The Economic Functions of Extrajudicial Violence in the Jim Crow South

By Mark Stelzner and William Darity Jr.[1]

Abstract: In this paper, we analyze the direct economic functions of White-on-Black violence in the Jim Crow South. As we will see, White-on-Black violence was used to control Black labor and to seize gains made by Black agriculturalists. We find that in 1879, on Black farms where individuals worked for a share of the crop in counties that experienced White-on-Black violence during the pre-harvest season, the total amount of man-hours expended on the farm was 22 percent higher than on Black farms also working for a share in counties that did not experience such violence. We also find that the occurrence of one or more White-on-Black lynchings in a given county is associated with a 4.7 percentage point decrease in the percent change in Black landownership in the same county in the year following said lynching, and a 4.4 percentage point decrease in the percent change in Black landownership in the year after that. As we will see, given the high frequency of White-on-Black violence in the Jim Crow South, the impact on Black labor and the cumulative effect on Black landownership were huge.

Keywords: Jim Crow, lynchings, productivity, property ownership

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Introduction

In the mid-1860s, the Ku Klux Klan, the Red Shirts, the White League, and other White terrorist groups were created in retaliation to the end of the Civil War and the newfound freedom of formerly enslaved Black Americans. In the following years, they spread quickly throughout the South—actively working to suppress Black political expression and that of White southerners who backed the Republican ticket, which for a brief period supported the expansion of Black Americans' economic and political rights.[2]

Through a "festival of violence" in the 1870s,[3] White Democrats were able to claw back control of local and state governments across the South and pass Jim Crow laws that enforced segregation, exploitation, and discrimination against Black Americans.[4] In the years that followed, White threats, beatings, and murders of Black southerners became a constant feature of the landscape to which White government officials almost always turned a blind eye.

From 1863 through 1949, for instance, there were upwards of 100 White massacres directed against Black communities throughout the nation, some which had death tolls in the hundreds.[5] In terms of White-on-Black lynchings, over the same time period, verified accounts total 4,660 Black deaths—meaning, on average, a White mob murdered a Black man, woman, or child once a week, every week for the entirety of those eight and a half decades.[6]

Many White-on-Black murders also went unrecorded. Consequently, the overall amount of White-on-Black violence over this period is potentially much higher than adding together official estimates from lynchings and massacres. Indeed, Robert Smalls, who escaped slavery during the Civil War, served in the Union navy, and later went on to represent South Carolina in both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, estimated that from the end of the Civil War though the turn of the 20th century, White violence killed 53,000 Black Americans.[7]

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[2] Du Bois (1935); Initiative (2017).
[3] This phrase is taken from Tolnay and Beck (1995).
[4] Du Bois (1935), p. 684; Foner (1988); Tolnay and Beck (1995).
[5] See Darity et al. (2022; Table 2) for a complete list. Also see Bentley-Edwards et al (2018).
[6] This is the authors' calculation using the most recent data from Tolnay and Beck (1995). Although there is some ambiguity, massacres usually refer to killings with four or more victims, and lynching refer to killings with less than four victims. Tolnay and Beck's data has White-on-Black killings with between one and 14 victims. However, the typical incident they record in their data has less than three victims.
[7] For account on Smalls, see Darity et al. (2022). Others have found Smalls' estimate to be roughly correct (Egerton, 2018).

This violence served not only a political purpose. Along with changes in state laws implemented after White Democrats retook control of the South, extrajudicial violence had direct and fundamental economic functions as well. Understanding the material purpose of this violence is important for understanding the history of the United States, which often ignores the exploitative nature of the economic system created in the wake of slavery.[8] At the same time, estimates of the pecuniary effects of White-on-Black violence in the Jim Crow South are important for informing and motivating current political discussions—including the national conversation on reparations for Black Americans whose ancestors were enslaved in the United States.

In this paper, we seek to examine the economic functions played by extrajudicial violence in the Jim Crow South. In the following sections, we analyze the literature and contemporary sources to outline those functions of White-on-Black violence. Subsequently, we combine new and existing data to look for statistical evidence of the same dynamics. As we will show, two central objectives of extrajudicial violence were to recreate White dominance over Black labor and to forcefully take gains made by Black southerners. The effects of each of these dynamics were huge.

The Jim Crow economy: Monopsony and unfree labor

Social scientists have explored elements of the economic web that made the systematic exploitation of Black labor possible under the Jim Crow regime. For example, some have highlighted how the passage of certain labor laws led to the creation of monopsony power wielded by southern Whites. Naidu finds, for instance, that enticement laws—which made it a crime for an employer to hire someone who was already under contract with someone else—reduced worker mobility, wages, and returns to experience for Black farmers in the Jim Crow South.[9]

To be sure, there were many laws that increased the monopsony power of southern White employers. For example, contract enforcement and false pretense laws reduced the ability of southern Blacks to quit a disadvantageous or harmful work scenario either by making the breach

[8] Herbin-Triant (2021, p. 111) explains that historians often ignore the economic side of Jim Crow. Some economists, on the other hand, have argued that labor markets in the postbellum South were competitive—meaning the economic system was not exploitative (Wright, 1986).
[9] Roback (1984); Ransom and Sutch (2001); Naidu (2010).

of a labor contract illegal or by charging employees with fraud if they quit before paying off an advance.

Legislatures across the South also enacted vagrancies laws, which made it a crime to choose not to work, and laws that made it illegal for farmers to sell their crops after sundown—effectively making landlords the pure monopsonists of anything produced by sharecroppers working their land since Black workers were not permitted to leave their posts during the day to sell their produce either.[10] As put by one White southerner, James T. Rapier, in a U.S. Senate hearing on outmigration from the South in 1880, almost all Black farmers in the South were under a landlord's contract: "A man is prevented, no matter whether his family is sick, from sundown to sunrise, from going and selling anything that he has," Rapier explained, "as the landlord will not give him time between sunrise and sundown."[11]

Others have emphasized the prominence of debt peonage—a form of unfree labor, stemming from the passage of the same Jim Crow labor laws, in which laborers, almost always Black, worked for White landowners to pay off debts they may have accrued purchasing equipment or other supplies to farm the land.[12] For example, after spending eight years investigating peonage in the early 20th century, Special Agent A. J. Hoyt estimated that in Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, "investigations will prove that 33 1/3 per cent of the planters operating from five to one-hundred plows, are holding their negro employees to a condition of peonage, and arresting and returning those that leave before alleged indebtedness is paid."[13]

Similarly, Cohen argues that labor relations in the decades after the Civil War were a "fluid, flexible affair which alternated between free and forced labor in time to the rhythm of the southern labor market." State labor laws served as the legal foundation for this system, and extralegal and illegal practices filled the void.[14]

Other social scientists have highlighted the importance of White violence against Black southerners with respect to the agricultural profit system. In many cases, violence would work in tandem with monopsony power or different forms of forced labor, making possible the dramatic regression in Black southerners' conditions from the days of congressional Reconstruction. As

[10] These Redemption laws were modeled on the Black Codes of Presidential Reconstruction but specifically left out any mention of race to pass judicial muster.
[11] Senate Report 693, 46th Congress, 2nd Session, part 2, p. 466.
[12] Du Bois (1935); Daniel (1972); Oshinsky (1997); Novak (2015); Blackmon (2009).
[13] Quoted in Stelzner (2019).
[14] Cohen (1976; pp. 33-4).

we will see, there were two main economic aims of White-on-Black violence in the Jim Crow South: Violence was used as a method for controlling Black labor and for taking Black gains. We look at each of these dynamics in turn.

