

# ***Jim Crow and Black Economic Progress After Slavery***

*By Lukas Althoff and Hugo Reichardt*

Comments by Jonathan Rodden  
Hoover Long-Run Prosperity Conference  
June 2023

# Three steps

- Comparison of families of those enslaved until the Civil War with those freed earlier
  - Evidence of a large gap on a variety of indicators
- Examination of the persistence of the gap
  - Evidence that the persistence of the gap can be accounted for by post-Civil War cross-state differences in where families were freed
  - But no evidence yet that this has anything to do with Jim Crow— just simple state fixed effects
- Cross-border discontinuity
  - Evidence that state fixed effects are capturing aspects of Jim Crow

# Praise:

- Incredible data work.
- Much to be learned from following families for generations after slavery.
- The “Free-enslaved gap” and exogeneity of location are useful.
- Lots of clever ideas throughout the paper
  - I am especially impressed by the increasing RD estimates over time

# Main questions and concerns:

- Alternative explanations for “place” effects in each step
- The role of migration
- Robustness of the cross-border discontinuity

# The free-enslaved gap

- Not surprising that it is large, but as we subsequently learn, its persistence is driven completely by the state where the enslaved person's family was freed.
- But many things are different in Kentucky or Tennessee than Mississippi or Louisiana that might matter for long-term literacy and occupation:
  - Economic growth, labor markets, economic policy, distance from equator (Chad).
  - Free Blacks were living in places with access to industrial jobs.
- A concern is that descendants of poor Tennessee Whites also experienced better literacy in the decades after the Civil War than poor Mississippi Whites.

# Why not follow Whites?

- Why not conduct a diff in diff with Whites?
  - Follow poor Whites born in similar locations to the free and enslaved Blacks. Do they experience a similar gap?
  - Do the location effects look similar?
- There is an analysis of intergenerational mobility among White Americans, but wouldn't it be better to look at mobility among whites from matched locations?

# Out-migration

- For the most part, possible out-migration of Blacks from oppressive states during Jim Crow is viewed as something to ignore because it is infrequent.
- And we learn that the effect of being freed in location / is very similar to the effect of living in location / from 1865 to 1940, which we are to take as reassurance that migration was minimal.
- But...

