

How the Legacy of Slavery and Racial Composition Shape Public School Enrollment in the American South

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Abstract

History is centrally involved in place development. Given the historical importance of antebellum slavery, it is little surprise that it profoundly shaped the social and economic future of the United States. What is perhaps more surprising is the link to local, county-level development as it relates to contemporary systems of black disadvantage. Through our focus on one aspect of school segregation in the American South, namely racial disparities in public school enrollment, we contribute to the literature on the legacy of slavery by examining how this local link persists. We use spatial data analysis techniques to assess the relationship between county historical slave concentration and the black-white ratio of public school attendance. Our data originally come from the 1860 Census, 2006–2010 American Community Survey, and National Center for Education Statistics Private School Universe Survey, 2007–2008. Notably, our historical slave concentration estimates incorporate spatially informed refinements to better represent contemporary counties than previously available data. Drawing from our regression analysis, we argue that slavery history shaped the local social structure in a way that facilitates contemporary white disinvestment from public school systems. We examine two potential explanations for this legacy of slavery—the number of private schools and racial threat—particularly their manifestation within the Deep South. Despite evidence of subregional differences rooted in history, neither pathway explains the initial slavery association. We argue that processes tied to the legacy of slavery are a foundational component of black disadvantage and that further examination of this foundation is necessary to stem the tide of recent resegregation.

Keywords

racial inequality, legacy of slavery, U.S. South, school segregation, private schools

Our history is reflected in contemporary society in a variety of ways, but a key manifestation is through place development (see e.g., Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulsen 2000). Drawing from this perspective, recent research focusing on the South has highlighted one compelling component of antebellum slavery's legacy—namely the imprint of historical slave labor dependence on local social structure and subsequent systems of

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black disadvantage (e.g., Duncan 1999; Levernier and White 1998; O'Connell 2012; Ruef and Fletcher 2003; Vandiver, Giacopassi, and Lofquist 2006). The development of this type of historical perspective advances our understanding of the foundations of racial inequality. In addition, its examination of differences across place addresses the call to account for the role of locally embedded processes in generating disparities (see Gieryn 2000; Roscigno 1995, 1999). Here we contribute to historically informed, place-based perspectives of inequality (re)production by examining the links between slavery history and black-white disparities in public school enrollment in the U.S. South.¹

We argue that localities within the South that had larger concentrations of slaves in 1860 have greater disparities in black-white public school enrollment due to slavery's impact on local institutions (also see Curtis and O'Connell 2012; O'Connell 2012; Vandiver et al. 2006). This argument references a small but growing body of literature that examines the persistent role of slavery on contemporary society (also see Melish 1998; Rockman 2011; White 1991). To date, slavery scholars have made connections to intergenerational occupational stratification among blacks (Ruef and Fletcher 2003; Sacerdote 2005), black-white poverty inequality (O'Connell 2012), legal executions (Vandiver et al. 2006), and black-white educational attainment disparities (Bertocchi and Dimico 2012). However, there is still little understanding of how this particular link between local history and contemporary disparities is maintained.

Our primary contribution to research on the legacy of slavery is to assess possible explanations for how antebellum slavery in the South connects to contemporary inequality. Scholars have argued that the influence of history is maintained through the creation of new systems of inequality to replace those that have been outmoded (O'Connell 2012; Ruef and Fletcher 2003; Tilly 1998; also see DeFina and Hannon 2011). We examine this replacement hypothesis for the legacy of slavery within the context of school segregation by assessing the explanatory power of private schools, a key pathway linking history to present segregation. In addition, we assess broader explanations for how the legacy of slavery affects contemporary inequality by examining the extent to which historical context modifies contemporary inequality-generating processes, namely those related to the presence of private schools and black population concentration (also see Curtis and O'Connell 2012). By examining these interactive relationships, we more fully

assess legacy processes associated with slavery and the extent to which slavery's legacy is primarily felt through its modification of, rather than creation of, inequality processes.

Finally, although our primary aim is to advance the literature on historical legacies and racial inequality more broadly, we believe that a focus on inequalities within the educational system is particularly pressing because education is involved in a variety of life outcomes (see e.g., Herd 2010; Hout 2012; Lochner and Moretti 2004). In addition, examining segregation specifically is critical to understanding subsequent disparities because it facilitates the uneven distribution of resources (Condrón and Roscigno 2003; Logan, Minca, and Adar 2012) and is a central factor in the educational disadvantage of blacks relative to non-Hispanic whites (e.g., Card and Rothstein 2007; Condrón et al. 2013; Entwisle and Alexander 1992; Logan et al. 2012; Rumberger and Palardy 2005; but see Entwisle and Alexander 1994) as well as future social and employment integration (Dawkins and Braddock 1994). Furthermore, black-white differences in educational outcomes have proved relatively intractable over time. Although there were declines in the black-white achievement gap through the 1980s, the severity of black disadvantage on some outcomes increased during the 1990s and has stabilized during the most recent decade (Barton and Coley 2010; Grissmer, Kawata, and Williamson 1998; Hedges and Nowell 1999). Such consistent inequality suggests that a deeply rooted racialized structure may be involved in the perpetuation of black-white educational inequalities. The literature on the legacy of slavery provides a foundation for thinking about how the educational system, particularly within the U.S. South, has been structured by chattel slavery to support this persistent inequality.

THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY AND CONTEMPORARY INEQUALITY

Slavery was abolished over 150 years ago, yet it continues to affect contemporary society. Ruef and Fletcher (2003) called this an institutional legacy, which refers to "the reproduction of material-resource and cultural conditions from a social institution despite the fact that the institution has been formally dismantled" (p. 447). Tilly's (1998) work offers insight into the mechanisms of this structural-institutional reproduction, which he dubbed *durable inequality*. He suggested that places reproduce inequality across generations by mapping social

categories onto hierarchal power relations. This hierarchy is maintained through a process he called *opportunity hoarding*, whereby the dominant group develops a virtual monopoly on a valuable resource or a method of resource acquisition. Recent research suggests that such monopolistic practices continue in the educational sphere (Fiel 2013). Fiel argued that school segregation is a mode of social closure that whites use to exclude blacks from the resource acquisition process. Consistent with the history discussed below, we build on these ideas to argue that ideas and institutions developed to sustain American slavery facilitated whites' hoarding of access to quality education through school segregation.

In contrast, previous research that empirically links slavery to the contemporary educational system asserts the role of human capital rather than an institutionalized legacy of slavery. Bertocchi and Dimico (2012) examined slavery's relationship with the contemporary black-white gap in educational attainment and suggested that the legacy of slavery has only an indirect effect on the contemporary educational gap via the initial level of educational inequality in 1940. They found that a state's historical attachment to slavery was positively related to the state's racial education gap in 1940 and that slavery's relationship with the 2000 gap was mediated by the gap in 1940. Bertocchi and Dimico (2012) argued that this is evidence of "the transmission of human capital" (p. 582). However, their argument uses a household-level mechanism that cannot be examined using their state-level data and assumes that the majority of families remained in the same state for multiple generations. We argue that a structural interpretation that relies on the characteristics of places rather than the people is more plausible and consistent with their analysis. Therefore, despite the face-value contradiction with previous work, we suggest that our structural perspective of legacy is consistent with previous analyses. In addition, this reinterpretation suggests that the legacy of slavery has important consequences for contemporary black-white educational disparities.

We extend previous work on the legacy of slavery to explore how slavery is related to contemporary educational outcomes. Consistent with research on how slavery and its legacy shape the social structure of place (see e.g., Duncan 1999; Levernier and White 1998; O'Connell 2012; Ruef and Fletcher 2003; Vandiver et al. 2006), we argue that slavery had lasting impacts on the educational system within the South, such that black relative to

white public school enrollment will be positively related to the strength of the local historical slave concentration. But to extend our understanding of the "how," we ask what specific aspects of the school system would be most affected by a legacy of slavery to generate additional school segregation. We highlight potential explanations for the legacy of slavery through a discussion of the history of black-white school segregation in the South.

THE HISTORY OF SCHOOL SEGREGATION AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN THE SOUTH

Racial school segregation is a dominant feature of the American educational system, yet there are important differences across regions (Clotfelter 2004; Yun and Reardon 2005). Notably, the use of nonpublic schools, particularly private schools, is most involved in overall levels of school segregation within the South (Clotfelter 2004). We stress that despite this and other differences in the processes, the disparities we address are not absent in non-Southern regions. Still, this regional difference in the reliance on and impact of private schools supports our focus on the South and may signal the role of the unique historical circumstances that spawned and maintained school segregation in the South compared with other regions of the country.

During Reconstruction, the former slaves quickly organized school systems to educate themselves. However, white elites sought to suppress black educational efforts because the Southern economy relied almost exclusively on low-wage black labor for farm work as well as other physically intensive jobs such as railroad construction (Anderson 1988; Giggie 2008; Litwack 1998; Span 2009). A system of universal education would have undermined this enterprise by affording black people the skills to leave the countryside in search of other job opportunities (Anderson 1988). A Mississippi Delta planter summarized this sentiment when he said in an interview, "What I want here is Negroes who can make cotton, and they don't need education to help them make cotton" (as cited in Litwack 1998:98). White elites' strong state connections allowed them to influence educational policy, including efforts that aimed to maintain their labor force by systematically denying educational opportunities to blacks (Walters 2001).

Eventually, local and state governments were forced to alter, if only slightly, their stance on black education when blacks began to leave the Southern

countryside for the opportunities and potential safety offered by cities (Tolnay and Beck 1990). White elites and local municipalities across the South wanted to provide separate public schools to blacks not only to stem the tide of black out-migration but also to indoctrinate blacks into a system of segregation and to counter what white elites saw as the dangerous influence of schools established by Northerners (Anderson 1988; Litwack 1998). However, most states were reluctant to provide the requisite financial and logistical support to ensure the success and stability of these propositions. In many cases, black communities poured their own money and labor into erecting and maintaining their local public schools. Though they paid taxes, their tax dollars were funneled into the white schools, and local education boards all but refused to release education funds to black schools. Nonetheless, by the 1930s a system of universal elementary education for blacks had been established across the South (Anderson 1988; Litwack 1998).

In the post–World War II period, states and local school districts slowly and reluctantly began to increase the quality of black schools to placate blacks and avoid legal challenges to Jim Crow segregation (Bolton 2005; Moyer 2005). However, rather than risk integration after the Supreme Court ruled segregation unconstitutional in *Brown v. The Board of Education*, some states and local municipalities passed amendments and legislation that would allow them to shut down the public school system if integration became a reality (Bolton 2005; Brown 2010; Chemerinsky 2005; Moyer 2004).² This move paralleled previous efforts that excluded blacks from educational opportunities. Although most places were able to ignore the *Brown* ruling for almost a decade, others had to act on their threat to close the public school system as blacks entered previously white public schools. The closing of public schools led to the 1964 Supreme Court case *Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*, where the court ruled that shutting down public schools in protest of integration was unconstitutional (Brown 2010; Moyer 2005). This decision, combined with other court decisions mandating that schools integrate immediately, shattered previous avenues of local resistance to integration and forced school boards and white organizations to take additional action to maintain a segregated educational system.

