42.1%	3.9%
Pennsylvania	28.4%	25.5%	2.9%
South			
District of Columbia	46.3%	24.3%	22.0%
Delaware	31.3%	25.1%	6.2%
Maryland	34.0%	29.0%	5.0%
Oklahoma	40.5%	43.3%	-2.8%
South Carolina	61.8%	64.9%	-3.1%
Louisiana	37.2%	41.4%	-4.2%
Georgia	46.1%	53.1%	-6.9%
Texas	33.1%	40.6%	-7.5%
Virginia	29.3%	37.2%	-8.0%
Florida	38.8%	48.0%	-9.2%
West Virginia	27.1%	37.9%	-10.8%
North Carolina	39.1%	50.1%	-11.0%
Arkansas	44.4%	55.8%	-11.4%
Kentucky	26.2%	37.8%	-11.6%
Alabama	41.6%	53.5%	-11.9%
Tennessee	30.7%	45.0%	-14.3%
Mississippi	44.4%	59.9%	-15.4%

Notes: Work relief take-up rates are presented for all states with at least 10,000 Black men in the labor force. The take-up rate is calculated as the number of workers with work relief jobs divided by the number of workers either unemployed or on relief. Source: authors' calculations using 1940 U.S. Full Count Census (Ruggles et. al 2015).

Table 4

Coefficient Summary: County-by-County Work Relief Eligibility Regressions

	U.S.	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Weighted Mean of Black Coefficients	0.034	0.120	0.161	-0.001	0.133
Number of Counties	1,413	108	234	1,022	49
Black Pop. Aged 18-65 (Thousands)	3,127	338	382	2,362	45

Notes: This table presents weighted averages by region of the Black coefficients obtained by estimating Equation (1) separately for each county in our sample with an outcome equal to 1 if unemployed or on relief (a dummy for being eligible for work relief). The sample includes all counties with at least 20 unemployed Black and white men. Means are weighted by the Black male population in the labor force aged 18-65.

Table 5

Regressions Showing the Relationship Between Work Relief Take-up and Individual Characteristics for the Nation, the South, and the Non-South

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Work Relief	All	South	Non-South
Black	0.0217	-0.0459***	0.0766***
	(0.0138)	(0.0105)	(0.0264)
Foreign Born	-0.0998***	-0.125***	-0.0977***
	(0.0144)	(0.0105)	(0.0150)
Household Head	0.148***	0.196***	0.134***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.006)
Others Employed in HH	-0.0319***	-0.0272***	-0.0320***
	(0.0014)	(0.0020)	(0.0017)
Own Home	-0.0450***	-0.0460***	-0.0420***
	(0.0044)	(0.0035)	(0.0054)
Age	-0.000144	-0.00398***	0.00123
	(0.000722)	(0.000940)	(0.000810)
Age Squared	8.50e-06	4.30e-05***	-2.90e-06
	(7.19e-06)	(1.03e-05)	(8.00e-06)
Years of Education	-0.0104***	-0.0116***	-0.0102***
	(0.0011)	(0.0015)	(0.0016)
Years of Education Squared	0.000225***	0.000475***	0.000200***
	(6.70e-05)	(8.96e-05)	(7.58e-05)
On Farm	0.127***	0.156***	0.0891***
	(0.00699)	(0.00616)	(0.00865)
Married	-0.0139***	-0.00924***	-0.0146***
	(0.0009)	(0.0007)	(0.0012)
Born Same State	0.00382	0.0385***	0.000914
	(0.00735)	(0.00804)	(0.00908)
Same House as 5 years Ago	0.0608***	0.0582***	0.0612***
	(0.0073)	(0.0064)	(0.0082)
Same State as 5 years Ago	0.0919***	0.0687***	0.0951***
	(0.00617)	(0.00640)	(0.00721)
Number of Children	0.0131***	0.0103***	0.0148***
	(0.000798)	(0.00128)	(0.000929)
Number of Children under 5	0.0172***	0.0083***	0.0211***
	(0.0011)	(0.0011)	(0.0012)
Total People in HH	0.0108***	0.0096***	0.0106***
	(0.0006)	(0.0011)	(0.0006)
Constant	0.276***	0.338***	0.244***
	(0.0192)	(0.0203)	(0.0236)
Observations	4,911,685	1,219,513	3,692,172
R-squared	0.111	0.108	0.108

Notes: The dependent variable is equal to one if on work relief. Sample is men who are unemployed or on work relief and is limited to men aged 18-65 and U.S. Citizens. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the county level. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