FIGURE C.50: Black Families Leaving their 1870 State of Origin by 1940

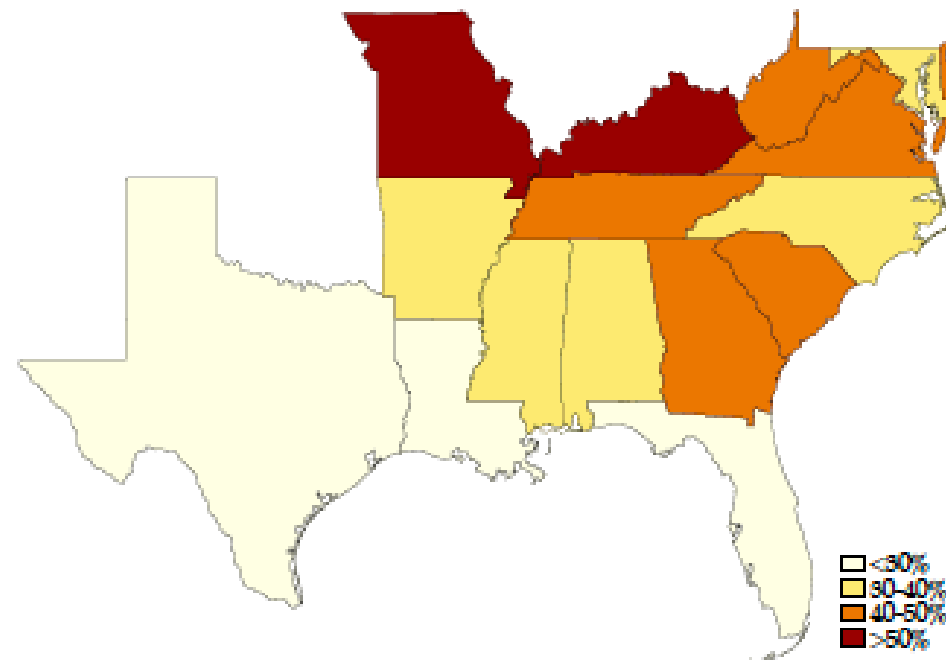
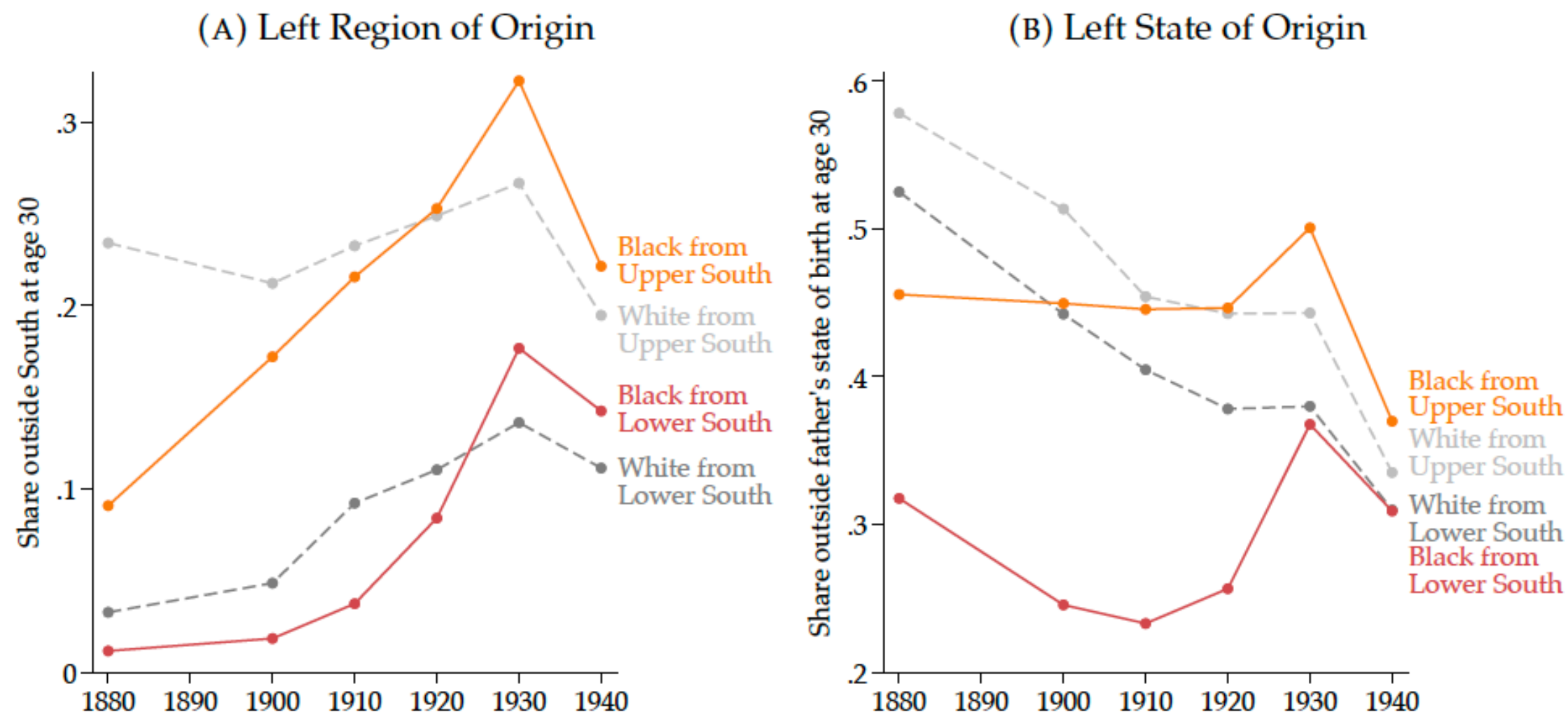