That action came in the form of private schools. As blacks began to enter the local white public schools, private schools cropped up seemingly overnight. According to Moyer (2005), “By 1970,

whites in the [Mississippi] Delta had given up on public schools completely” (p. 178). The rapid construction of these schools was facilitated by white solidarity that came in the form of money, land, and labor donations and corrupt spending by local and state governments that provided tuition grants, scholarships, and tax exemption (Andrews 2002; Moyer 2005). Private schools also sometimes simply stole material and financial resources from the local public schools (Andrews 2002; Moyer 2005). The move toward private schools opened up a new avenue of segregation—one between (black) public schools and (white) private schools. Since that time, the role of private schools in school segregation has decreased nationally, but their importance in the South has continued (Clotfelter 2004; Yun and Reardon 2005). This history highlights two important aspects of school segregation in the South.

First, following the institutional legacy (Ruef and Fletcher 2003) and durable inequality (Tilly 1998) frameworks, this history suggests a link between white understandings of the racialized economy and the development of social systems (e.g., the local school system) that followed the dismantling of slavery. Related, this history exposes a distinct pattern of moves and countermoves consistent with arguments regarding how legacy is perpetuated through new, yet consistent, social structures (also see O'Connell 2012). Private schools figure prominently in this history as well as in the contemporary period and thus could provide critical insight into how the legacy of slavery promotes school segregation. Specifically, we expect that private schools may be concentrated in places with a strong historical attachment to slavery and that the disproportionate availability of private schools could explain any positive association between historical slave concentration and contemporary public school attendance disparities.

Second, the strongly demarcated social hierarchy associated with the legacy of slavery may make the use of private schools more likely among whites, regardless of the number of private schools. As we discuss below, research on racial threat processes suggests that “white flight” to private schools is more common in places with higher black population concentrations (e.g., Clotfelter 1976). However, we argue that the social structural legacy of slavery may separately affect the use of private schools by amplifying their legitimacy as a means to escape integrated public schools. This would suggest a stronger association between the number of private schools and public school enrollment disparities in

places that are more deeply rooted in the slavery history (i.e., places in the Deep South). Furthermore, this could explain any positive association previously attributed to a direct impact of the legacy of slavery. Assessing this explanation will extend our understanding of the specific pathways through which the legacy of slavery is operating to reproduce black disadvantage.

BLACK CONCENTRATION AND PUBLIC SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Private schools may also be indirectly involved as part of a racial threat process. Similar to research on residential segregation and white flight (e.g. Crowder 2000; Emerson, Chai, and Yancey 2001; Krysan 2002), studies indicate that white students are increasingly less likely to attend public schools as the level of local and school black population concentration increases (Andrews 2002; Clotfelter 2004; Fairlie and Resch 2002; Renzulli and Evans 2005). In his foundational work on this topic, Clotfelter (1976) found that white flight from desegregated public schools was positively related to the concentration of black students in a school. He found that this relationship was nonlinear such that it was increasingly positive at higher concentrations of black students. That is, the rate of white flight was relatively low as long as the proportion of black students in the school remained low; however, as the proportion of black students approached a “tipping point,” typically around 50 to 55 percent, the rate of white flight increased exponentially.

The primary hypothesis linking black concentration to greater black-white inequality is the racial threat thesis. The racial threat thesis as proposed by Blalock (1967) suggests that the dominant group institutes various methods of social control in places with higher concentrations of a minority group. Blumer (1958) and Key (1949) offer complementary insights that can extend Blalock’s theory on how threat relates to prejudice and subsequent discrimination. Blumer’s (1958) discussion of racial prejudice adds an emphasis on the centrality of group, rather than individual, position. He argues that group positions are historically cultivated and that prejudice is the result of a challenge, or perceived challenge, to the dominant group’s position. This dynamic suggests that dominant groups seek to maintain their social distance relative to another group through social closure surrounding limited resources. Drawing from this argument, whites may seek to maintain their privileged social position through educational advantage, which could be

obtained by attending private schools rather than public schools.

While Blumer’s (1958) added perspective clarifies the roots of the racial threat process proposed by Blalock (1967), Key’s (1949) research provides a foundation for considering contextual variation in the link between black population concentration and the more germane threat response. Key (1949) contends that racial threat is more than a reaction to the concentration of black people. Instead, it is a combination of racial and economic climate, where the response to the black population is strongest in places where the black population is linked to white economic prosperity. It is from this starting point that we turn to a discussion of subregional variation in the racial threat process.

Subregional Variation: Racial Threat in Historical Context

We argue that, as with segregation processes linked to the availability of private schools, the role of racial threat may be enhanced by the context rooted in slavery dependence. The U.S. Census designates 16 states as part of the South, but the economic and political importance of slavery varied within the region as well as between regions (Berlin 1998). We draw on a distinction that is tied to historical differences within the South by focusing on differences between the Deep South and the Upper South. The Deep South was much more reliant on the plantation economy and is argued to have subsequently developed a more rigid set of racial politics that remain in place today (Beck and Tolnay 1990; Nye and Bullock 1992; Valentino and Sears 2005; also see Andrews and Biggs 2006; Beyerlein and Andrews 2008; Glaser 1994). This subregional variation may capture an important aspect of the social structure that we argue is a prominent feature of the legacy of slavery.

Consistent with Key’s (1949) argument regarding how the economic context structures local responses to black population concentration and the likelihood of racial threat, the greater reliance on black labor in places with strong ties to slavery may exacerbate, or be essential to initiating, actions meant to maintain white dominance. Such a racially charged social context could have important implications for the salience of racial boundaries—an integral ingredient for racial threat (Blumer 1958). Specifically, whites’ sense of relative group position, and the subsequent motivation to maintain that position, may be stronger in places entrenched in the racialized context of slavery (also see Curtis and O’Connell 2012).

Table 1. Variables and Descriptive Statistics for Southern Counties ($N = 1,186$).