Violence as a means of controlling Black labor

A system of violence was central during slavery to force enslaved workers to toil day after day to the rhythms demanded by the slave-owner or overseer. With the abolition of slavery, planters turned to extralegal and illegal savagery to reassert control over Black Americans.

Indeed, Hahn even argues that the initial purpose of vigilante groups was labor control, and that the goals of these groups only spread to political repression with the end of presidential Reconstruction and the assertion of Black political power during congressional Reconstruction.[15] To be sure, as evidenced by more than 6,000 pages of testimony from congressional hearings in the 1870s on the violence wrought by the Ku Klux Klan and other White terrorist groups, two central motives of these groups that emerged were control over the Black vote and over Black labor.[16]

In the late 1870s, with the end of Reconstruction, the South was experiencing a wave of outmigration. In 1879, in Sabine County, Texas, for example, a Black farmer was planning to migrate to Kansas. "He had bought a horse, and owed a small amount on it yet," according to the *Southwestern Christian Advocate*. "On Sunday while the people were at church, suddenly a body of armed [White] men surrounded the building, and leveling their guns over the congregation, told all to be still. One of the men entered and searched for the colored man, but did not find him. The armed band then went to a neighboring Baptist church, and doing the same thing, found the man they were hunting. He was arrested on a suit for what he owed and put under bonds." "No doubt the trial will be postponed indefinitely," speculated the *Christian Advocate*, "and the bond remain so held, dare he leave for fear of severer penalties."[17]

Many times, such events had a much more violent turn. In the late 1880s, for example, a Black agriculturalist and labor promoter named Elder Green traveled to the hill country in Mississippi to convince Black farmers to move to Yazoo Bottoms to pursue more remunerative

[15] Hahn (1979; pp. 207-213).
[16] *The Rutland Weekly Herald and Globe*, 29 Jul 1880, p. 2.
[17] The *Southwestern Christian Advocate*, December 18, 1879, editorial, "The Negro Exodus from Texas". Quoted in Senate Report 693, 46th Congress, 2nd Session, part 2, p. 258.

work. Alarmed that their workers might leave, White plantation owners in the hill country organized a mob to track down Green, encountering him at a train station nearby. In fear, Elder Green took flight into the woods. Later that week, the mob caught up to Green and killed him. To scare others from enticing away their labor, an unsigned dispatch was sent to Yazoo Bottoms: "If you want Elder Green you had better send a box for him."[18]

Later that same week, the *Fort Worth Daily Gazette* commented that "[t]he movement of negroes from the hilly counties of Mississippi to the Yazoo swamps has been very large of late, more than 20,000 having left in the last three months." "It is thought," continued the *Gazette*, "that this killing [of Elder Green] will have a tendency to check the exodus."[19]

Likewise, in 1935, in Hernando, Mississippi, Reverend T.A. Allen attempted to create a union for Black agricultural workers. "When White landowners learned that Reverend Allen was using his pulpit to preach to the Black community about unionization," explains a report on lynching by the Equal Justice Initiative, "they formed a mob, seized him, shot him many times, and threw him into the Coldwater River."[20] Many others who attempted to organize workers suffered a similar fate.[21]

Often, it was the laborers themselves who were made the example. In 1883, the *Arkansas Weekly Mansion* reported, for instance, that "a poor colored woman was beaten by a mob because her cotton was not laid by."[22] In 1918, in Earle, Arkansas, Elton Mitchell, a Black man, refused to labor without pay for a White man. In response, White citizens of Earle butchered Mitchell, hanging his remains from a tree for all to see.[23]

Violence aimed to control Black labor was not always carried out via a mob or a terrorist group. Indeed, sometimes, it took place by the employer on the farm itself. Right after the Civil War, for example, a White plantation owner, Mr. Parker, called upon his recently freed workers, offering them room, board, and two suits of clothing to continue to work on his plantation for another year. Yet "when one of them demurred at the offer, his son James flew at him and

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[18] *The Sun*, 12 Jan 1887, p. 2

[19] *Fort Worth Daily Gazette*, 13 Jan 1887, p. 6.

[20] Equal Justice Initiative, 2017; pp. 63, 181, 183, 194.

[21] For example, Ben Patterson and Robert Collins were lynched in 1891 and 1894, respectively, for their engagement in worker collective action (Tolnay and Beck, 1995).

[22] *Arkansas Weekly Mansion*, 18 Aug 1883, p. 1. "Laid by" refers to the work between planting and harvesting, which includes plowing between rows and weeding.

[23] Equal Justice Initiative, 2017; pp. 63, 181, 183, 194.

cuffed and kicked him." Afterward, all of Parker's workers were "perfectly willing to stay," but Parker had them watched night and day and even kept one of them in chains all night—creating fear among his workers about the consequences of trying to leave the plantation.[24]

In 1866, a group of Black Louisianans led by Henry Adams formed a committee to gauge the intensity of violence against Blacks in different parts of the South. Between 1866 and 1876, committee members traveled throughout the South and documented almost 700 violent events. Many of these were motivated by a desire to control Black labor: For example, Eliza Smith, a Black farm laborer, reported being whipped in 1868 by "Frank Hall on his plantation about not being able to work while sick."

Another Black worker recounted an incident in 1874: "I lived on Bell's plantation, and was cropping. I asked him [Bell] for some meat rations … he told me to plant cotton [and corn]; which I did, and again asked him for meat, and told him I was going to work for a man that would give me some meat to eat. Then Bells, Lans, and other White men tried to kill me; they cut me nearly to death." In another example, Samuel Smith, a Black farmer, reported being "badly whipped and bloodied [in 1875] by Captain Scott, because he went to church without his consent." Similar incidents abound.[25]

Even when violence against Black southerners was not clearly linked to labor control, it still had an indirect effect on employer-employee relations. Clearly, the horrid demonstration of a White southerner or group of White southerners threatening, beating, or killing a Black southerner with impunity would instill racial fear. As put by Tolnay and Beck, the lynching of a Black man, woman, or child "for any offense would have the effect of tightening or reinforcing White domination over the entire local Black population."[26]

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[24] *Congressional Globe*, 39th Congress, 1st Session, Part 1, p. 94; Du Bois, 1935; p. 138.

[25] Henry Adams reported these incidents to Congress in its hearings on Black migration out of the South immediately after Reconstruction. Senate Report 693, 46th Congress, 2nd Session, part 2, pp. 196 – 215; Painter, 1992, p. 33. Here are a few other examples from Adams' report to the Senate: "346th. Hannibal Jones, badly beat by Dr. Davis, White about his cotton accounts and crops, in the city of Shreveport, in 1873." "379th. Louis Jones, killed by Charley Chase on his place, because he did not go to pounding when he told him to. This was in 1873." "454th Ben. Gardner (colored), badly beaten by White men, on Mr. Gamble's plantation, because he refused to stay on the place for another year. This was in 1874." "460th. Caroline Lee, badly whipped by Dave Penton (White), because she would not bind her children to him, on his plantation, in the year 1870." "683d. James Metimus, colored, beaten by Billy Willfort, a White man, on Dr. Spempe's place, because he did not get out to work as soon as he wanted him to, 1868."

[26] Tolnay and Beck (1995) p. 144.

Of the almost 700 violent events against Black southerners between 1866 and 1876 recorded by Henry Adams' committee in Louisiana, at least 323 took place at or very near the victims' place of work. In 1874, for example, Julia Davis, a Black farm laborer, was killed by her manager on the plantation. In another example, in 1875, Giles Gibbs, also a Black farm laborer, was severely whipped by D. D. Simpson and a group of other White men on Simpson's plantation. After, the mob of White men tied Gibbs "to a horse and dragged [him] about five miles through creeks, lakes, with rope around his neck."