FIGURE C.51: Long-Term Migration Rates across Regions and States by Race

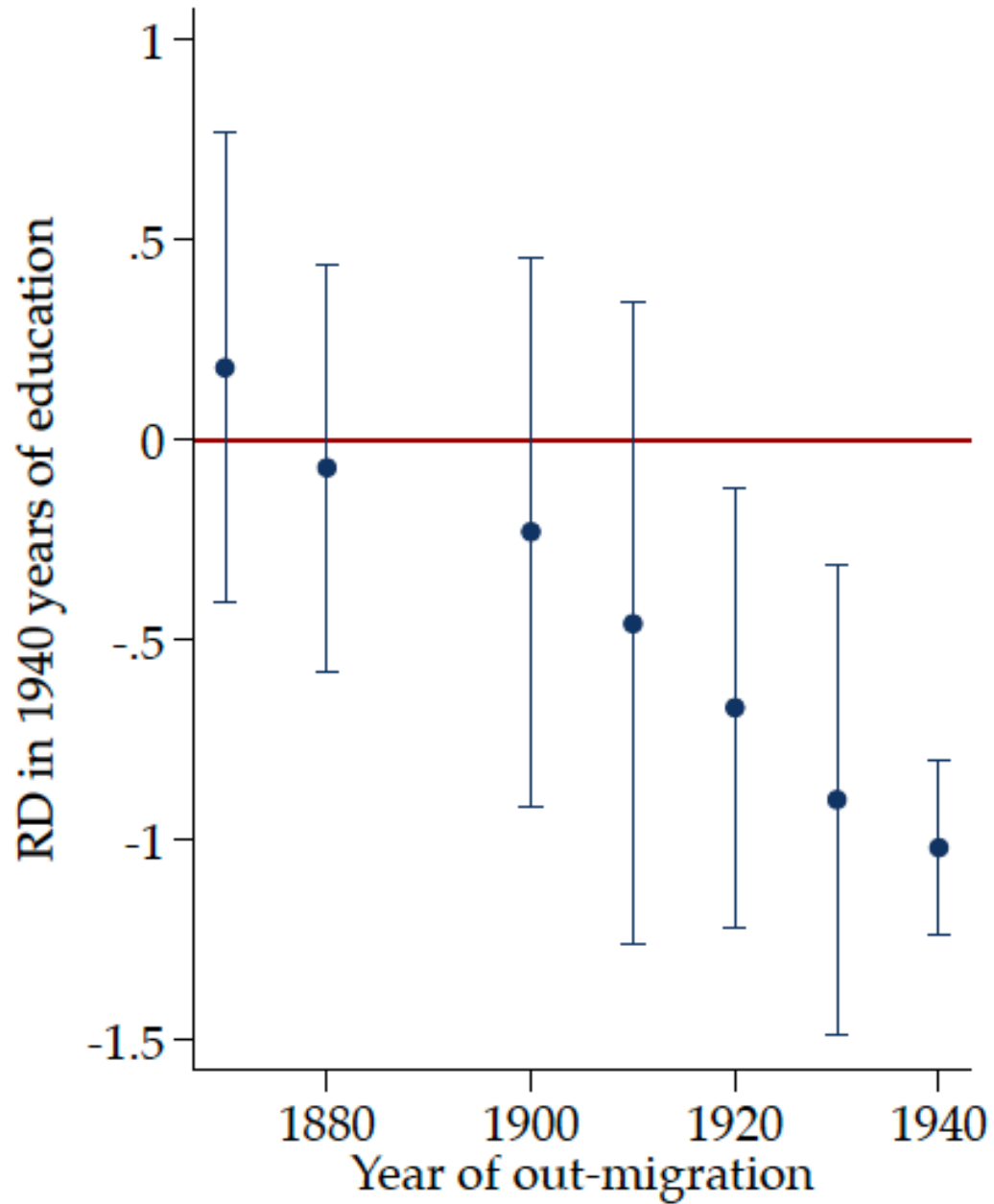


Lots of migration *within* the South, especially from residents of less oppressive states

- Big growth in Black populations of:
  - Memphis (17% Black in 1860 and 40% Black in 1865).
  - Norfolk (already >50% Black in 1920)
  - Atlanta, Birmingham, New Orleans, Durham, Charlotte, Houston, St. Louis
  - Especially Black male Union army veterans
  - Is it possible to get data on military service? Was it easier to escape to the Union Army in some locations than others?

# Migration, cont.

- They touch on this in the border discontinuity section, but I'd like to see it for the full analysis as well.
- Why not present all results broken down by “movers” and “stayers,” or according to the intensity of treatment (years spent in oppressive states)?
- Maybe the “place effects” are better for the Upper South because more of them were able to move to opportunity?
- In the border discontinuity analysis:

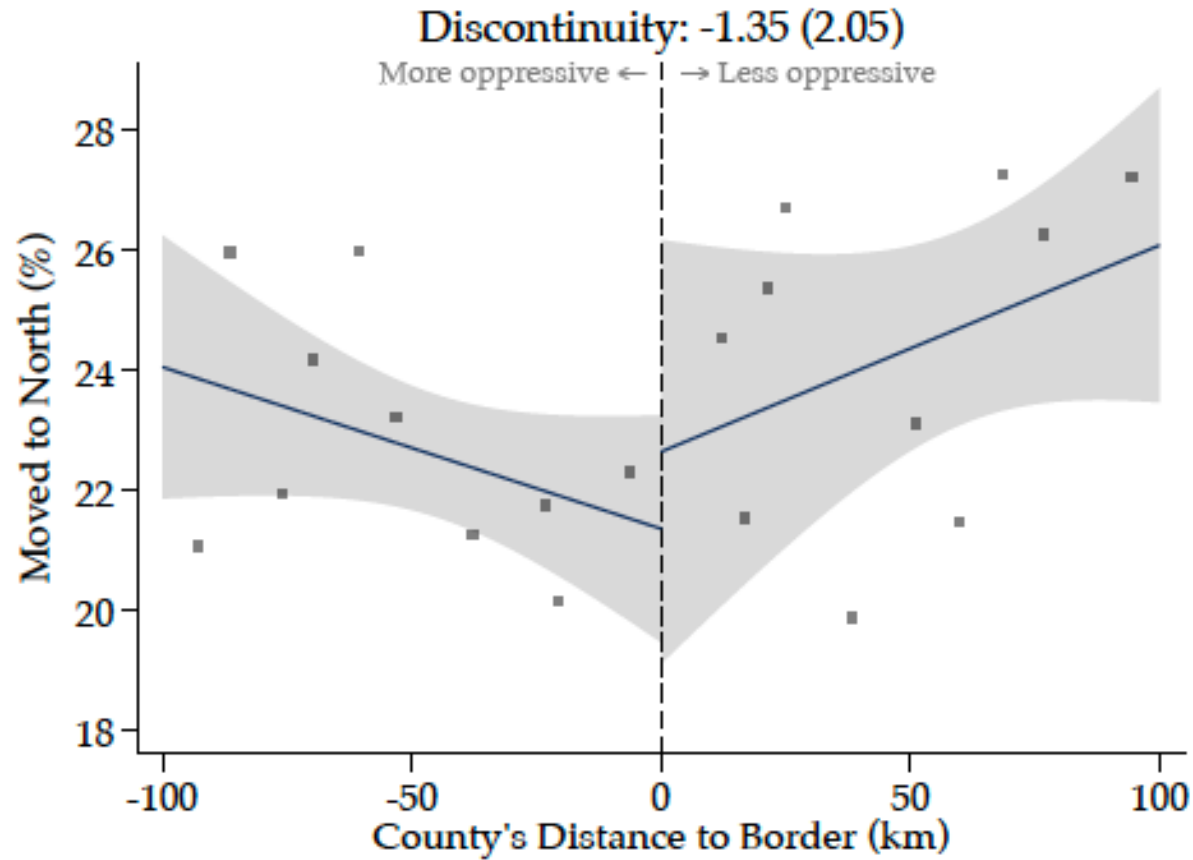


Not sure I understand this.

People are out-migrating on both sides of the boundary.

If Jim Crow laws are implemented, there should be much higher levels of out-migration on the less oppressive side of the border.

### (D) Migrated to North



This is probably purely a latitude effect

But the lack of a discontinuity seems to suggest that Jim Crow laws did not work as intended. Out-migration should be higher in the less oppressive states.

Since a lot of the movement was to Memphis, etc., should examine ALL migrants.

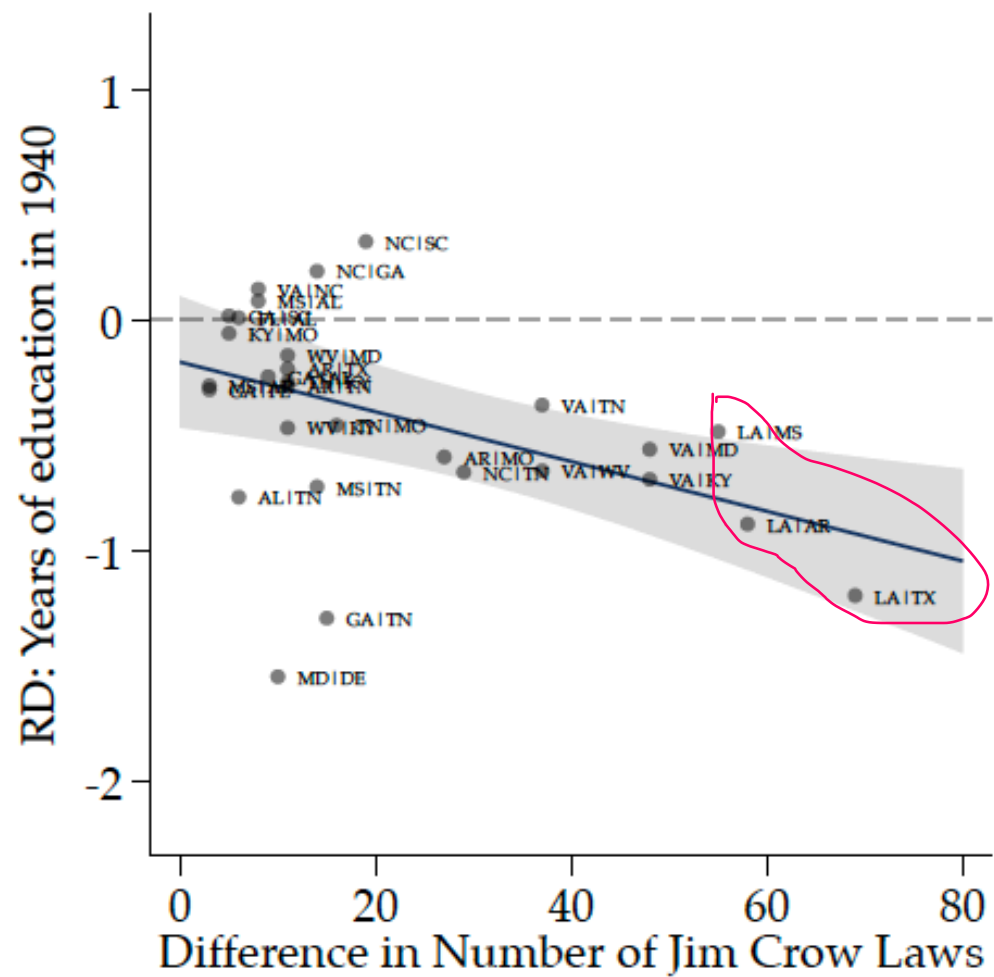
# Migration and causal mechanism

- How easily can out-migration mitigate the free-enslaved gap?
- Does someone whose father moved to Detroit in 1910 look similar to the descendant of Free Blacks who were already in Detroit in 1865?
- If so, doesn't this suggest that restrictions on out-migration were a crucial mechanism?
- Again, wouldn't it make sense to follow both Blacks and Whites? We know that Whites were able to migrate in large numbers to places with better opportunities.

