STRUCTURAL RACISM, FAMILY STRUCTURE, & BLACK-WHITE INEQUALITY IN POVERTY:

THE DIFFERENTIAL IMPACT OF THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY AMONG SINGLE MOTHER & MARRIED PARENT HOUSEHOLDS

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“Today, in virtually every realm for which evidence exists—from the bottom to the top of the socioeconomic hierarchy—Whites remain better off, on average, than Blacks.”

- Sociologist, Barbara Reskin (2012)
BLACK-WHITE POVERTY GAP AMONG FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN (U.S.)

(Source: Sullivan & Ziegert, 2021)
Black poverty rates remain about **double** White poverty rates, despite the poverty measure used.
Poverty rates are higher among single-mother families vs. married parent families.

A disproportionate share of Black families are single-mother families.

Single motherhood deemed a mechanism for the reproduction of poverty that largely contributes to the Black-White poverty gap.
MARRIAGE AS A SOLUTION TO REDUCING THE BLACK-WHITE POVERTY GAP AMONG FAMILIES

- Much emphasis on the economic benefits of marriage for families (e.g., Amato & Maynard 2007; Thomas & Sawhill 2002; Waite 1995).

- Hence, marriage has been deemed a mechanism for economic stability among children and poverty reduction (AEI-Brookings 2015; Amato & Maynard 2007).
Yet...there are racial disparities in the impact of family structure.

White women experience greater economic returns than Black women

Marriage provides more material advantages for White children than Black children.
(Manning & Brown 2006).

Single motherhood has a more adverse impact on educational outcomes of White children than Black children
(Cross 2020; Brand et al. 2020).

Poverty rates remain higher for Black families than White families, despite having the same family structure.
(Williams & Baker 2020).
Structural racism involves “macrolevel systems, social forces, institutions, ideologies, and processes that interact with one another to generate and reinforce inequities among racial and ethnic groups.”

(Gee & Ford, 2011)
THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONS IN SHAPING (RACIAL) INEQUALITY

- Institutions can regulate and shape individual and collective behavior, and thus shape inequality. (Brady, Blome, and Kleider 2016).

- Racism is deeply embedded in society’s institutions (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Feagin 2014).

- Oppressively racist institutions have enduring harmful effects (Feagin 2014).

- Examining historic oppressive institutions can help illuminate the long-term origins of contemporary racial inequalities.
HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL RACISM: THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY

- Slavery was an institutionalized mechanism of racial inequality (Biggs & Andrews 2015; Du Bois 1903; Oliver & Winant 2014).

- Historical slavery concentration reflects places’ reliance on slave labor & suggests local ties to the system of slavery.

- Linked to contemporary economic, social, & health outcomes (O’Connell 2012; Berger 2018; Acharya et al. 2016; Kramer et al., 2017, Reece 2020).
We can gain new insights by integrating research on poverty in families and the legacy of slavery.

Research demonstrating racial variation in the economic returns to different family structures implies that racism shapes how family relates to outcomes (Cross 2020; Williams & Baker 2021).

Assessing whether indicators of structural racism can impact racial inequality differently within a given family type can provide evidence to the above point.
RESEARCH QUESTION

Does the legacy of slavery amplify Black-White inequality in poverty among individuals within the same family structure?
THE CURRENT STUDY: A MULTI-DATA, MULTI-METHOD APPROACH

Poverty and family literature: Individual-level focus

Legacy of slavery literature: County-level, placed-based approach

1. Multilevel analysis linking individual- and state-level data
2. County-level analysis
MULTILEVEL ANALYSIS

INDIVIDUALS-STATES
DATA

- Luxembourg Income Study (LIS)
  - U.S. waves (2015-2019)
  - Current Population Survey (CPS) March supplement

- State-level slavery data: Historical U.S. Census
Non-Hispanic White & Black individuals residing in the South
- We exclude OK and D.C.

Total $N = 106,985$ individuals
- $N = 22,006$ in single mother-headed households
- $N = 84,979$ in married with children households
MEASURES

**Dependent Variable**
- Black-White poverty gap
- Relative Poverty: individuals living in households with post-tax, post-transfer disposable household incomes below 50% of median.

**Independent Variables**
- Race
- 1860 Enslaved Population
- Household composition
- Head’s age
- Household size
- Head’s education attainment
- Household employment
- Head’s immigrant status
- Rural Residence
- Year
ANALYTIC STRATEGY

Descriptive Analyses
- differences in poverty by family type & race

Bivariate Analyses
- the relationship between 1860 enslaved population and the Black-White poverty gap for each family structure

Multi-level Linear Probability Models
- interaction of enslaved population x Black
## Poverty Descriptives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Single Mother Households</th>
<th>Married with Kids Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black-White Poverty Gap</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Max. Poverty Rate</td>
<td>21.2% (NC)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min. Poverty Rate</td>
<td>4.9% (KY)</td>
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Note: All differences are statistically significant.
BIVARIATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BLACK-WHITE INEQUALITY IN POVERTY & 1860 ENSLAVED POPULATION BY FAMILY STRUCTURE

A. Single Mother Households

B. Married Couple with Kids Households

% Enslaved Population, 1860

BIVARIATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BLACK-WHITE INEQUALITY IN POVERTY & 1860 ENSLAVED POPULATION AMONG SINGLE MOTHER HOUSEHOLDS, $r = .27$
BIVARIATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BLACK-WHITE INEQUALITY IN POVERTY & 1860 ENSLAVED POPULATION AMONG MARRIED WITH CHILDREN HOUSEHOLDS, $r = .50$
### Multi-level Linear Probability Models of Poverty among Black & White Southerners by Family Structure

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Single Mother Households</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coef.</td>
<td>Z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enslaved Pop.</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>0.75</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enslaved Pop. x Black</td>
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<td>1.39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>All Controls</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>22,006</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: All models include controls for year and cluster the errors by state. ***p < .001, ** p < .01, *p < .05
COUNTY-LEVEL SUPPLEMENTAL ANALYSES
COUNTY-LEVEL DATA

- American Community Survey (ACS)
  - 5-year period estimates for 2015-2019

- 1860 Historical Census
  - Slave data for counties
COUNTY-LEVEL SAMPLE

- 1,075 southern counties for single-mother household analysis; 1,087 counties for married households with children analysis.

