

Comment on Althoff and Reichardt,
“Jim Crow and Black Economic
Progress After Slavery”

William Summerhill
UCLA

What's the paper do?

- Rigorously establishes how slavery created the persistent wealth and income gap among formerly enslaved and their descendants, by linking across censuses from 1870 to 1940
- Shows the gap persisted long after emancipation due to restrictive laws (“Jim Crow”)
- States with more severe Jim Crow regimes reduced the quality of Black schooling, accounting for much of gap in schooling

Has anyone tried this before?

- Fogel & Engerman (1974) created "Exploitation Ratio" of slavery.
 - Value of the marginal product of slave labor (implicit "wage"), minus cost of calories, shelter, and clothing -> 40% went to planter
 - Loss to slave of current consumption and saving, loss to future wealth
- Economic losses from Jim Crow laws: DeCanio (1974), Higgs (1977), Ransom & Sutch (1977), Wright (various)
- Jim Crow and under-funded Black schools in the south: Margo (1991)

A few questions

- Spatial autocorrelation?
- Jim Crow and “Informal” institutions: intensity of contemporary sentiment vs. laws
- Rosenwald schools and local demand for schooling

Conclusion

- Althoff and Reichardt bring the quasi-experimental techniques needed tell us where earlier generation of scholars were right, and where they were wrong
- Innovate in their application of full-count census-matching the descendants of formerly enslaved population
- Has direct relevance for ongoing deliberations on question of reparations