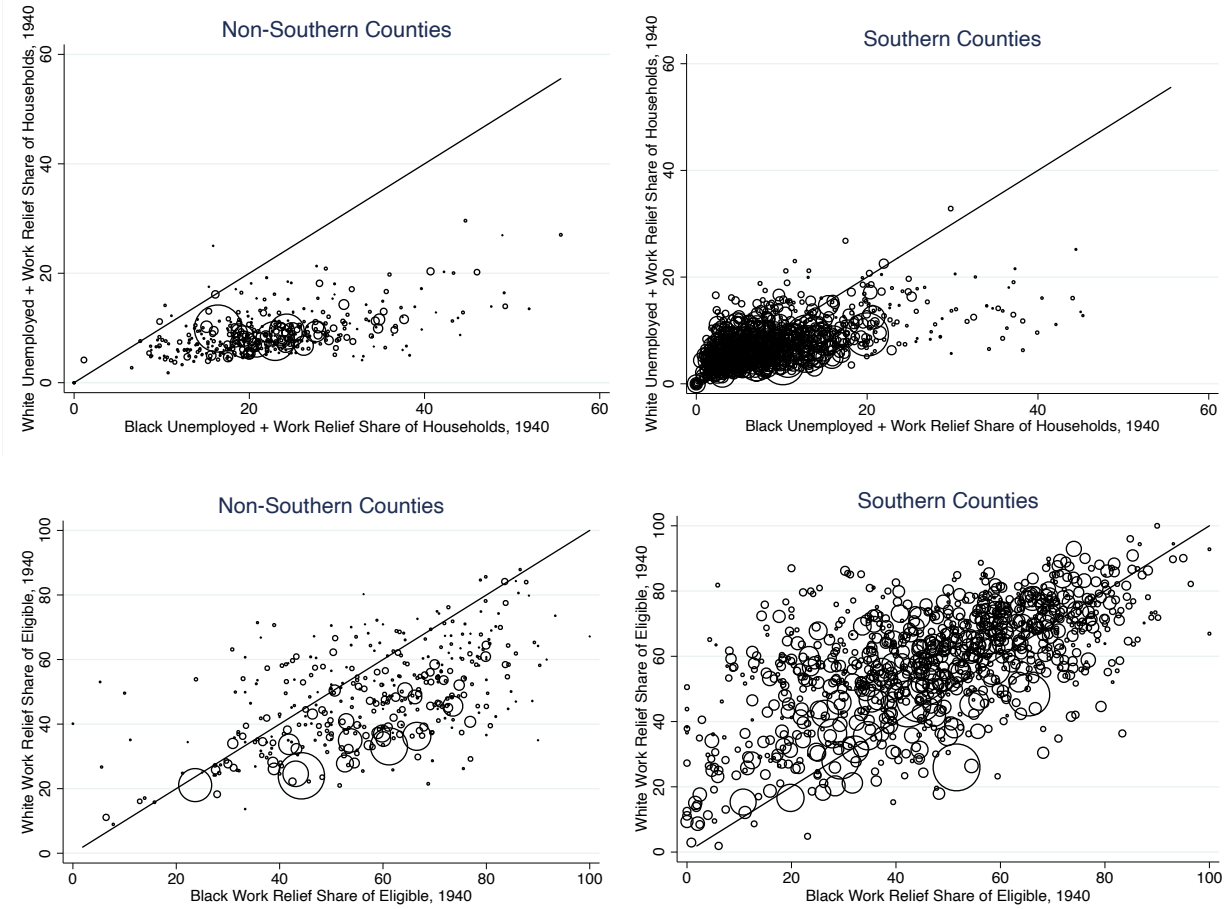
Table 6

Coefficient Summary: County-by-County Work Relief Take-up Regressions

	U.S.	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Weighted Mean of Black Coefficients	-0.026	0.086	0.136	-0.069	0.137
Percent Coefficients Positive (weighted)	39.6	76.9	94.3	24.4	90.4
Number of Counties	1,413	108	234	1,022	49
Black Pop. Aged 18-65 (Thousands)	3,127	338	382	2,362	45

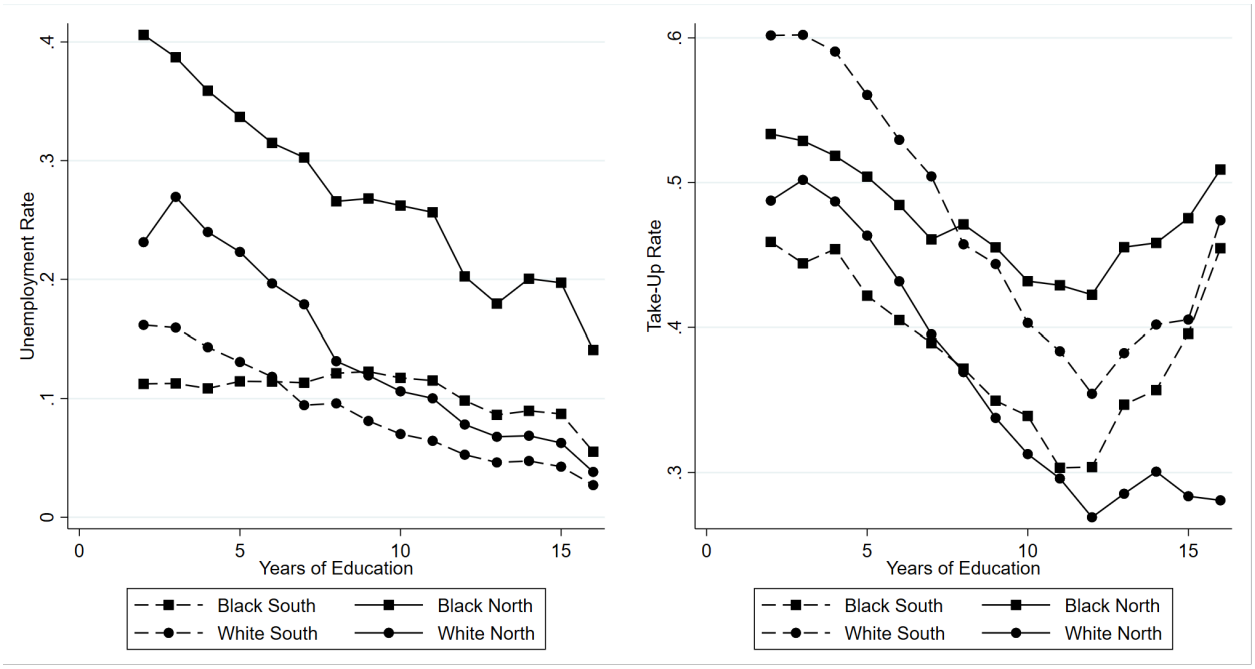
Notes: This table presents weighted averages by region of the Black coefficients obtained by estimating Equation (1) separately for each county in our sample. The sample includes all counties with at least 20 unemployed Black and white men. Means are weighted by the Black male population in the labor force aged 18-65.