While no motives were recorded by the committee, these violent events and the many others in their long list went unchecked by the law. Such brutal demonstrations, even when not clearly connected to labor control, would obviously affect how others at the plantation reacted to any demand from their White employers.[27]

Some social scientists have looked at the quantitative links between violence and economic outcomes.[28] Tolnay and Beck created a database of White mob violence against Blacks throughout the United States between 1882 and 1930. From that data, they find that lynchings were significantly more common in cotton-producing areas, even after controlling for the size and portion of the Black population. In addition, in cotton-producing counties, lynchings fluctuated intensely by season—with the highest frequency of lynchings taking place in August, right before the cotton-picking season started in earnest. They theorize that lynchings were used to directly deter Black agriculturalists from unionizing or from trying to increase their share of the crop or their wages, at this bottleneck stage in the production process of cotton.

Tolnay and Beck conclude that the terror created by the Ku Klux Klan, the Red Shirts, the White League, and other lynch mobs "was a weapon for maintaining some degree of control over the African-American labor force." The decline in Black lynchings by White mobs from its peak of more than 90 per year in the early 1890s, they continue, was a result of the complete legal implementation of the Jim Crow regime, which accomplished through state laws what the lynch mob sought through extrajudicial violence.[29]

[27] Senate Report 693, 46th Congress, 2nd Session, part 2, pp. 196 – 215.
[28] Price, Darity, and Headen (2008); Christian (2017); Talnay and Beck (1995).
[29] Tolnay and Beck also argue that the Great Migration of African Americans from the South reduced lynching. Tolnay and Beck (1995), pp. 19, 32.

Violence as a means of taking Black gains

Violence was used by virtually all White southerners to take gains made by Black southerners. Poor Whites joined terrorist organizations, argues Du Bois, in order to obtain a feeling of racial superiority and to be able to take economic gains from successful freedmen.[30] "White labor saw in every advance of Negroes a threat to their racial prerogatives," Du Bois writes, "so that in many districts Negroes were afraid to build decent homes or dress well, or own carriages, bicycles or automobiles, because of possible retaliation on the part of the Whites."[31]

Other social scientists have made similar points. Bailey argues that "[e]very prosperous negro who shows his prosperity in a way to be seen by the Whites is a focus for hatred on the part of the 'lower' Whites."[32] Darity explains that, in general, individuals compare the perceived status of their self-identified affinity groups with other groups. Consequently, actions, such as White-on-Black violence in the Jim Crow South, can stem from inter-group comparisons.[33] Indeed, during this period, White landlords played up racial affinities with poorer Whites to create White solidarity for the many changes in the law explained above, as well as the ability to effectively wield extrajudicial violence to control Black labor.

This created the social pretext and possibility for White southerners to use violence against Black southerners when inter-group jealousies arose. Sometimes such jealousies were manifest solely through the expression of violence. Other times, violence or the threat of violence was used to take some of the gains that were seen as a threat. In 1875, for example, William Henry was lynched just outside of Saint Martinville, Louisiana by a White mob because "he refused to let them take his crop." In the same year, a Black farmer was lynched by a group of White men in the same area because he "sauced" a White man who wanted him to leave his crops. And, in 1878, Marion McMillen, a White man, shot Henry, a Black farmer, and took all of his crops.[34]

[30] Du Bois (1935, pp. 131, 680).
[31] Du Bois (1935), p. 701.
[32] Bailey (1914) p. 30.
[33] Darity (2022).
[34] Senate Report 693, 46th Congress, 2nd Session, part 2, pp. 196 – 215.

These events often led to taking not just the crops but also the land itself—or Whitecapping, as it was termed.[35] In 1875, for example, near Bayon Sara, Louisiana, a Black farmer was run off his land in fear for his life, and all of his crops were taken by five armed White men.[36] In 1903, in Lincoln County, Mississippi, Eli Hilson was shot after refusing to leave his farm and surrender his crops and land to local Whites. Hilson was "the second negro murdered by Whitecaps," reported the Memphis *Commercial Appeal,* in that part of Lincoln County in just a month's time.[37]

The same dynamic also occurred after White riots or massacres of prosperous Black communities. After the 1921 Tulsa massacre—where White violence killed around 300 Black Oklahomans according to one estimate—Black survivors filed insurance claims for $1.8 million in property lost.[38] Likewise, as a result of the 1919 Elaine massacres—where White mobs killed an estimated 300 Black Arkansans—Black residents lost approximately $10 million in property.[39] In both of these cases, and in the many other White massacres of Black Americans, some of the losses represented Black property taken by the White perpetrators.

At other times, Black southerners were intensely pressured to sell property at give-away prices after a White massacre of the local Black population. These sales gave the change in ownership a guise of legitimacy but clearly represented a sale under extreme duress. In 1920, in Ocoee, Florida, for instance, local Whites killed around 50 Black citizens. After the massacre, many Black residents sold their property to Whites for fire-sale prices: Valentine Hightower, a relatively wealthy Black Floridian, sold two properties to a White man, I.C. Bobo—one for $10 and another for $1. Many others Black residents in the area suffered a similar fate.[40]

Whether taking the crops, some other physical property, or the land itself, all such acts of violence would have the effect of reducing the possibilities of economic advancement for the victim and the victim's family. This violence aimed at Black agriculturalists would negatively

[35] Holmes (1969) p. 166.
[36] Senate Report 693, 46th Congress, 2nd Session, part 2, pp. 196 – 215.
[37] Memphis *Commercial Appeal*, December 22, 1903.
[38] Darity et al. (2022), Messer et al. (2018), and Canales and Elder (2021). The present value of that loss at a 3 percent and 6 percent interest rate would be $34.5 million and $611 million, respectively (Darity et al. (2022; p. 108).
[39] Logan and Darity (2020).
[40] Darity et al. (2022).

affect the ability of Black southerners to advance from sharecropping to owning and farming their own land.

Regression analysis of violence and labor relations

In this and the following sections, we look at quantitative data to identify statistical support for violence as a tool both for controlling Black labor and for taking gains made by Black farmers. There is significant evidence of both.

In order to analyze the role of White-on-Black violence in shaping employer-employee relations, we look at the effect of a White-on-Black homicide before the harvest in a given county on the number of man-weeks of labor expended on the farm over the entire season and the percent of the family that worked on the farm of the total number of family members who lived there and also worked on the farm on White and Black farms of different tenure in the same county across the South in 1879. We analyze the 1879 pre-harvest period and the resulting harvest because there exists data on both Black homicides and on the total number of man-work weeks of labor utilized by farm and the percent of the family that lived and worked on the farm on both White and Black farms during this period. This year is also a good point of analysis because it represents a stage of transition—where the laws that came to represent the economic side of Jim Crow had not been completely established.

For statistics on Black homicides, we collected data from the U.S. Federal Census of Mortality Schedules for the period between June 1 and August 31 in 1879. This data includes information on the cause and date of death and the race and profession of the deceased individual. For example, according to the Census of Mortality Schedules, Jepp Brown, a 22-year-old Black farmer, was "shot by a mob" in July 1879 in Crittenden, Arkansas.

From this data, we identified 58 homicides of Black agriculturalists in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia between June 1 and August 31—the pre-harvest period—in 1879.[41] We use pre-harvest homicides because such

[41] In total, we identified 623 Black homicides between June 1, 1879 and May 31, 1880. However, in narrowing our timeline to the three months before the 1879 harvest and to homicides of individuals who worked in agriculture, the number decreased to 58. Black agriculturalists were anyone whose profession was "farming", "farmer", "field hand", "farm laborer", etc.

violence has been identified in the literature as important for controlling labor during the harvest—a bottleneck stage in the production of cotton.[42]

The Mortality Schedules allow for a fairly clear determination of whether the death was a homicide or not. We compiled data for individuals that were "shot", "stabbed", "lynched", "hanged", "killed", "murdered", and a number of other variations of similar actions. Sometimes, the cause of death was even listed as a "homicide."