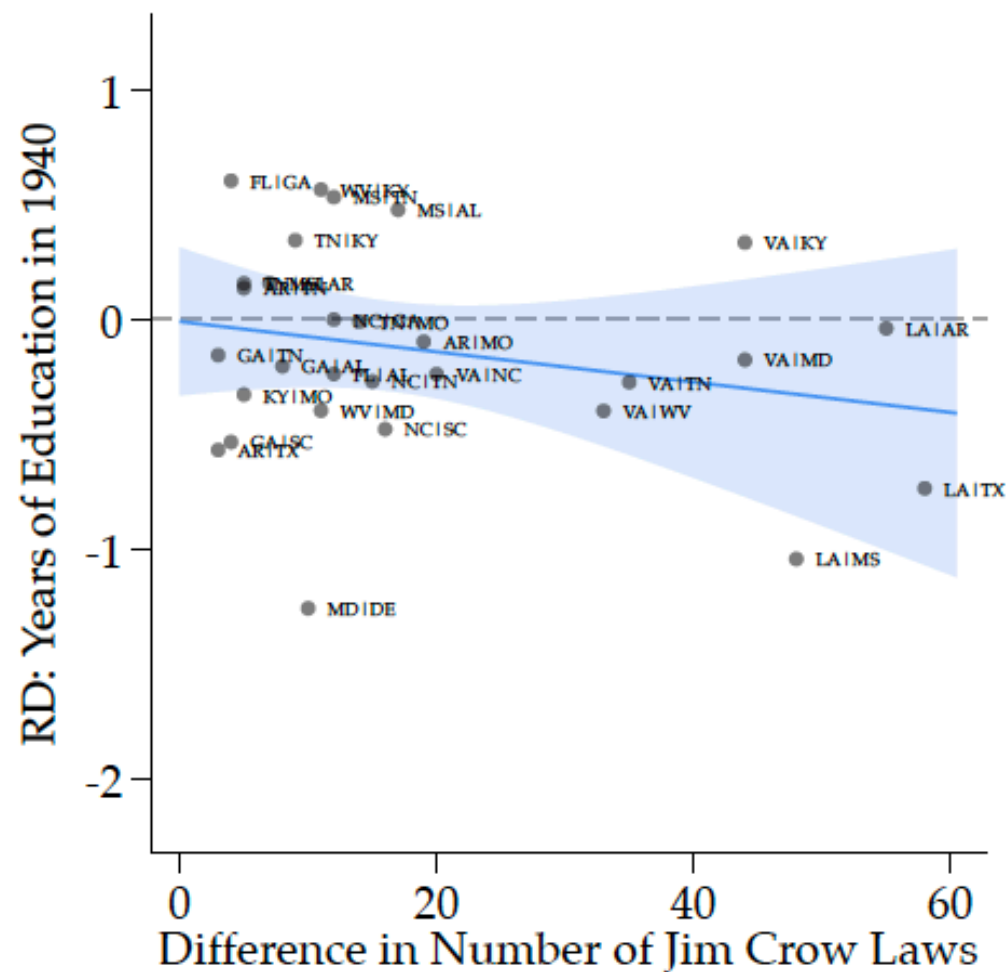
# Border discontinuity analysis: Two approaches

- Separate RD for each of 20 border pairs
  - Visual inspection of plotted regression lines for different levels of “difference in Jim Crow intensity,” measured with HRR Index, the number of Jim Crow laws, and school quality.
  - No weights for number of people associated with each border?
  - No confidence intervals?
- Pooled analysis of the 10 border pairs with the largest differences in “oppressiveness.”
  - Only HRR index (What happened to the number of Jim Crow laws and school quality?) Given the paper’s proposed mechanism, isn’t school quality the best variable?