Figure 1
Black and White Labor Market Status, by Region



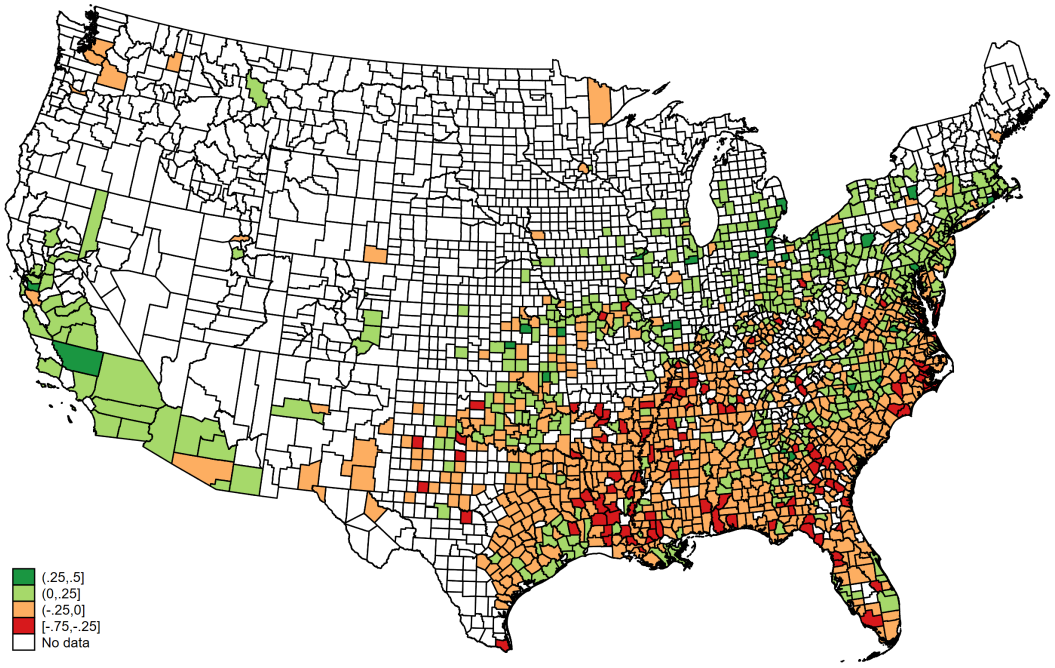
Notes: Observations are weighted by weighted by the Black male population in the labor force aged 18-65. Work relief take-up rate is calculated as (unemployment including relief workers minus unemployment without relief workers) divided by unemployment including relief workers. Source: authors' calculations using 1940 U.S. Full Count Census (IPUMS).

Figure 2
Unemployment and Work Relief Take-up, by Race and Educational Attainment