Variable Name	Mean	SD	Definition
Public-Private Segregation (dependent variable)	1.17	.37	Ratio of the proportion of black students to the proportion of white students enrolled in public schools
Legacy of Slavery	.31	.21	1860 proportion of slaves (the number of slaves relative to the total population)
Private School Concentration	.04	.04	The number of private schools per 100 students in a county
Racial Threat	.23	.20	Average of (1) the number of blacks relative to the black-white county population and (2) the number of black students relative to the number of black and white students in the county school system
Deep South	.57	—	Binary variable indicating whether the county is in a state that was part of the original confederacy
Metropolitan Status	.43	—	Binary variable indicating whether a county is defined as metropolitan by the Economic Research Services (ERS)
Income Inequality	1.60	.78	White median household income relative to the black median
Homeownership Inequality	.74	.20	Black homeownership rate relative to the white homeownership rate
Poverty Inequality	2.62	1.46	Black poverty rate relative to the corresponding white rate
Education	.80	.06	Proportion of residents aged 25 and older with at least a high school education
Single Mothers	.14	.04	Proportion of families headed by a single woman

Notes: Values for the standard deviation (SD) are not included for the Deep South or Metropolitan Status variable because it does not provide useful information for noncontinuous variables.

Consistent with these arguments, research suggests that black concentration has a stronger relationship in the Deep South than in the Upper South (e.g., Corzine, Creech, and Corzine 1983; Tolnay, Beck, and Massey 1989). We extend previous work by incorporating subregional variation directly into the legacy of slavery literature. We argue that the contextual role of the Deep South is linked to historical legacies, and by linking the two literatures we are able to assess the extent to which a greater response to black population concentration explains how the legacy of slavery continues to affect contemporary inequalities.

OTHER CORRELATES OF PUBLIC-PRIVATE SCHOOL SEGREGATION

Although not our focus, other factors are likely to explain county differences in racial disparities in public school enrollment. In this analysis, we

examine covariates that are prominent in both the school and residential segregation literatures, including metropolitan status, income inequality, homeownership inequality as a proxy for wealth, poverty inequality as a reference to local social position/distance, family structure, and education. See Table 1 for a description of these variables.

We expect that metropolitan status will be negatively related to black-white disparities in public school enrollment. Metropolitan counties contain more public school districts and perhaps other schools of choice, such as charter and magnet schools. Therefore, white parents may have other public school options available before resorting to transferring their children to private school. In rural counties, private schools may be the only option available for leaving the traditional public school system.

We also account for the possibility that racial differences in public school enrollment may be affected by families' ability to afford the tuition to

send their children to private school. To do this we include variables for both black-white income inequality and black-white homeownership inequality.³ We expect that black-white income and homeownership disparities are respectively, positively and negatively related to disproportionate public school enrollment among blacks. In addition, we include a measure of the black-white poverty ratio as a measure of an extreme form of economic inequality that may reflect and sustain a local racialized context that supports social distance (also see Roscigno 1995). As a result, we anticipate a positive link to black-white public school enrollment, net of median income and wealth disparities.

Finally, research suggests that higher levels of education are positively related to private school attendance (Sikkink and Emerson 2008). To account for this aspect of private school enrollment, we include a measure of the educational attainment for the counties' total population. In addition, we account for the concentration of disadvantaged families by including the concentration of single-mother families. A higher concentration of single mother families would suggest lower private school attendance within a county.

We also examined measures of school quality to account for the possibility that enrollment in private schools is driven by the quality of private relative to public schools. We estimate relative school quality using the difference between the student-teacher ratio for public schools and private schools. In addition, we use the expenditure per student for public schools to reflect the overall quality of the public schools in a county. However, we ultimately excluded both measures of school quality from the final models. School quality was nonsignificant (for similar results, see Andrews 2002), had no effect on our other results, and had the undesirable consequence of omitting about 400 counties from the analysis because they lacked private schools.

DATA AND METHODS

Our data for the dependent variable and other contemporary covariates come from the 2006–2010 American Community Survey (ACS).⁴ Data for the legacy of slavery come from the 1860 U.S. Census. Private school and school quality data come from the National Center for Education Statistics Private School Universe Survey, 2007–2008. The analysis includes all of the counties within the Census-defined South: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland,

Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. We were forced to exclude Oklahoma because it was not a state in 1860 and so lacks the 1860 Census data that are central to this analysis.⁵

The county is a common unit of analysis in this type of research, but it is also strongly positioned to reflect the social spaces relevant to our analysis. Most notably, many public school districts in the South overlap with county boundaries, and the county has been the locus of life and politics in the region, especially for black Southerners (Petersen and Ward 2015). Moreover, Labao and Hooks (2007) suggested that historical path dependency processes, such as those related to the legacy of slavery, are most salient at the county level. These factors combine to make the county the optimal unit of analysis for this study.

Dependent Variable

Our dependent variable is a disparity index measuring black public school enrollment relative to white public school enrollment (for a discussion of disparity indexes, see Shaw et al. 2008).⁶ The formula is as follows:

$$\frac{(\text{Blacks in public school} / \text{Blacks in school})}{(\text{Non-Hispanic whites in public school} / \text{Non-Hispanic whites in school})}$$

A value of 1 indicates that black and white children are equally likely to attend public school. A value above 1 signifies that black children are more likely to attend public school than whites, and a value below 1 means that white children are more likely to attend public school than blacks. The mean suggests that the average southern county has nearly proportional public school attendance (see Table 1), yet the standard deviation suggests substantial variation across counties. There are counties where blacks attend public schools at a lower rate than whites (e.g., minimum = .28), while blacks in other counties are disproportionately enrolled in public schools relative to whites (e.g., maximum = 6.25).⁷ We briefly note that while differences in public school enrollment do not capture the totality of school segregation, they highlight a historically and contemporarily important component of segregation that is related to the use of alternative school options to maintain segregation—a key focus of our analysis.