Blacks

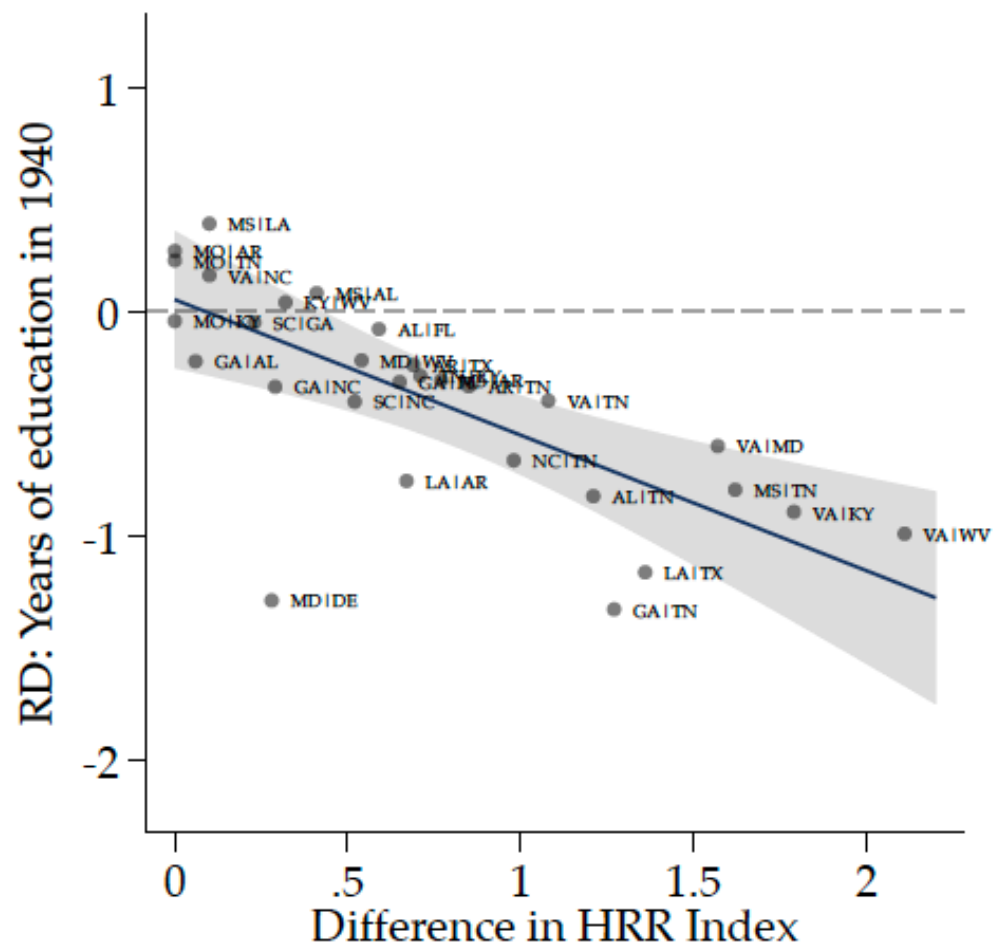


Poor Whites

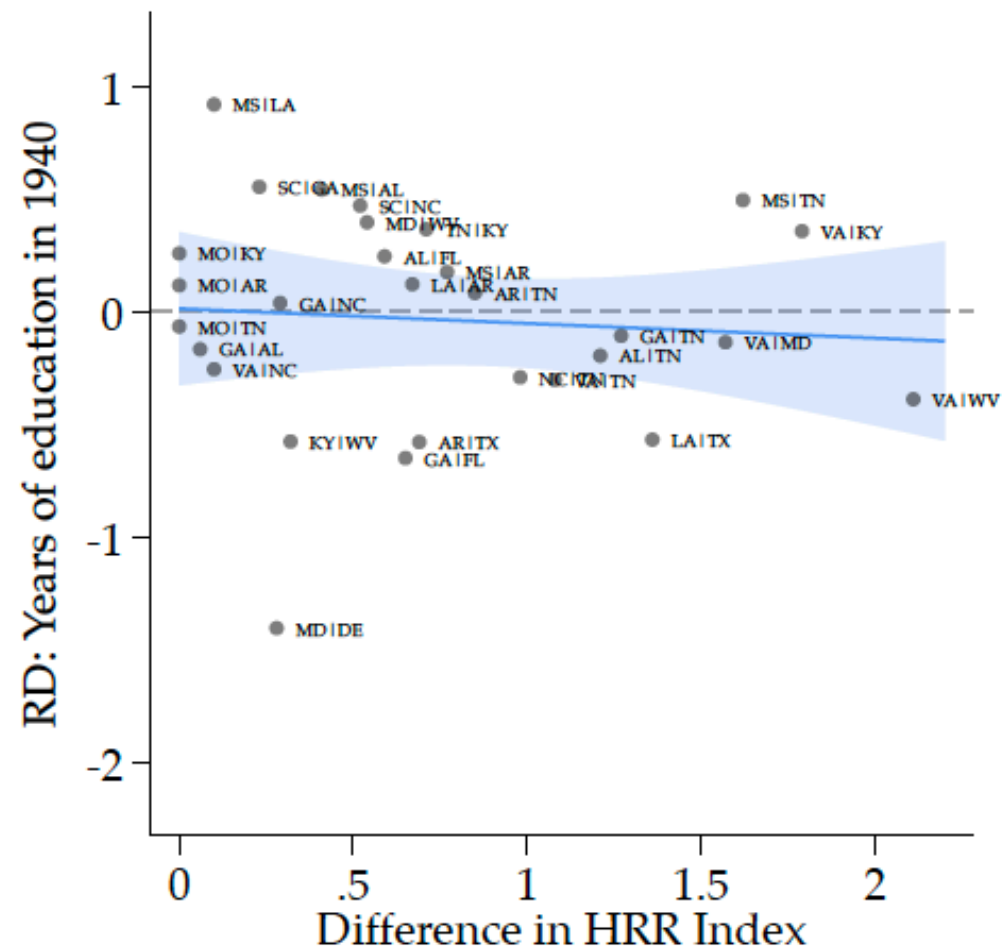




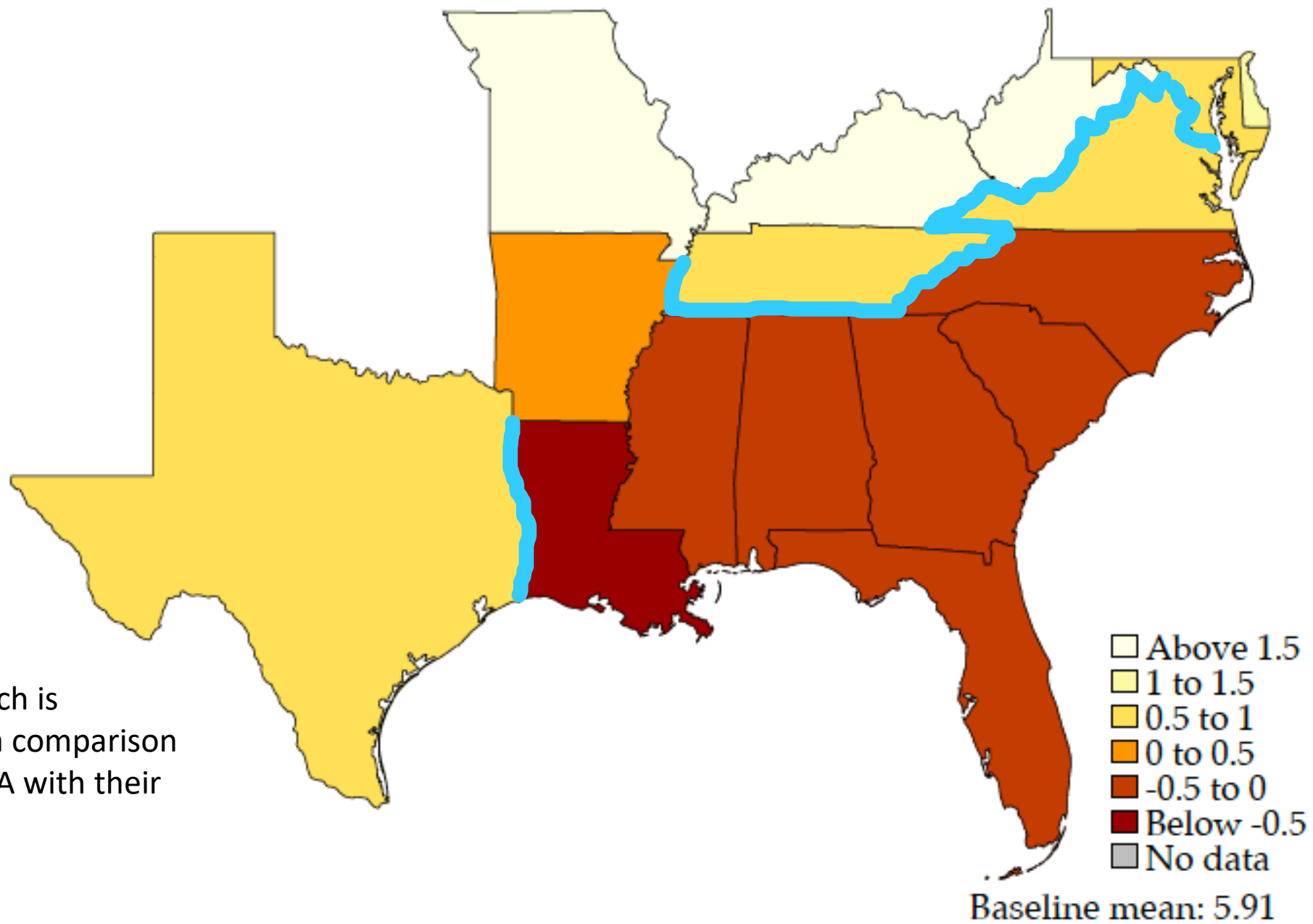
Blacks