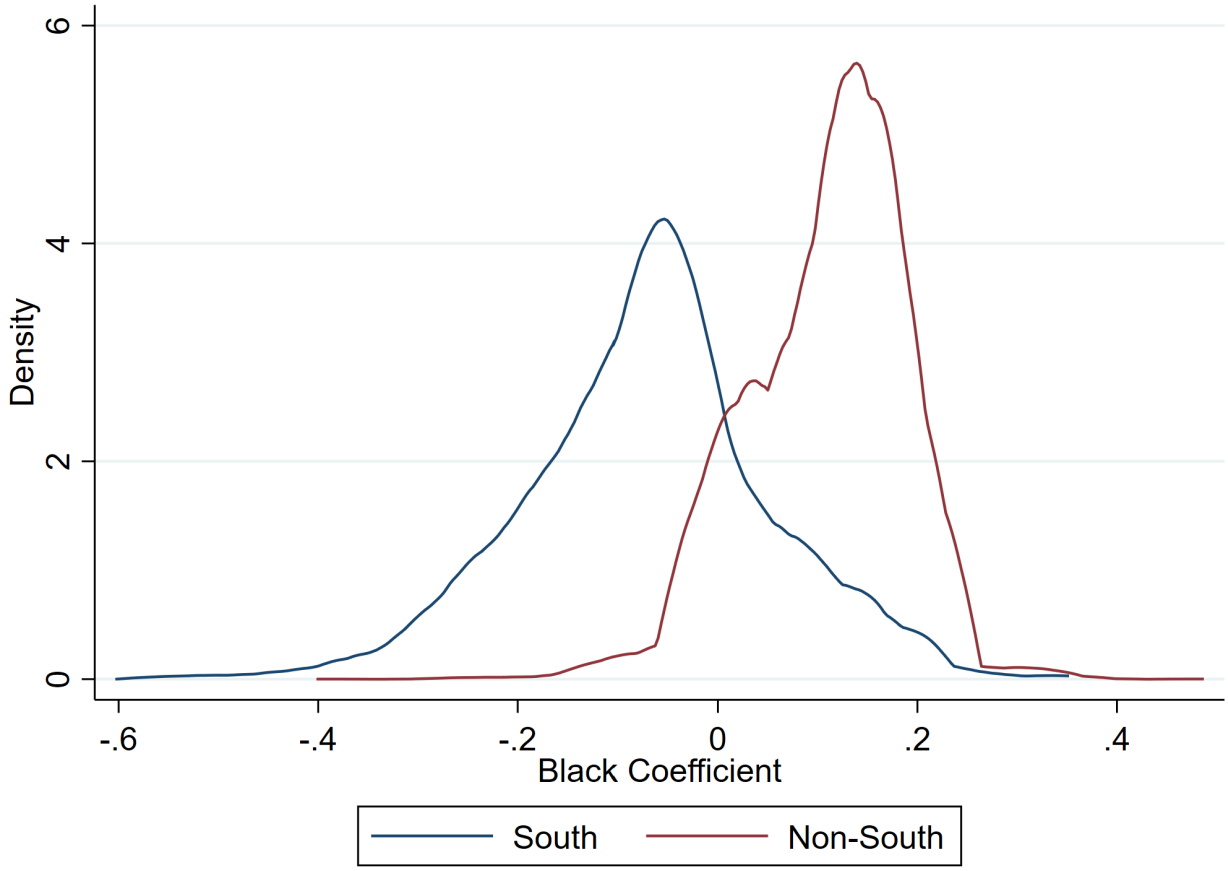
Notes: First panel shows unemployment rate by years of education. People on work-relief are *counted as unemployed*. Second panel shows take-up rate, which is defined as the number of people on work-relief divided by the total number of unemployed.

Figure 3
Relative Access to Work Relief Among Black Workers



Notes: Map of regression adjusted Black-white differences in work relief take-up at a county level. A positive coefficient shows that Black take-up rates were higher than white take-up rates adjusting for observable characteristics.

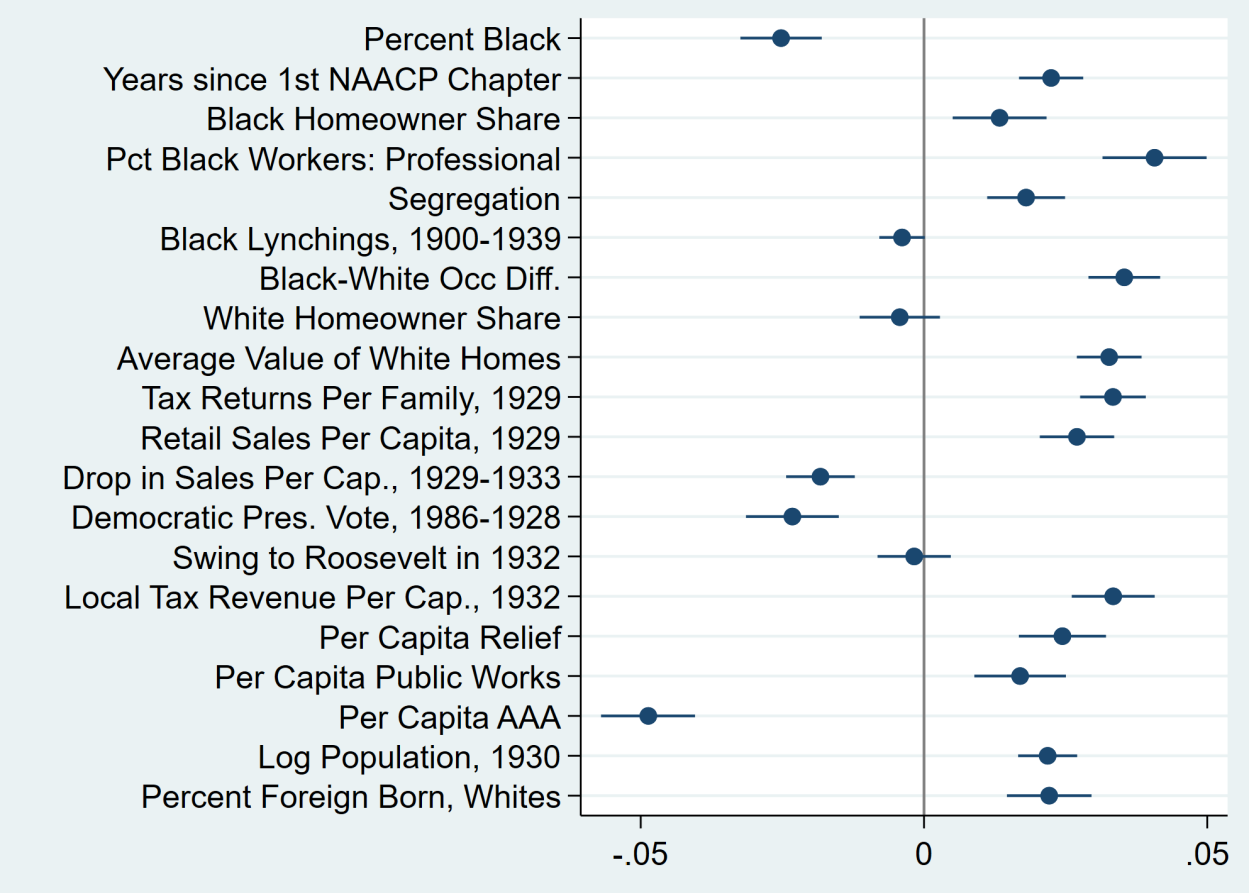
Figure 4
Regional Differences in County-by-County First Stage Coefficients