At the same time, the Mortality Schedules only occasionally identified or gave some clue as to the race of the individual or individuals responsible for the homicide. For example, information in the Mortality Schedules that the homicide was perpetrated by a mob—which gives a strong indication that it was a White-on-Black homicide—was rare. However, there were such examples in the data, such as the murder of Jepp Brown described above or that of Charles Shepherd, a 27-year-old Black farm laborer, who was "hung by a mob" in July 1879 in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

However, based on the immense qualitative evidence briefly explored in the previous sections, we assume that many of the homicides we identify represent White-on-Black violence. At the same time, we effectively test this assumption when we assess whether there is any correlation between Black homicides in agriculture in a given county during the pre-harvest period and output per worker on Black farms in the same county in the following months.[43]

For data on farms across the South during the same year, we use the sample of 11,000 southern farms collected by Sutch and Ransom from the 1880 Census of Agriculture.[44] This data includes information on farm output, number of workers, value of the farm, value of livestock, race of the farmer, county and state of the farm, number of adult labor weeks utilized, and a number of other factors potentially important for farm production.

To look at the effect of a White-on-Black homicide in shifting employer-employee relations in favor of the former, we first regress the log of the number of man-weeks of labor expended on farm i during the entire season, $ln\ (L)_i$, on a cross term for the race of the farmer, R_{ji}, the tenure of the farmer, T_{ti}, and a dummy for if one or more Black homicides occurred in the three months before the harvest in the same county, V_{ki}:

[42] Tolnay and Beck (1995).
[43] We do not use Tolnay and Beck lynching data here because they only recorded nine verified White-on-Black lynchings between June 1 and August 31 in 1879 across the entire South.
[44] Sutch and Ransom (1990), labeled ICPSR 940.

$$ln\,(L)_i = \alpha + \beta V_i + \gamma_{jt}\left(R_{ji}xT_{ti}\right) + \delta_{jt,V=1}\left(R_{ji}xT_{ti}xV_{ki}\right) + \sum_{l=1}^{5}\theta_l \ln\,(F_{li}) + \sum_{\rho}\vartheta_p C_{\rho i} + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

During Jim Crow, there existed three main tiers of farming tenure in the South: owning and farming your own land, renting the land for cash, and sharecropping. Sharecropping initially emerged as a contested outcome between recently freed enslaved workers and landowners who wanted to reinstitute a gang-labor system based on wages. With the abandonment of Reconstruction, the little power that sharecroppers initially had was clawed back through changes in the law that reinterpreted sharecropping from a joint adventure between landowner and farmer—as the title implies—to an employer-employee relationship with the landowner in control.[45] As a result with sharecropping, landowners had significant control over those farming their land and an incentive to extract as much labor as possible—especially during the harvest which was the bottleneck stage in the production of cotton. In contrast, the same incentive did not exist for the other tenures of farming.

In the regression formalized in equation (1), we also control for a number of other factors. For example, F_{li} are the non-labor factor inputs—number of tilled acres, value of livestock, value of the farm, and value of farm implements. The summation at the end of equation (1), $\sum_{\rho}\theta_p C_{\rho i}$, represents the other potential factors that contribute to the total number of man-week of labor expended on the farm. They include a dummy variables for the county and state in which the farm is located, and a string of dummy variables for whether other crops (such as rice, tobacco, and wheat, in addition to cotton) were produced on the farm. Because Black homicides are potentially more common in counties with a larger Black population, and these same counties also likely represent key cotton-producing areas where demands on labor would be higher, we also control for the size of the Black population of the county where the farm is located.

[45] Foner (1988).

Table 1: Effect of Pre-Harvest Violence on the Number of Man-Weeks of Labor

			I	II	III
Black farm	One or more pre-harvest Black homicide in county	Farmer owner	-0.040 (0.095)	-0.012 (0.095)	-0.039 (0.097)
		Rents for cash	0.050 (0.084)	0.065 (0.085)	-0.001 (0.094)
		Sharecropper	0.198*** (0.072)	0.201*** (0.073)	0.136* (0.081)
White farm	One or more pre-harvest Black homicide in county	Farmer owner	-0.040 (0.033)	-0.025 (0.036)	0.162 (0.185)
		Rents for cash	0.159 (0.126)	0.158 (0.126)	0.102 (0.130)
		Sharecropper	-0.067 (0.072)	-0.080 (0.072)	-0.071 (0.073)
White farm	Rents for cash		0.022 (0.042)	-0.043 (0.042)	0.038 (0.042)
	Sharecropper		-0.056* (0.027)	-0.042 (0.027)	-0.039 (0.028)
Black farm	Farmer owner		0.341*** (0.040)	0.333*** (0.040)	0.336*** (0.042)
	Rents for cash		0.478*** (0.045)	0.488*** (0.045)	0.496*** (0.047)
	Sharecropper		0.407*** (0.043)	0.418*** (0.043)	0.423*** (0.046)
Controls for number of tilled acres, value of livestock, farm and farm implements			Yes	Yes	Yes
County fixed effects			No	No	Yes
State fixed effects			No	Yes	Yes
			N = 4,319 R^2 = 0.12	N = 4,319 R^2 = 0.12	N = 4,319 R^2 = 0.14

Source: Regression analysis of Sutch and Ransom sample of the Census of Agriculture for the fiscal year of 1880 and data on Black homicides from the Mortality Schedules. A number in parentheses represents robust standard errors. '*', '**', and '***'represent statistical significance at the 10 percent, 5 percent, and 1 percent level, respectively.

In Table 1, we display the regression results from equation (1). As we can see from regression II, on Black farms where individuals worked for a share of the crop in counties that experienced a pre-harvest homicide of a Black agriculturalist, the total number of man-weeks of labor was 22 percent higher than on Black farms also engaged in sharecropping in counties that did not experience such violence. In regression III, we control for county fixed effects, and the effect of a homicide of a Black agriculturalist during the pre-harvest period on the amount of labor expended by Black sharecroppers remains both economically and statistically significant. In contrast on Black farms where the farmer owned the land or rented for cash, a White on Black homicide during the pre-harvest period was not associated with an increase in the total number of man-weeks of labor expended. Likewise on White farms of all tenures, a homicide of a Black agriculturalist did not affect the total amount of labor expended on the farm.

These results hold if we change the dependent variable to the percent of the family that worked on the farm of the total number of family members living on the farm. In Table 2, we display these results. As we can see after controlling for county fixed effects, on Black farms where individuals worked for a share of the crop, a Black homicide in the same county as the farm during the pre-harvest period led to a 39 percent increase in the percent of the family that worked on the farm. In contrast on Black farms where farmers owned the land or rented for cash and on White farms of any tenure arrangement, a Black homicide in the same county as the farm during the pre-harvest period was not associated with any statistically significant change in the percent of family members working on the farm.

In other words, a White-on-Black homicide in the three months before the harvest allowed White landowners to more effectively control Black labor working during the harvest—the period of cotton production process that was most labor intensive. By contrast, on farms where Black agriculturalist were able to carve out a degree of freedom through owning or renting for cash the land they farmed, this dynamic of violence used for labor control did not affect labor supply. On White farms, such violence also had no effect on labor supply. But, in the case of White sharecroppers, this was a result of White on Black violence only directly affecting labor relations where the employer was White and the employee was Black.