- Excludes Oklahoma & D.C.

- Counties capture important sub-state variation in the historical attachment to slavery.
COUNTY-LEVEL MEASURES

DEPENDENT VARIABLE

- County-level Black-White inequality in poverty by family type
  Based on the Official Poverty Measure (OPM)

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE

- The total (%) of enslaved population in a county in 1860.
COUNTY-LEVEL ANALYTIC STRATEGY

- **Descriptive Analyses**: differences in poverty by family type & race
- **Bivariate Analyses**: the relationship between 1860 enslaved population & the Black-White poverty gap for each family structure.
- **Binary Regression**: with state fixed effects
- **Maps**: of dependent variable
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Single Mother Households</th>
<th>Married with Kids Households</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black-White Poverty Gap</td>
<td>10</td>
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Note: All differences are statistically significant.
BIVARIATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BLACK-WHITE INEQUALITY IN POVERTY & 1860 ENSLAVED POPULATION IN SOUTHERN COUNTIES BY FAMILY STRUCTURE

Panel A. Single Mother Households (r = -.02, p > .10)

Panel B. Married with Kids Households (r = .10, p < .001)

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Coef.</th>
<th>Stand. Error</th>
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<td>.049</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1,076</td>
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<tr>
<td>Married with Children Households</td>
<td>.065*</td>
<td>.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,088</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Note: All models include a set of state fixed effects. North Carolina serves as the reference. ***p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05
BLACK-WHITE INEQUALITY IN POVERTY AMONG SINGLE MOTHER HOUSEHOLDS IN SOUTHERN COUNTIES, 2015-2019

Proportion of Black minus White Single with Children Households that are Poor

- < -.25
- -.25 - 0
- 0 - .25
- > .25
- Missing
BLACK-WHITE INEQUALITY IN POVERTY AMONG MARRIED PARENT HOUSEHOLDS IN SOUTHERN COUNTIES, 2015-2019

Proportion of Black minus White Married with Children Households that are Poor

- < -.25
- -.25 - 0
- 0 - .25
- > .25
- Missing
CONCLUSION
CONCLUSIONS

- That Black poverty is higher than White poverty across family structure, suggests a need to consider explanations for inequality that lie beyond family structure (e.g., structural racism).

- We expected there to be an impact of the legacy of slavery on Black-White inequality in poverty, but we did not expect this relationship to be more consequential for married parent households than single mother households.

- The mechanisms stemming from the legacy of slavery affecting how family structure relates to poverty may be unique to the relative advantages associated with marriage.
Why a stronger legacy impact for married families with children?

- White married individuals experience greater financial returns from marriage (Addo & Lichter 2018; Shapiro et al. 2013) that may be exacerbated by the legacy of slavery, which has been shown to protect White advantages (Gabriel et al., 2021; Reece, 2020).

- Simultaneously, Black married families residing in stronger legacy of slavery contexts are likely to experience enhanced negative consequences as a result of this form of structural racism.
WHY A LACK OF/WEAK LEGACY IMPACT FOR SINGLE MOTHER FAMILIES?

- The punitive nature of the legacy of slavery (particularly its connections to the criminal legal system (e.g., Gottlieb and Flynn, 2021; Vandiver et al., 2006), may extend to the economic realm and impact marginalized families (i.e., single-mother families) similarly, regardless of race.

- The lack of economic/welfare support combined with the enhanced role of the criminal legal system associated with the legacy of slavery produces a context that is detrimental for single mothers.
RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

- Adds to the evidence of a contemporary legacy of slavery

- Demonstrates useful insights to be gained by examining structural mechanisms of inequality

- Underlines need for more attention on the role of racism when explaining why marriage is differentially protective against poverty for Black & White families

- Challenges implicit belief that marriage is an anti-poverty mechanism that works equally across groups/context & suggest the limitations of individual-level perspectives in explaining racial inequality across family types
POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Policy may reward or protect certain family structures that are associated with Whiteness—namely, marriage. This can be direct or indirect, and at all institutional levels, not just the state/local level. (e.g., Brown 2021)

- Existing marriage penalties can compound with local structural racism to the disadvantage of married Black households.

- However, federal policy (e.g., Child Tax Credit) can also mitigate the impact of the discriminatory contexts associated with the legacy of slavery that are implied by our analyses.
Structural racism, family structure, and Black–White inequality: The differential impact of the legacy of slavery on poverty among single mother and married parent households

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Abstract

Objective: To assess whether an indicator of structural racism—the legacy of slavery—impacts racial inequality in poverty among individuals within the same family structure.

Background: Family structure is a dominant explanation for racial inequality in poverty. This overemphasis on an “individual-level” variable results in relatively less attention to the role of structural factors. Yet, structural fac-
Thank you!
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