Notes: Kernel density of regression adjusted Black-white differences in work relief take-up at a county level. Density is weighted by the Black male population in the labor force aged 18-65.

Figure 5

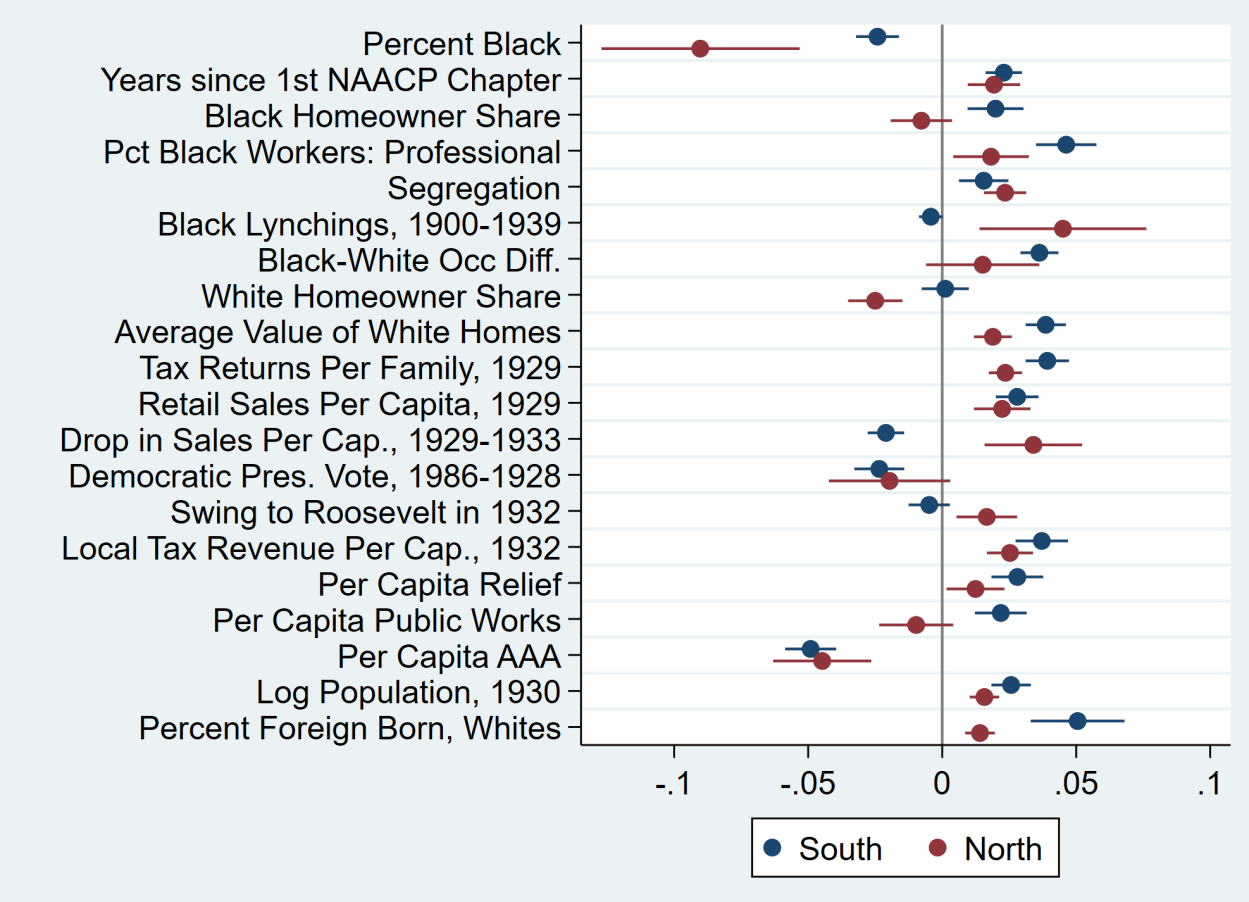
Univariate Regression Coefficients on County Level Black-White Take-up Gap