Table 2: Effect of Pre-Harvest Violence on the Percent of Family Members on the Farm who Work on the Farm

			I	II	III
Black farm	One or more pre-harvest Black homicide in county	Farmer owner	-0.007 (0.101)	0.015 (0.101)	-0.012 (0.103)
		Rents for cash	0.179** (0.081)	0.185** (0.082)	0.119 (0.092)
		Sharecropper	0.371*** (0.065)	0.363*** (0.065)	0.327*** (0.075)
White farm	One or more pre-harvest Black homicide in county	Farmer owner	-0.065* (0.033)	-0.031 (0.035)	0.013 (0.186)
		Rents for cash	0.031 (0.112)	0.032 (0.113)	0.001 (0.117)
		Sharecropper	0.004 (0.092)	-0.011 (0.091)	-0.008 (0.090)
White farm	Rents for cash		0.053 (0.041)	0.057 (0.041)	0.041 (0.042)
	Sharecropper		-0.030 (0.029)	-0.026 (0.029)	-0.039 (0.030)
Black farm	Farmer owner		0.250*** (0.038)	0.240*** (0.039)	0.251*** (0.041)
	Rents for cash		0.368*** (0.043)	0.368*** (0.043)	0.379*** (0.045)
	Sharecropper		0.300*** (0.041)	0.302*** (0.041)	0.284*** (0.043)
Controls for number of tilled acres, value of livestock, farm and farm implements			Yes	Yes	Yes
County fixed effects			No	No	Yes
State fixed effects			No	Yes	Yes
			N = 4,242 R^2 = 0.10	N = 4,242 R^2 = 0.10	N = 4,242 R^2 = 0.12

Source: Regression analysis of Sutch and Ransom sample of the Census of Agriculture for the fiscal year of 1880 and data on Black homicides from the Mortality Schedules. A number in parentheses represents robust standard errors. '*', '**', and '***'represent statistical significance at the 10 percent, 5 percent, and 1 percent level, respectively.

At the same time, there is no correlation between a Black homicide and the Black population of the county—meaning large Black populations were not driving Black homicides. This, in tandem with the effect of pre-harvest racial violence on cotton output per adult-week of labor on only Black farms, lends support to the assumption that many of the Black homicides identified from the Mortality Schedules represent White-on-Black violence.

Consequently, just as we found from exploring contemporary accounts and more recent literature on the topic, our regression analysis of farm and homicide data gives additional support to the idea that White-on-Black violence in the Jim Crow South was utilized by White employers to reassert control over Black workers. This violence was channeled through group-group dynamics between White farmers and Black farmers—through White terrorism of Black farmers—and as a result, did not affect White farmers directly or Black farmers who were able to obtain some degree of economic independence.

Regression analysis of violence and taking Black gains

In this section, we look at quantitative evidence of the effect of violence on taking gains made by Black southerners. To do this, we look at the effect of White mob lynchings of a Black man, woman, or child in a given county and year in Georgia on changes in Black landownership in the same county in the future. We focus on Georgia because it is the only southern state during this period to record data on landownership by race annually.

Data on White mob lynchings of Black southerners was compiled by Tolnay and Beck and has been updated since their 1995 publication.[46] Most of this data comes from contemporary newspaper accounts of lynchings—especially the *Chicago Tribune*, which published yearly accounts. From this data, we look at White-on-Black violence in Georgia from 1879 through 1915.

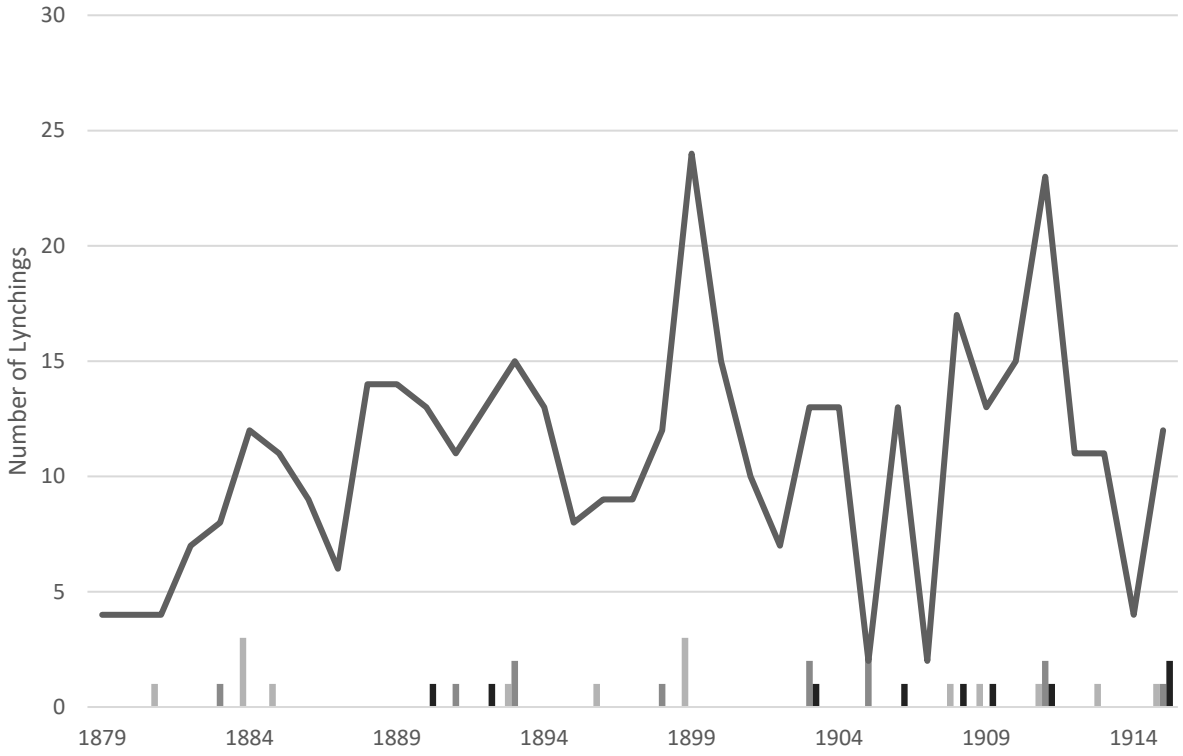
In Figure 1, we display data on mob violence against Black Georgians over this period. The dark grey line is the number of mob lynchings of Black Georgians statewide for a given year. Each of the bars at the bottom represents the number of White-on-Black mob killings for three select counties: Early (light grey), Decatur (dark grey), and Dodge (Black). These three

[46] Tolnay and Beck (1995). For the regressions below, we only use White-on-Black killings that would classify as lynchings—i.e., there were three or fewer victims for a single incident.

counties experienced more frequent White-on-Black lynchings than the average county in Georgia at the time and thus will showcase the peak effects of such violence.

As we can see in Figure 1, White mob killings of Black Georgians increased steadily throughout the late-19th century, peaking at 29 deaths in 1899. For Early, Decatur, and Dodge counties, we can see significant variation in when and how many mob killings took place in a given year. (Note that for the regression analysis below, we use the data for each of the 148 counties in Georgia between 1879 and 1915, which we did not display in Figure 1 for reasons of visual clarity.)

Figure 1: White-on-Black Mob Violence in Georgia



Source: Tolnay and Beck (1995).