Focal Independent Variables

The legacy of slavery is represented by the proportion of slaves relative to the total population in 1860. Due to county boundary changes over time, the historical data cannot be directly attached to contemporary county units for all counties. Building from the work of O'Connell (2012), we use a new set of slave proportion estimates for contemporary units (for a comparison of the estimates, see Figure 1). Although the two sets of estimates closely resemble one another, the new estimates are a substantial improvement because they use the spatial patterning of the data to derive more nuanced estimates of the distribution of historical slave concentration. For example, information from neighboring counties was used as an indication of the distribution of slaves within a historical county that subsequently split into two counties (full details of data construction are available upon request).⁸

The total number of private schools in a county is taken from the National Center for Education Statistics Private School Universe Survey, 2007–2008. The final variable is the number of private schools per 100 students in the county. We include the base number of students because counties with more students may have more private schools regardless of processes related to legacy. Figure 2 presents the distribution of private schools across the South while bringing attention to their concentration within the Deep South.

We aim to capture the effect of both the general black population and the population of blacks in the school systems, as both have been shown to affect the prevalence of white flight to private schools. Factor analysis suggests that the two variables are highly collinear so we combined them into a latent variable by averaging the proportion of blacks in a county and the proportion of blacks enrolled in public school. We calculate the proportions relative to the black and white population rather than the total population because the juxtaposition of the two populations is more consistent with the idea of “threat” than the proportion of blacks relative to the entire population. We also include a squared term to capture any curvilinear effects in the models as suggested by the “tipping points” noted in Clotfelter’s (1976) work.

Scholars have operationalized the Deep South in a variety of ways (see e.g., Andrews and Biggs 2006; Beck and Tolnay 1990; Corzine et al. 1983; Stovel 2001). However, given our focus on slavery history, we use a dichotomous variable to identify states that were part of the original Confederacy: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi,

South Carolina, and Texas (see e.g., McCrary, Miller, and Baum 1978). Correspondingly, the Upper South states include Arkansas, Delaware, Kentucky, North Carolina, Maryland, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.⁹

Model Design

We estimate four models. The first model includes slave concentration, black population concentration, black concentration squared, and an indicator for Deep South status, as well as the control variables. In the second model, we add the private school variable in order to examine its mediating effect on the slavery coefficient. The third model adds an interaction between the Deep South and private schools. The separate addition of this interaction provides insight into the extent to which the greater use of private schools in the Deep South explains how the legacy of slavery contributes to school segregation. In the fourth model, we add an interaction between the Deep South and racial threat. This allows us to assess a number of points. First, we examine whether the effect of racial threat varies by subregion and subsequently how much of the relationship for the South is driven by the Deep South. This contributes to discussions regarding the extent to which the racial threat process is unique to specific parts of the United States (Blalock 1956, 1957; Curtis and O'Connell 2012; Emerson 1994; Giles 1977; Taylor 1998; Wilcox and Roof 1978). Second, we assess the extent to which legacy’s impact on school segregation is primarily indirect through the amplified threat context associated with the Deep South.

We initially estimate these models using ordinary least squares regression.¹⁰ However, a Moran’s *I* test suggests that there is residual spatial dependence among neighboring counties even in our full model ($I = .07, p < .001$). Spatial autocorrelation among the residuals can meaningfully affect coefficient and standard error estimates. Therefore, we use spatial regression analysis, which can account for the spatial structure of the data and reduce bias by separating the spatial autocorrelation from the other coefficient estimates. We estimate spatial error models because the Robust Lagrange Multiplier is significant for an error but not lag specification (RLM error = 8.11, $p < .01$; RLM lag = .25, $p > .10$).¹¹

RESULTS

Consistent with a legacy of slavery argument, contemporary disparities in public school attendance are patterned by historical slavery (see Table 2).