Notes: Coefficients come from separate county-level regressions where the dependent variable is the adjusted Black-White gap in work relief take-up. Each coefficient is from a separate regression which also includes a dummy for whether the county is in the South. Bars show the 95% confidence intervals. Covariates have been normalized by their standard deviation. For all regressions, N=1,308.

Figure 6

Univariate Regression Coefficients on County Level Black-White Take-up Gap, North and South



Notes: Coefficients come from separate county-level regressions where the dependent variable is the adjusted Black-White gap in work relief take-up. Each coefficient is from a separate regression where only the listed variable is included. Bars show 95% confidence intervals. Covariates have been normalized by their standard deviation. Standard deviations are calculated on the whole data and not for the specific region. For South regressions, N=939. For North Regressions, N=369.

Appendix C – Additional Tables and Figures

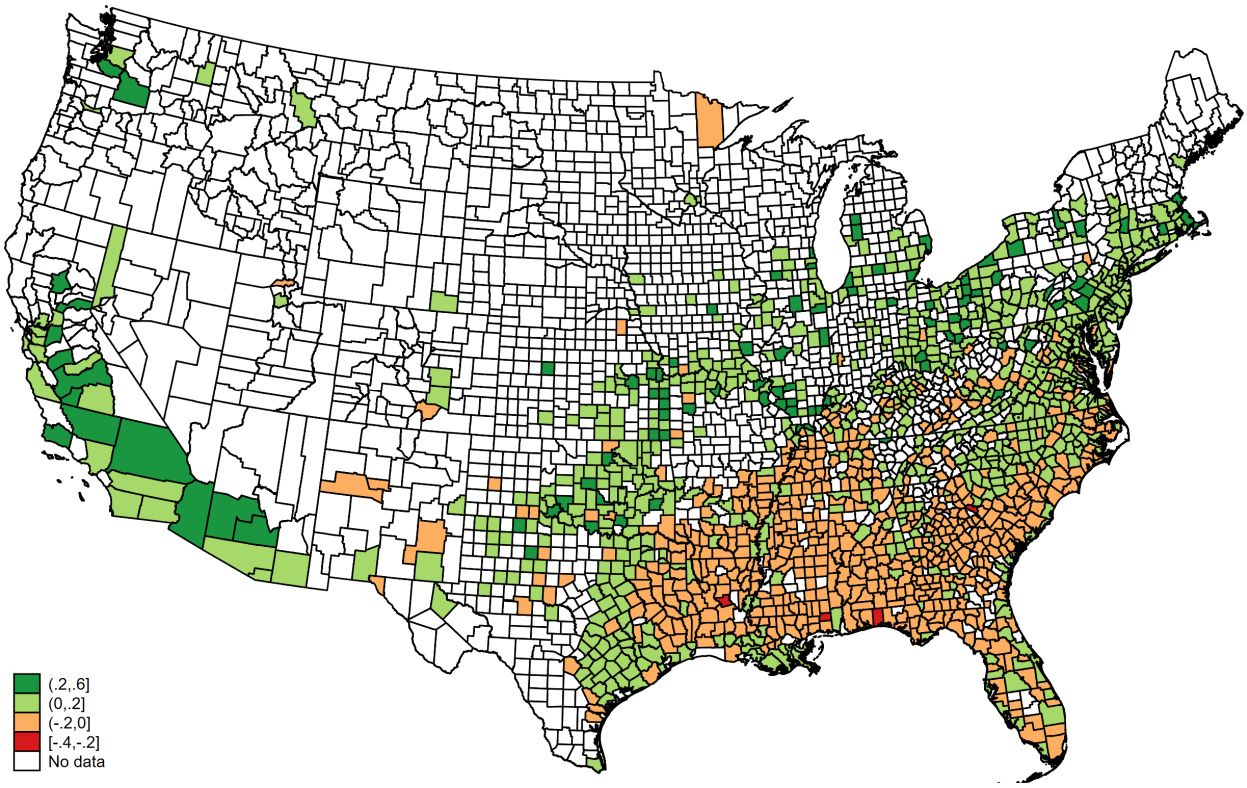
Table C1
Summary Statistics of County-Level Explanatory Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
Number of Black Men, Age 18-65	2058	4577	34	81679
Percent Black	20.9	20.3	0.1	83.8
Years Since 1st NAACP Chapter (no chapter = 0)	5.36	9.11	0	29
Black Homeowner Share	31.9	17.0	0.0	87.5
Professionals as Share of Black Workers	1.6	1.1	0.0	9.4
Segregation (Logan and Parham)	0.49	0.18	0.00	0.96
Black Lynchings, 1900-1939	1.26	2.24	0.00	26
Black-White Occupational Difference Index	0.94	0.31	0.19	1.64
Black Relief-Regular Occupational Difference Index	1.25	0.32	0.46	1.90
Share of White People Who are Homeowners	46.6	10.9	11.0	87.7
Average Value of White-Owned Homes	2198	1164	464	10058
Tax Returns Per Family, 1929	0.06	0.06	0.00	0.34
Retail Sales Per Capita, 1929	260	144	13	795
Minus % Chg. Retail Sales per Capita, 1929-1933	63.7	9.1	-58.5	87.4
Democrats Avg. % of Presidential Votes, 1896-1928	58.6	19.1	17.4	99.0
Swing to Roosevelt in 1932	16.7	9.3	-15.6	50.5
Local Tax Revenue Per Capita, 1932	31.1	21.0	5.6	171.5
Per Capita Relief	55.6	40.0	4.3	371.6
Per Capita Public Works	29.6	37.1	0.0	844.4
Per Capita AAA	23.5	24.5	0.0	219.4
Ln (Population), 1930	10.33	0.98	7.97	15.20
Percent Foreign Born among Whites	4.95	7.96	0.00	43.69