For data on Black landownership, we coded the number of acres owned by Black residents in each of the 148 counties in Georgia for 1877 through 1915 using the Reports of the

Comptroller-General for that state.[47] Each year, Georgians were required to report, via a pre-distributed questionnaire, the number and value of acres they owned, along with various other information pertinent to taxation, to the tax receiver in their county. This information was taken under oath and could be contested and severely punished for false reporting.[48]

In Figure 2, we show data on Black landownership in Georgia between 1879 and 1915. The dark grey line represents acres owned by Black Georgians statewide and uses the primary vertical axis on the left side. The three lines below the statewide figure represent the number of acres owned by Black residents of select counties: Early, Decatur, and Dodge. In order to see their trend better, given the smaller number of acres owned at the county level, these lines use the secondary vertical axis on the right side.

As we can see from Figure 2, Black landownership in Georgia increased through the 1880s, stalled in the 1890s, increased again in the 1900s, and then fell in the first half of the 1910s. In terms of per-capita landownership, Black Georgians only owned 0.8 acres per capita in 1880. This increased to 1.14 acres per capita in 1890, but then fell to 1.04 acres in 1900. By 1910, it had increased to 1.35 acres per Black Georgian, but by 1915, it had fallen again to 1.34.[49]

Early, Decatur, and Dodge counties showed slightly different trends from the state as a whole. In all three counties, for instance, aggregate Black landownership actually decreased for at least part of the 1890s, and in Decatur county specifically, it decreased again from 1905 through 1915.

For the regression analysis, we use data on landownership for each of the 148 counties in Georgia over the same period. While this data has been utilized before by many researchers, it has never been used in a panel analysis.[50]

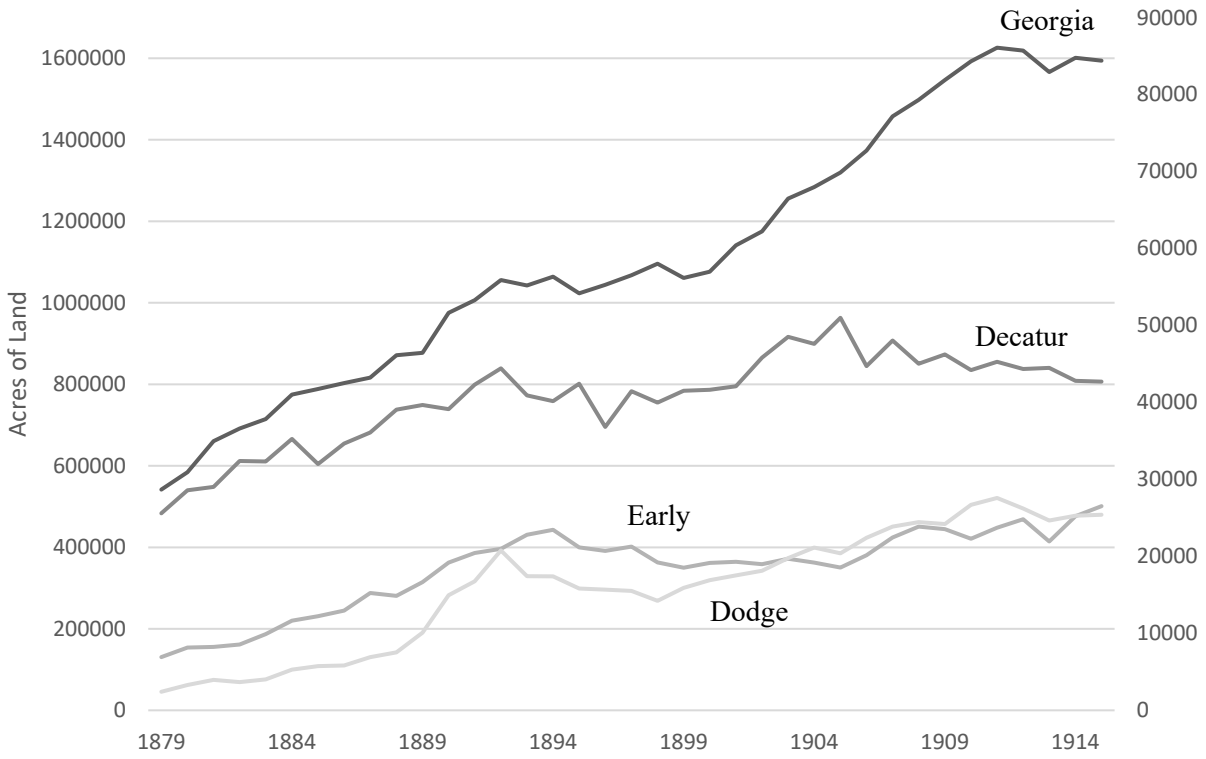
[47] Between 1877 and 1915, the only year for which we couldn't find data was 1878. Consequently, regressions on the change in Black landownership start in 1879. Also, year-county cells where the number of acres in a given county changed either from the creation of a new county or from change in the size of a previously existing county were dropped. Finally, for year-county cells where errors in the Reports of the Comptroller-General were identified, Black landownership was estimated using extrapolation and change in the dollar value of Black land owned.

[48] Higgs (1982).

[49] Per capita estimates calculated by authors using U.S. Census data.

[50] Du Bois (1901, 1903, 1908, 1909); Washington (1909); Oubre (1978); Higgs (1982).

Figure 2: Black Landownership in Georgia



Source: Reports of the Comptroller-General for the State of Georgia, Table 16. Data compiled by authors.

To look at the effect of White-on-Black lynchings with the goal of taking gains made by Black southerners, we set up a difference in difference regression of the percent change in the number of acres owned by Black Georgians in a given county and year, A_{it}, on a dummy for if one or more White-on-Black lynchings took place the year before in the same county, as well as a dummy for if one or more mob killings took place two years before in the same county:[51]

$$A_{i,t} = \alpha + \sum_{l=1}^{2} \beta_l V_{i,t-l} + \sum_{\rho} \theta_p C_{i,t} + \varepsilon_i \quad (2)$$

In the regression formalized in equation (2), we also control for a number of other factors, as illustrated by the second-to-last term, $\sum_{\rho} \theta_p C_{i,t}$, which includes county and year fixed

[51] A_{it} is equal to the acres owned by Black Georgians in year N divided by the acres owned by Black Georgians in the previous year.

effects. Finally, to relax the assumption of a common trend, we allow for different trends by county in the change in Black landownership overtime.

In Table 3, we display the results. Regression I through III look at the effects of violence on Black landownership. As we can see from regression III, the occurrence of one or more White-on-Black lynchings in a given county is associated with a 4.7 percentage point decrease in the percent change in Black landownership in the same county in the following year, and a 4.4 percentage point decrease in the percent change in Black landownership in the second year after the violence. This is after controlling for both county and year fixed effects and allowing for a separate time trend for the evolution of Black landownership for each of the 148 counties in Georgia.

In regression IV through VI in Table 3, we change the dependent variable to the number of Black polls reported by each county in Georgia between 1879 and 1915. During this period, part of the revenue collected by the state of Georgia was via a poll or "head" tax, which was assessed on all men between the ages of 21 and 60 without reference to income or resources. As with property ownership, the Reports of the Comptroller-General for Georgia record the number of Black polls by county on an annual basis. Consequently, we can use this data to get an idea of the effect of White-on-Black mob violence on outmigration of Black Georgians, which would be connected to change in Black property ownership.

As we can see from the final three regressions in Table 3, lynching also seems to be associated with Black Georgians leaving the counties where the violence took place. The difficulty with this statistic is that we cannot be sure if this reduction in the number of adult Black males is a result of individuals leaving the state or moving to another county in the same state.

The effect of a lynching on outmigration of Black Georgians presented in Table 3 also is upwardly biased, at least to a small degree, because the act of the lynching itself would have the effect of reducing the number of Black males if the victim was an adult Black male. Given the extensive literature on outmigration from the South during this period and later, however, it seems as though the final three regressions in Table 3 show that at least some part of the reduction in property ownership was a result of Black Georgians leaving the state because of White-on-Black mob violence.