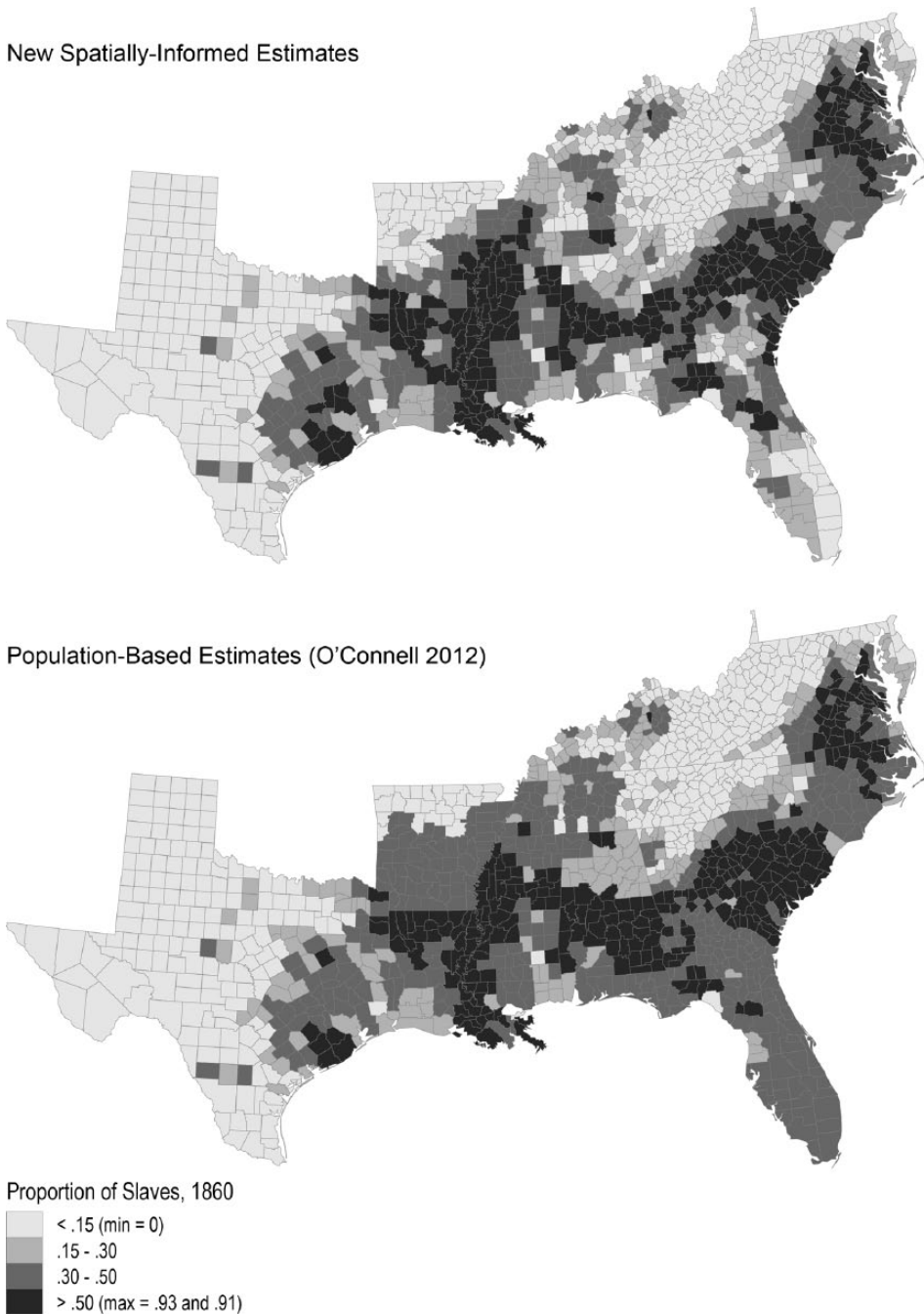


Figure 1. Comparison of New and Old Slave Population Estimates

Our baseline model suggests that black students are more likely than white students to attend public schools in counties with higher historical concentrations of slaves. Similarly, counties in the Deep South have greater public-private school enrollment

disparities net of other factors. This association, combined with the link between the Deep South and social legacies rooted in slavery, underscores the role of social and historical context in black-white public-private school enrollment.

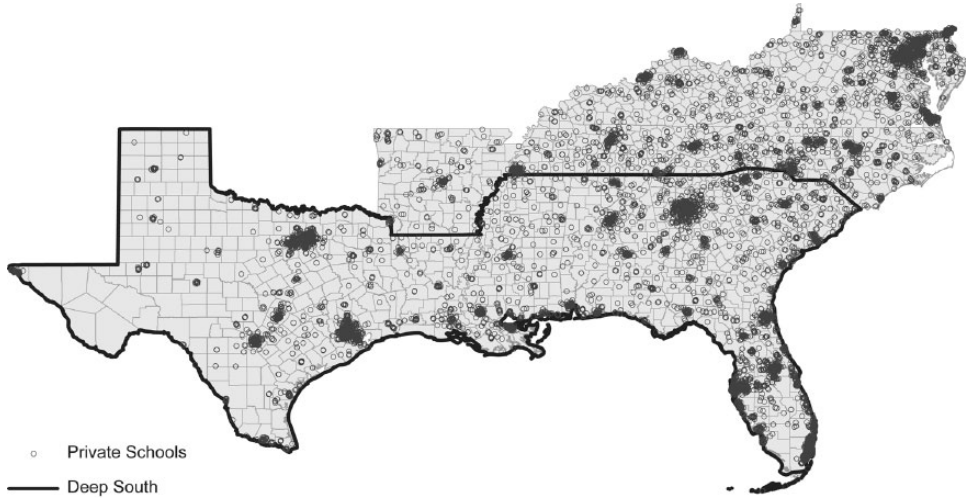


Figure 2. Private School Location and the Deep South, Private School Universe Survey 2007-08

Table 2. Coefficient Estimates, Spatial Error Regression Model (N = 1,186).

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Legacy of Slavery	.17** (.06)	.18** (.06)	.18** (.06)	.14* (.06)
Deep South	.05* (.02)	.06** (.02)	.05 (.03)	.12** (.04)
Threat: Proportion Black	-1.24*** (.15)	-1.24*** (.15)	-1.23*** (.15)	.03 (.23)
Proportion Black Squared	3.09*** (.19)	3.08*** (.19)	3.08*** (.19)	.55 (.36)
Private Schools per 100 Students		.83*** (.22)	.78* (.35)	.94** (.34)
Deep South × Private School Interaction			.07 (.45)	-.10 (.43)
Deep South × Proportion Black Interaction				-1.53*** (.27)
Deep South × Proportion Black Squared Interaction				3.16*** (.41)
Metropolitan Status	.03 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.03 (.02)
White-Black Income Ratio	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Black-White Homeownership Ratio	.02 (.04)	.03 (.04)	.03 (.04)	.02 (.04)
Black-White Poverty Ratio	.03*** (.01)	.03*** (.01)	.03*** (.01)	.02*** (.01)
Adult Educational Attainment	.26 (.16)	.23 (.16)	.23 (.16)	.08 (.15)
Single Mothers	.54 (.35)	.45 (.35)	.44 (.35)	.26 (.34)
Intercept	.73*** (.15)	.72*** (.15)	.72*** (.15)	.82*** (.15)
Lambda (λ) ^b	.19*** (.04)	.18*** (.04)	.19*** (.04)	.17*** (.04)

^aCoefficients are estimated by a spatial error regression model that was run in R 2.14.0 using the spdep package (R Development Core Team 2012).