Poor Whites



This approach is essentially a comparison of TN and VA with their neighbors



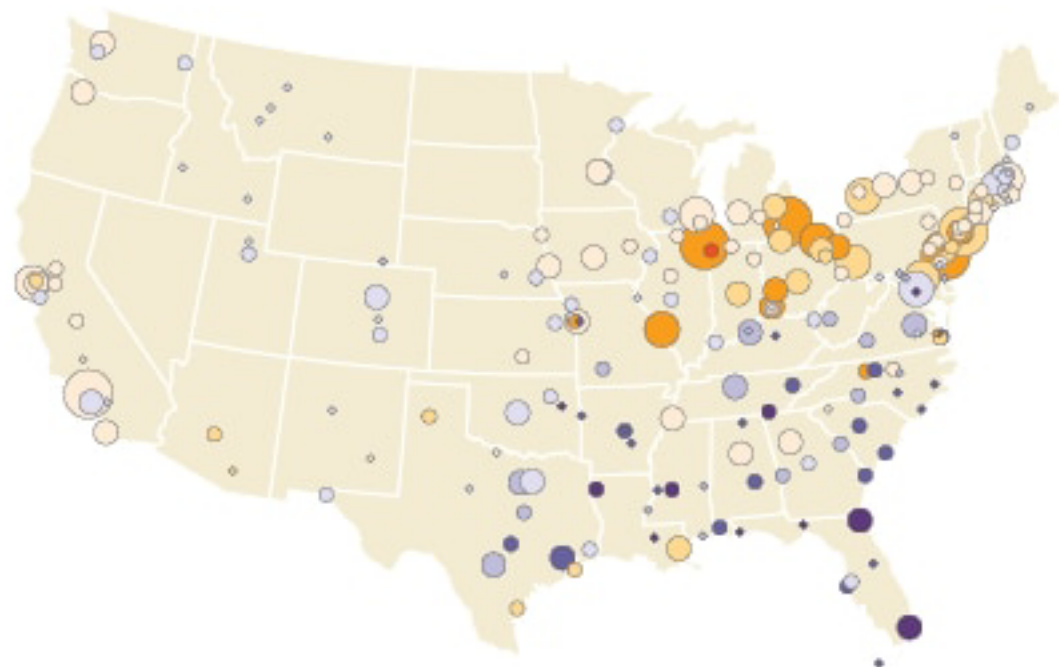
# Why not use all the borders?