Notes: For all summary statistics, N=1308. Sample includes all counties with data available in all covariates.

Figure C1

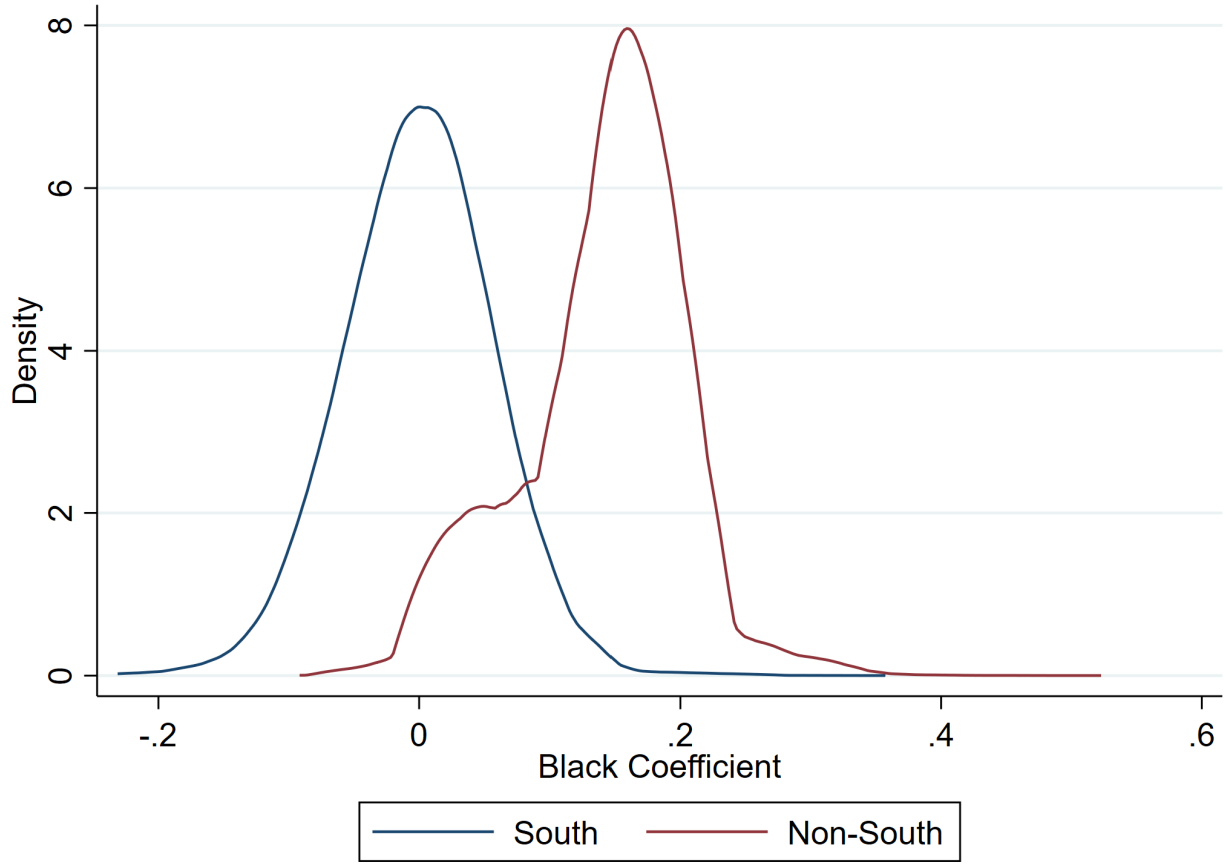
Black-White Differences in Unemployment Rate, 1940 Census



Notes: This map shows adjusted Black-white differences in unemployment (including work relief as unemployed) from county-by-county regressions. Positive values indicate that Black unemployment rates were higher than white unemployment rates adjusting for observable characteristics.