^b λ is the coefficient for the spatial error term, which reflects unobserved similarities in neighboring counties as defined by the 5 nearest neighbors approach in GeoDa (i.e., the 5 counties with the shortest distance between their centroids and the center of the focal county are identified as neighbors of the focal county).

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

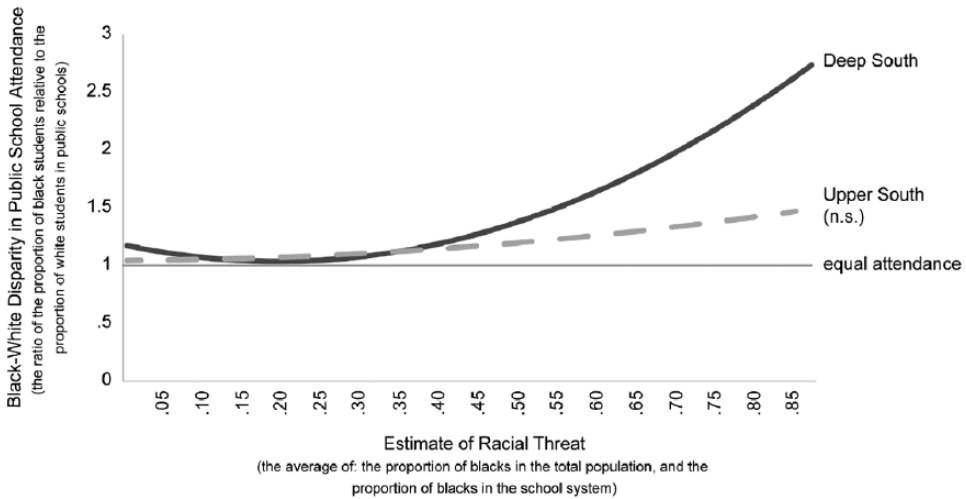


Figure 3. Racial Threat Association in the Deep South and the Upper South

Our results also provide some support for the role of racial threat processes (e.g., Blalock 1967; Blumer 1958; Clotfelter 1976). The black population concentration variables suggest that black students are more likely than white students to attend public schools as black population concentration increases, such that the association is increasingly positive at higher levels of concentration. This is most consistent with Clotfelter's (1976) work on school segregation that suggests a "tipping point" after which white flight is dramatically higher. Building from this baseline establishing a role of both history and processes related to contemporary black population concentration (also see O'Connell 2012), we further examine the processes underlying the legacy association and the interrelationship between legacy and threat.

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In our second model we add the concentration of private schools to assess their role in generating public school enrollment disparities. Consistent with our expectations, there is a positive association between the presence of private schools and black-white disparities in public school enrollment. However, despite the historical link between slavery and private schools, the addition of the private school variable does not attenuate the slavery or Deep South coefficients. Similarly, slavery's link to the contemporary school system is not explained by a moderating influence on the use of private schools. In fact, the social and historical context associated with the

Deep South has no effect on how private schools are related to public school enrollment disparities—the interaction between private schools and the Deep South is nonsignificant (see Model 3).

In contrast, our results suggest that the legacy associated with the Deep South exacerbates the racial threat association (see Model 4). In the Deep South, higher concentrations of blacks are associated with higher disparities in the proportion of black students attending public schools relative to white students (see Figure 3). This association remains positively nonlinear such that the association is increasingly positive at higher concentrations of blacks relative to whites. The main effect of racial threat is not sustained in this model, which suggests that in the Upper South black population concentration is unrelated to public school attendance disparities. Our results indicate that the social structural context associated with the Deep South affects contemporary inequalities indirectly by shaping local responses to black population concentration. Despite this strong moderation, slave concentration remains significant even in this final model, suggesting that conditions associated with and/or fostered by a history of slavery continue to shape the contemporary school system in the South independently of factors observed here.

To clarify some of the processes underlying these results, we estimated models with alternative dependent variable specifications (not shown). We used the same modeling strategy as above with each of the following dependent variables: proportion of white students in public school, proportion of white students in private school, and proportion

of black students in private school. Given our use of the concentration of black students in public schools as part of the racial threat variable, examining the proportion of black students in public school as a dependent variable is both methodologically and theoretically illogical.

Although not directly identifiable, these additional results bolster a white flight interpretation of why black population concentration is related to school enrollment disparities. The role of black population concentration plays out primarily through differences in white enrollment. Whites are increasingly *not* enrolled in public schools in counties with higher black concentrations and are instead increasingly enrolled in private schools. Consistent with our primary results, these associations with white enrollment are exacerbated in the Deep South.

DISCUSSION

A key component of the sociological imagination (Mills [1959] 2000) is that places are shaped by their histories. Through its impact on place, slavery continues to influence American society, particularly black disadvantage. Our results suggest that the legacy of slavery contributes to black-white educational disparities through greater public-private school racial segregation. Understanding the role of our slavery history provides insight into the structural foundations supporting this segregation, which might be valuable to efforts to reverse dangerous trends in school resegregation that have been increasing across the South over the last few decades (Chemerinsky 2005).

We provide evidence on two interconnected explanations for how the legacy of slavery affects contemporary school segregation. First, even though the concentration of private schools helps explain racial differences in public school enrollment, it provides little insight into slavery's link to segregation. This motivates the examination of alternative pathways. Scholars suggest that the establishment of private schools is related to a variety of factors such as civil rights mobilization, violent social control, and the timing of local court rulings (Andrews 2002; Brown 2010; Porter, Howell, and Hempel 2014). Therefore, it is possible that slavery structures other racialized events, including those mentioned above, and they, in turn, shape the concentration of private schools. Moreover, slavery and these other events may be associated with the development of specific types of private schools, as suggested by Porter et al. (2014).

