

I greatly enjoyed the paper. The argument is buttressed by an impressive array of analyses. I have a question, some notes about framing the mechanism, and specific comments that I hope may strengthen the paper in a few small ways.

**Question:**

Are whites in former slave counties poorer and less educated? Could part of the historical legacy of slavery be one of overall poverty, contributing to racial resentment? I suspect that you investigated this alternative mechanism.

**Framing the Mechanism:**

I am fully persuaded that attitudes handed down from the time of slavery explain current racism, not racial threat and probably not migration. I am not sure that the mechanism driving this is primarily about different elite ‘incentives’ and not equally about socialization resulting from different agricultural practices. Cotton plantations, as institutions of slavery, may have affected attitudes directly.

You suggest that economic and political changes gave Southern Black Belt elites an incentive to promote anti-black sentiment and violence and that this mechanism is attenuated in areas “earliest to eliminate the political and economic incentives...for example, by adopting new technologies, such as tractors, that reduced demand for black farm labor.” The logic of this mechanism is that violence is rational because it drives down black political power and wages, but when technology replaces labor, wages no longer matter as much. This dynamic is best explained on page 20 and in footnote 22, but I think the paper would be more clear if the mechanism was framed as a reinforcing relationship between economic/agricultural practices and attitudes, which includes but is not limited to, incentives for elites to oppress.

I buy that the economic situation of dependency on slave labor was impactful, but I don’t know if this should be seen primarily as strategic. Certainly there were incentives for white elites to maintain power, but I think norms deserve more credit in your story than “additional factors” or the results of elite incentives. With changing technology and thus less black labor in the cotton fields, there may be less socialization of dominance and old norms may fade. The fact that the analysis in 5.1 finds that contemporary black concentration reduces racial resentment suggests that the presence of a black population may socialize white people out of racial biases. This suggests that the effect of technology may be more about displacing the plantation labor practices, rather than reducing economic and political competition.

The elites had economic incentives to keep wages low, but, as noted at the top of pg. 20, poor whites did themselves an economic disservice by engaging in violence. The dynamic seems as much cultural, almost genocidal, as strategic. If labor supply was the driving issue, we would expect to see elite white efforts focus on preventing migration, encouraging immigration, and not killing working age men. Instead, it seems that a lot of discriminatory laws were social, rather than economic. Segregated spaces, violence against interracial relationships, forced

sterilization—these things required no rational economic motivation. The “hostile attitudes” discussed in footnote 22 were plausibly created by the institution of slavery and drove violence and economic oppression in the postbellum period, as much or more than the reverse (pg. 20). The fact that support for slavery was evenly spread across counties in the antebellum does not mean that postbellum differences in racial attitudes were driven by economics and not culture. Social norms may be driving economics as much as economics is driving norms. I do not think that this needs to be resolved for the paper to make sense; they are mutually reinforcing mechanisms.

### **Specific Comments:**

#### **5.2 Geographic Sorting**

I do not see the migration hypothesis as a threat to these conclusions, but the conclusion could be strengthened by estimates beyond one 5-year period.

Census data and polling is not my area, but I imagine someone has confronted this challenge of estimating the effects of migration on attitudes and that there are creative ways to do so. For example, one might look at times when county populations increased at relatively higher rates and see if this was associated in higher rates of change in outcome variables, or, in times before those questions were asked, other demographics that correlated with outcome variables (e.g. education). One might also estimate times when there were influxes of liberals, conservative, or people with more education. If percent enslaved does not predict such demographic changes, I would see it as evidence against the sorting hypothesis.

#### **6.3 Lynching and Farming Inequality**

I find the observation that white farmers were better off than black farmers in higher-slave counties to be more compelling than the discrepancy in lynchings per capita. One might expect that where there are more black people, there would be more lynchings. The lynching data would be more interesting if presented in terms of 100,000 black residents.

Best Regards,  
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