Figure C2

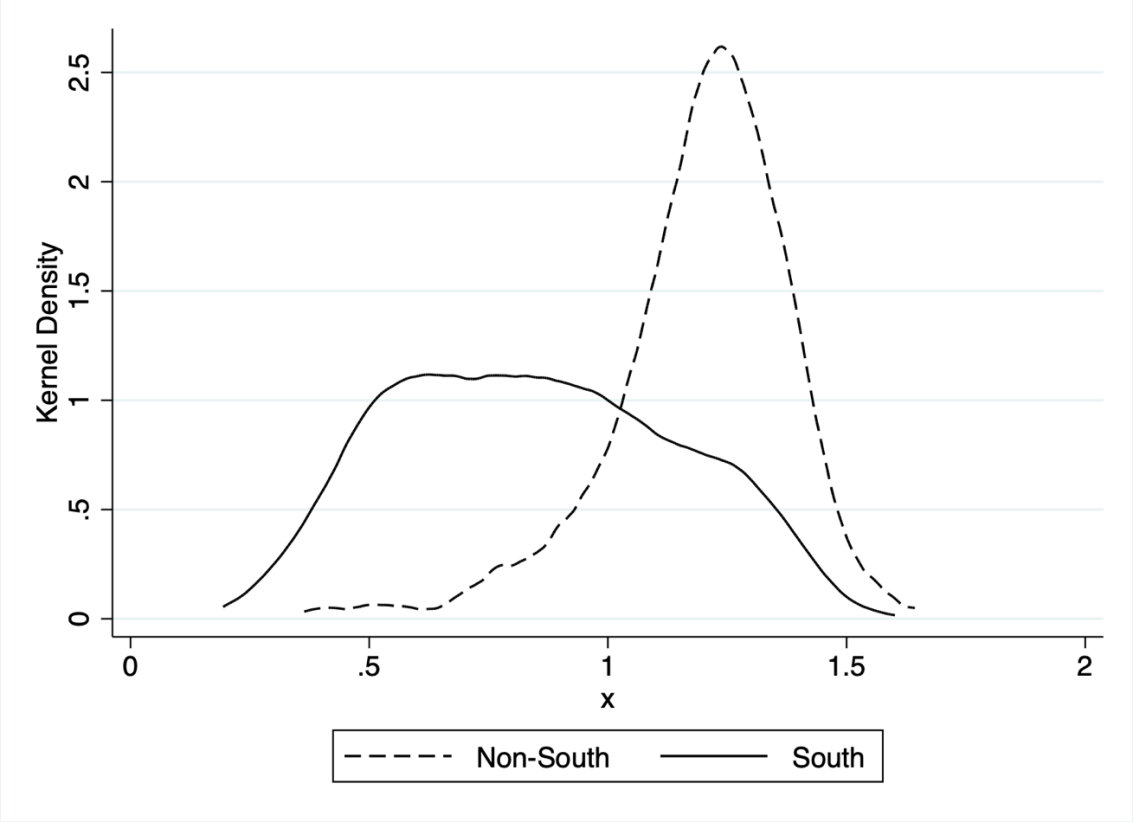
Regional Differences in County-by-County Unemployment Coefficients



Notes: Kernel density of regression adjusted Black-white differences in unemployment (including work relief) at a county level. Density is weighted by the Black male population in the labor force aged 18-65

Figure C3

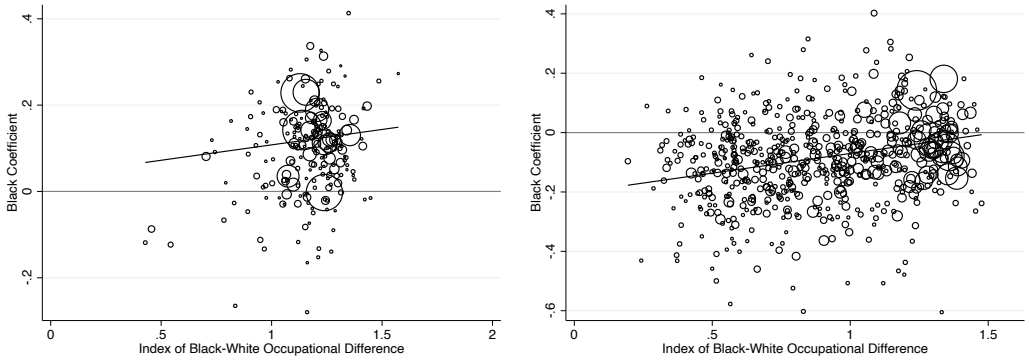
Regional Distributions of Black-White Difference in Occupational Distribution



Notes: Kernel density of index of Black-white differences in occupational distribution at the county level. Index construction described in text section 5.3

Figure C4

Scatter Plots: Black Relative Access to Work Relief vs. Black-White Difference in Occupational Distribution



Non-South **South**

Notes: Index construction described in text section 5.3