Table 3: Effect of White-on-Black Mob Violence in Georgia

		Black Landownership			Black Adult Male Population		
		I	**II**	**III**	**IV**	**V**	**VI**
White-on-Black mob killing	One year prior	-0.048*** (0.014)	-0.044*** (0.016)	-0.047** (0.019)	-0.038*** (0.014)	-0.041*** (0.014)	-0.040*** (0.014)
	Two years prior	0.046*** (0.017)	0.044** (0.018)	-0.044** (0.021)	-0.032** (0.014)	-0.034** (0.013)	-0.032** (0.013)
County fixed effects		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects		No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
County-specific trends for change in Black landownership		No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
		N = 5,137 R^2_{within}= 0.001 $R^2_{Between}$= 0.003 $R^2_{Overall}$= 0.001	N = 5,137 R^2_{within}= 0.01 $R^2_{Between}$= 0.004 $R^2_{Overall}$= 0.01	N = 5,137 R^2_{within}= 0.04 $R^2_{Between}$= 0.17 $R^2_{Overall}$= 0.01	N = 5,145 R^2_{within}= 0.001 $R^2_{Between}$= 0.004 $R^2_{Overall}$= 0.0001	N = 5,145 R^2_{within}= 0.01 $R^2_{Between}$= 0.003 $R^2_{Overall}$= 0.013	N = 5,145 R^2_{within}= 0.03 $R^2_{Between}$= 0.001 $R^2_{Overall}$= 0.000

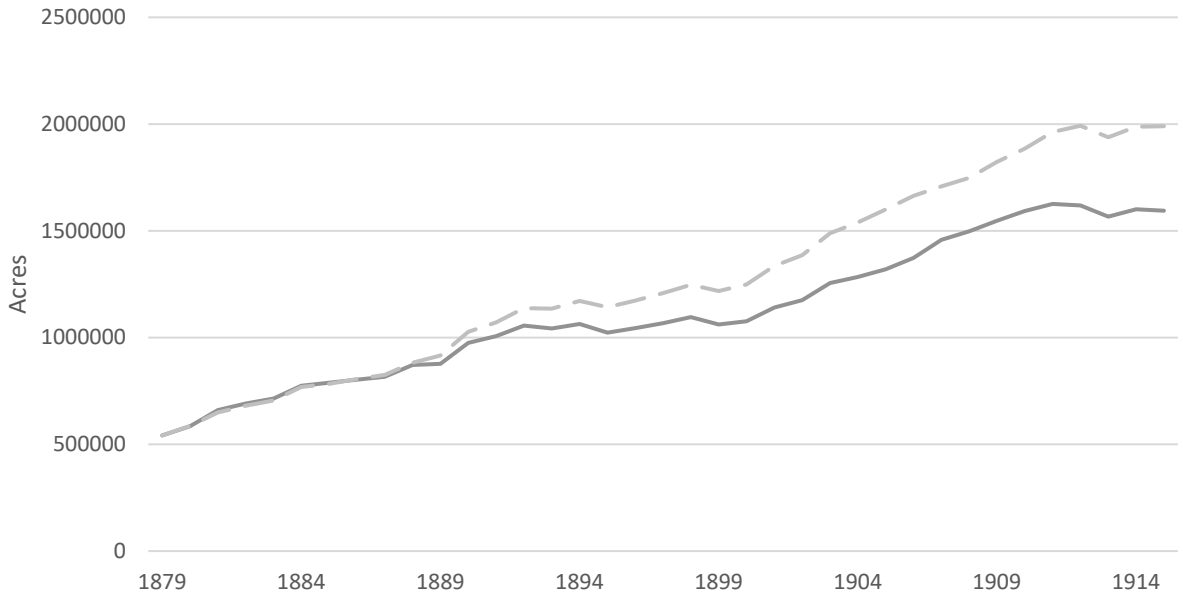
Source: Regression analysis of Tolnay and Beck data on White mob violence and data on Black landownership in Georgia from the Comptroller-General annual reports. A number in parentheses represents robust standard errors. '*', '**', and '***' represent statistical significance at the 10 percent, 5 percent, and 1 percent level, respectively.

Visualizing the overall effect of White-on-Black violence in the Jim Crow South

It is important to estimate the overall effect from this violence in order to get a better idea of its material significance. In this section, we do just that, using our results from the previous regression analysis.

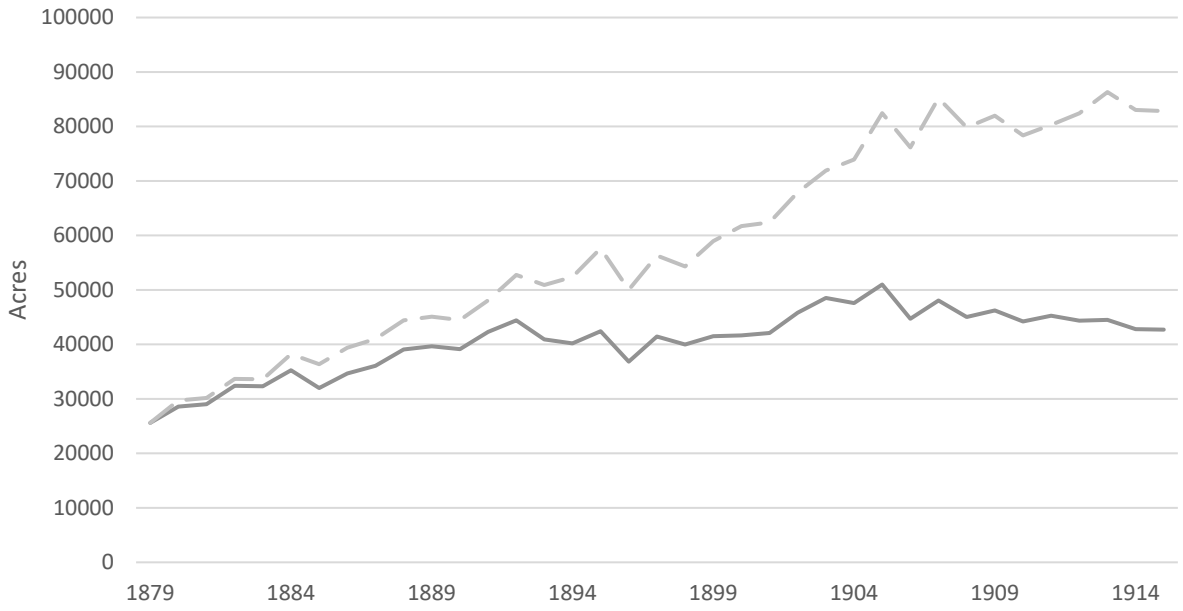
In Figure 3, we display data on Black landownership in Georgia between 1879 and 1915 and a counterfactual for what Black landownership would have been, according to the results from regression III in Table 3, if the state did not experience any White-on-Black lynchings. In Figures 4 through 6, we show the same data for Decatur, Dodge, and Early counties in Georgia between 1879 and 1915. For each of the figures, the solid dark grey line represents the actual number of acres owned by Black Georgians in the given year, and the dashed light grey line represents the counterfactual.