Exclusionary practices may be associated with the presence of private schools with certain characteristics (e.g., high tuition), which may mean that models that include all private schools would underestimate their role. Future research could extend our understanding of school segregation and the role of private schools in the legacy of slavery by bridging our work with that of others (i.e., Andrews 2002; Porter et al. 2014) to investigate the specific types of private schools associated with a legacy of slavery and the factors that lead to their development. Although our initial pass provides little support for the replacement model of how legacy is perpetuated (see O'Connell 2012; Ruef and Fletcher 2003; Tilly 1998), a more detailed treatment would help tease apart the interrelationship among slavery history, private schools, and educational segregation.

The second mechanism through which legacy may operate is threat processes related to local racial composition (Blalock 1967; also see Blumer 1958; Key 1949). We argue that threat processes, and particularly the amplification of those processes in the Deep South, are part of how slavery continues to shape contemporary society. This formulation of legacy places an emphasis on economic structure and notions of relative group position (for a similar discussion of the legacy of slavery, see Curtis and O'Connell 2012). Consistent with arguments raised by Key (1949), we suggest that the interaction between black population concentration and the Deep South is rooted in the greater reliance on the slave economy that initially led those states to secede from the Union. Our results may even go so far as to suggest that the centrality of subordinate black labor to the economy is a necessary condition for racial threat as we found no evidence of threat processes in the Upper South, where black labor was less essential. However, we stress that the limited role of racial threat in the Upper South is not a reprieve from conversations regarding discrimination and inequality, because racial threat, especially as it relates to black population concentration (see Brown 2010), is but one pathway to racial hostility and black disadvantage.

Before moving on, we note that there are two ways that racial threat could result in greater black-white public school enrollment disparities: through the development of more private schools and/or the greater use of available private schools by white students. Because our results suggest that black population concentration is related to school segregation even after accounting for the concentration of private schools, we argue that racial threat

influences the local *use* of private schools in the Deep South. Although our results are suggestive, a study of reasons for attending private schools and the type of private school attended is necessary to shed additional light on the different processes involved.

The subregional differences identified in our analysis highlight broader implications for future research. Our results challenge assumptions regarding the homogeneity of the South (also see e.g., Beck and Tolnay 1990; Corzine et al 1983). Results based on all counties in the South would suggest that processes related to local black concentration unfold similarly across the region. Yet when we allow for subregional variation, we find that the relationship is trivial and nonsignificant in the Upper South. Consistent with previous research (see especially Curtis and O'Connell 2012), our results suggest that indications of a racial threat process are driven predominately if not entirely by processes occurring in the Deep South. Continued investigation of this subregional distinction, as well as others that could be relevant to the non-South, is vital for identifying the processes that underlie persistent inequality in the United States.

Although we did not present the results of our models with school quality variables, our null results provide insight into the mechanisms underlying school segregation. Despite substantial variation in the variables, neither the quality of the local public school system nor the quality of the local public school system relative to the private schools displays an effect on racial differences in public school enrollment. This suggests that poor public schools are not driving the disproportionate white disinvestment in the public school system. In addition, that disinvestment occurs without regard to whether private schools are of higher quality on observed characteristics. Future research should investigate other factors related to the quality of education received and parent *perceptions* of school quality. However, our results suggest that differences in public school enrollment are driven more by racialized processes than by school quality.

Our focus is on the processes that underlie school segregation in the South, yet it is important to remember that this is a national issue. Future research must continue to examine the causes and possible solutions to school segregation in other regions as well. Although school segregation in other regions may not be shaped by antebellum slavery in the same way as in the South, other historical factors unique to the non-South may need to be incorporated if we are to gauge the nuances of

the processes underlying black disadvantage in the non-South. Through this and future research, we aim to bring light to the historical foundations and contemporary processes underlying black-white inequality in the United States.

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NOTES

1. Our focus on the South, as well as on the Deep South, is meant to emphasize a particular aspect of the inequality-generating process and does not preclude other types of places from sharing similar levels of inequality. Our intent is to argue that the roots of that inequality, and therefore the processes and solutions, are distinct.
2. The most notable state included in this group is Virginia; however, other states took similar action (e.g., North Carolina).
3. Our results are consistent when including black and white median income as separate variables. Overspecification of the model precluded us from keeping them in the final analysis.
4. Information on public school attendance is only available from the long form portion of the Census questionnaire. Given the shift to collecting long form data through the ACS, we are forced to rely on period estimates rather than a point-in-time estimate from a single census year. These data reflect the entire five-year period, which may weaken any association with the point-in-time estimate of private schools due to fluctuations over time.
5. Data availability excluded Washington, DC; York County, South Carolina; and Wyoming County, West Virginia.
6. The results were consistent when using alternative specifications, including the proportion of blacks in public school minus the corresponding proportion for non-Hispanic whites.
7. Using a disparity index of public school attendance is beneficial since focusing on private school attendance would unnecessarily limit our analysis to counties with private schools.

8. Our results are consistent when using the original slave concentration data from O'Connell (2012).
9. We conducted sensitivity analyses using alternate Deep South definitions (1) Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas; (2) Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina; (3) Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina; (4) Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina.
10. We also tested a multilevel model since counties that are nested within a state could be more similar than other counties because of common history and legislation. The results were consistent when using the multilevel model, but the design effect was low, which suggests that the added complexity is unnecessary.
11. We only turned to the robust tests, which are robust to the other form of spatial dependence (i.e., the RLM error is robust to spatial dependence related to a spatial lag), because the nonrobust LM diagnostics were significant for both error and lag.

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