- Why not use the pooled approach but include all relevant borders, interacting with the difference in Jim Crow intensity for each segment?
- Try this for each measures of Jim Crow intensity.
- Plot conditional RD estimates.

# To sum up:

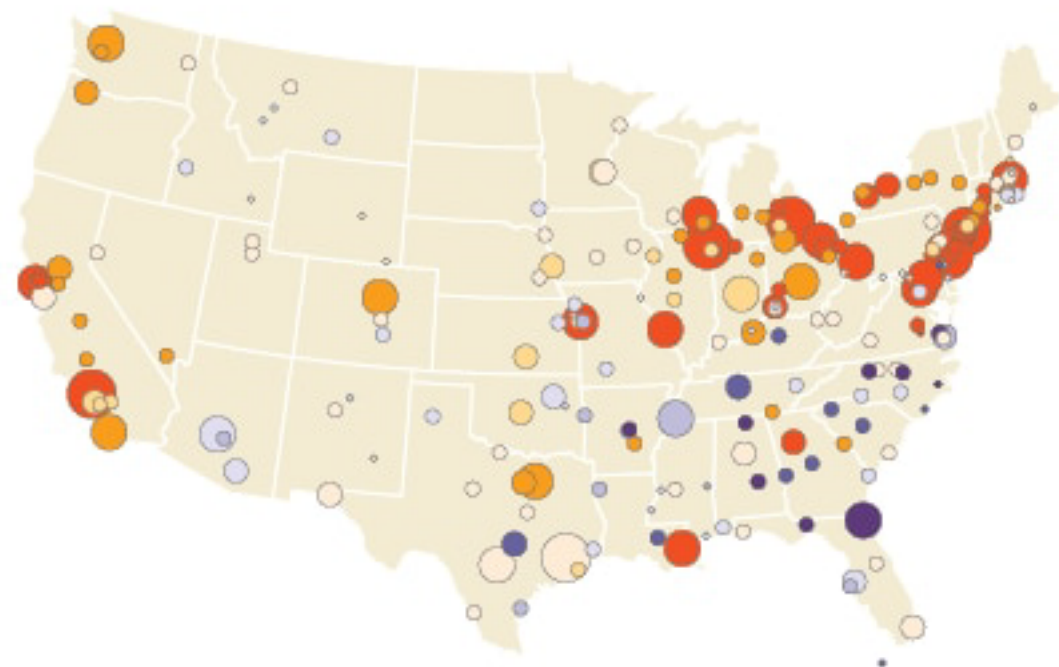
- Fascinating paper!
- It would be useful to follow trajectories of Whites and Blacks with similar starting geography throughout the paper.
- It seems there is more to learn about out-migration of both Blacks and Whites.
  - Rather than a threat to causal inference, it is an interesting question in its own right
- Perhaps some further sensitivity analysis for the border discontinuity results.

## The First Great Migration: 1910-1940



The change in share of Blacks in cities is based on the percentage point difference in the percent of population that was Black in the later time period compared to the earlier. For example, 18.3 percent of the population in Gary, IN was Black in 1940 but was just 2.3 in 1910, which represented a 16.0 percentage-point change in the share of Blacks in the city. It was the largest change in share during the First Great Migration. By the end of the Second Great Migration, Newark, NJ had realized the largest increase in Black population share, with the Black proportion of the city rising from 10.6 in 1940 to 54.2 in 1970.

## The Second Great Migration: 1940-1970



*Increasing*

**Change in  
share of Blacks**

- 10.0 or more
- 5.0 to 9.9
- 2.5 to 4.9
- 0.0 to 2.4
- 2.4 to -0.1
- 5.0 to -2.5
- 10.0 to -5.1
- Decreasing
- Less than -10.0

**City population  
(in later decade)**

- 1,000,000 or more
- 500,000 to 999,999
- 150,000 to 499,999
- 50,000 to 149,999
- Less than 50,000