Figure 3: Black Landownership in Georgia Counterfactual



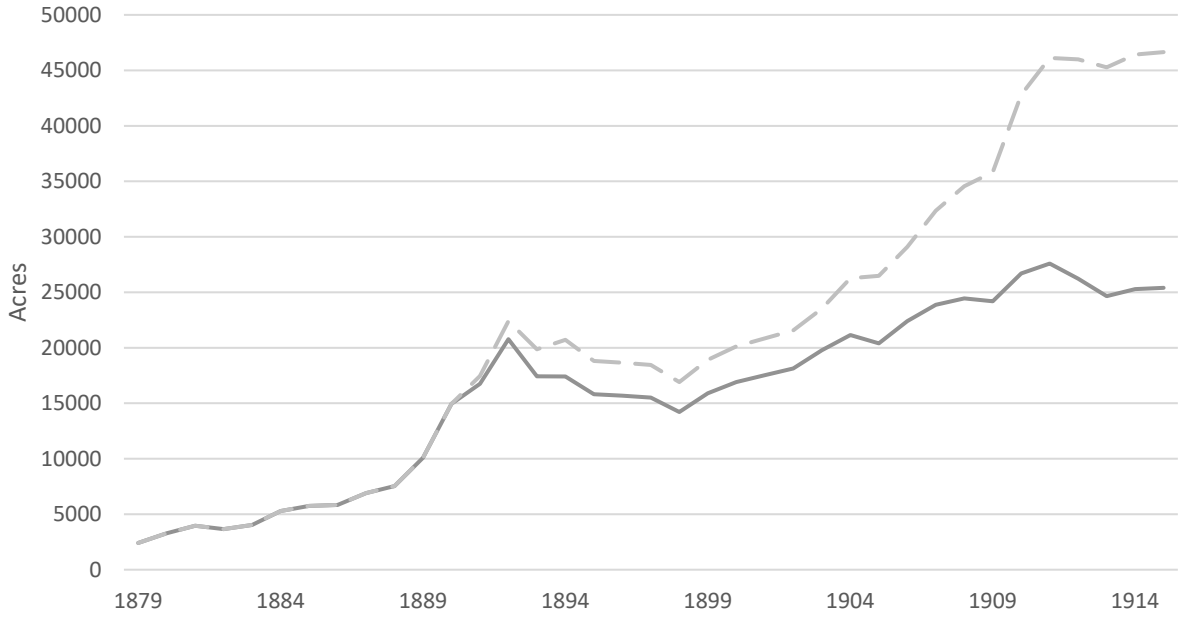
Source: Reports of the Comptroller-General for the State of Georgia, Table 16. Data compiled by authors. Counterfactual uses regression results from Table 2 and data on White-on-Black lynchings by county.

Figure 4: Black Landownership in Decatur County, Georgia Counterfactual



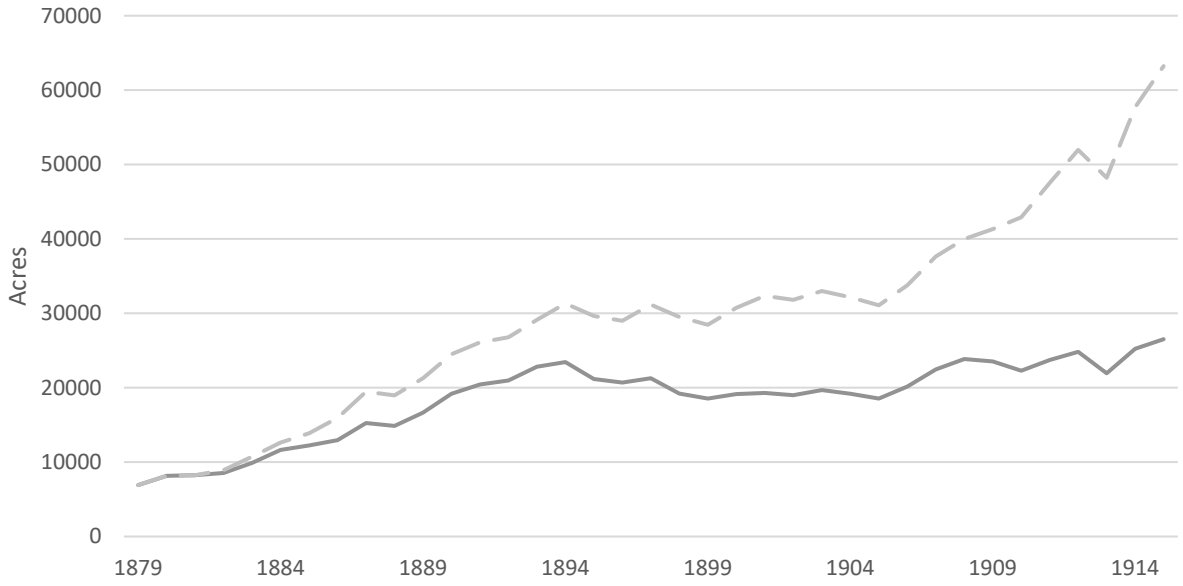
Source: Reports of the Comptroller-General for the State of Georgia, Table 16. Data compiled by authors. Counterfactual uses regression results from Table 2 and data on White-on-Black lynchings by county.

Figure 5: Black Landownership in Dodge County, Georgia Counterfactual



Source: Reports of the Comptroller-General for the State of Georgia, Table 16. Data compiled by authors. Counterfactual uses regression results from Table 2 and data on White-on-Black lynchings by county.

Figure 6: Black Landownership in Early County, Georgia Counterfactual



Source: Reports of the Comptroller-General for the State of Georgia, Table 16. Data compiled by authors. Counterfactual uses regression results from Table 2 and data on White-on-Black lynchings by county.

As we can see, the cumulative effect from this long period of White terrorism of Black Georgians was large. Even though we start the counterfactual at the actual value of Black landownership in 1879—which was, by no means, the beginning of such violence—by 1915, Black landownership in Georgia would have been 25 percent higher if the state had not experienced any of the 401 lynchings it actually endured over this period. And, as we can see from Figures 4 through 6, in counties such as Decatur, Dodge, and Early, where there were more frequent lynchings than on average in counties across Georgia, the cumulative effect over three-and-a-half decades was even larger than for the state as a whole.

Summary remarks

White-on-Black violence in the Jim Crow South had direct material goals. It was used by White landowners to reassert dominance over those farming their lands, allowing them to extract more economic output from their workers. This dynamic parallels that of slavery generally—in which violence was central since its inception—and that of the antebellum period in the United

States, when increased supervision, and with it an increased threat of violence, played a role in extracting more output.[52]

White-on-Black violence was also used to take the gains made by Black southerners after the end of the Civil War. In counties in Georgia where Black lynchings took place, growth in Black property ownership diminished in the two years following, compared to other counties that did not experience the same violence. As we saw from looking at changes in the Black adult male population by county in Georgia, part of this dynamic seems to have played itself out through outmigration.

Finally, looking at the counterfactuals of what Black landownership in Georgia would have been without such White-on-Black violence, we can see that the cumulative effect from decades of Black lynchings was huge. To be sure, the outcomes we detail in the section on taking gains made by Black southerners only looked at Georgia due to data limitations. Yet a similar dynamic played out throughout the South and for a much longer period than we examined—implying much larger overall effects from such violence.

As mentioned before, these outcomes are important for understanding our nation's economic history. As with slavery, Jim Crow was an economic system of extreme exploitation in which violence or the threat of violence played a central role. Similar parallels have been carried forward to aspects of our current agricultural system in the United States, where modern slavery of immigrant populations plays a substantial role in some areas of farming.[53]

At the same time, such findings are important for informing and motivating current political conversations—such as the debate over reparations. As others have highlighted, systematic taking of gains produced by Black Americans continued after Reconstruction in earnest with the creation of Jim Crow.[54] In this paper, we have quantitatively provided more evidence of the economic significance of that dynamic.

[52] Beckert and Stelzner (2024).
[53] Kara (2017)
[54] Darity et al. (2022); Herbin-Triant (2021).

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