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## **Cover Page Footnote**

This project was supported through an independent study in the Department of Government at Eastern Kentucky University. I would like to thank Dr. Kerem Ozan Kalkan for his guidance and supervision in the completion of this project. Without his instruction and assistance in data collection and methodology, this project would not have been possible.

## Slavery, Civil War, and Contemporary Public Opinion in The South

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**Abstract:** *This paper is an empirical extension of Avidit Acharya, Matthew Blackwell, and Maya Sen's piece (forthcoming), "A Culture of Disenfranchisement: How American Slavery Continues to Affect Voting Behavior." In their project, Acharya, Blackwell and Sen (forthcoming) show that the counties that had more slaves versus free population in the nineteenth century are more likely to exhibit conservative attitudes in contemporary elections. I am extending this argument by measuring potential influence of Civil War battlegrounds on recent voting patterns and political predispositions. My project finds further support for Acharya, Blackwell and Sen's study on the predictive power of Southern historical forces over current-day voting behavior, concluding that Southern counties with higher levels of free population as opposed to slaves in 1860, and the ones with Civil War battlegrounds are more likely than other Southern counties to vote for the Republican candidate in the 2012 presidential election.*

*Keywords: slavery, civil war, public opinion, south, vote choice, american south*

With much literature examining the factors that influence voting behaviors, it comes as no surprise that historical events would be aspects to consider as well. American history is characterized by racial tension between black and white, slave and free. That tension persisted beyond slavery, an institution of the American South until 150 years ago, marring America's history with a civil war and continuing to the present day with racially-motivated social movements. While slavery and its consequences have been studied relentlessly by historians, it has been overlooked, until recently, as an influence on contemporary politics.

This study extends upon Avidit Acharya, Matthew Blackwell, and Maya Sen's piece (*forthcoming*), "A Culture of Disenfranchisement: How American Slavery Continues to Affect Voting Behavior." In their project, Acharya, Blackwell and Sen (*forthcoming*) show that the counties where slavery was more prevalent in the 1860's are more likely today to exhibit conservative attitudes in contemporary elections along with a number of other contemporary characteristics. I am extending this argument by measuring potential influence of Civil War battlegrounds on recent voting patterns and political predispositions, limiting the scope of my investigation to Southern counties with the addition of Kentucky and Missouri.

To clarify this idea of historical conditions explaining contemporary voting patterns, Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen developed the theory of behavioral path dependence, which I use in our extension. Additionally, I build upon their theory of historical persistence of political and racial attitudes by using my study to support the idea that Southern whites had political and economic motivations to reinforce existing norms and institutions regarding race to maintain control over the newly-freed black population. This amplified differences in conservative political attitudes that have been passed down through generations and are being seen in today's voting behaviors.

### **Path Dependency and the Legacy of Slavery**

Like Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen (*forthcoming*), my study relies on the theory of path dependency, which expects what has happened at an earlier time affects the possible outcomes of events occurring at a later point in time. Institutional changes, behavioral forces, and cultural mechanisms in the past have the potential to influence contemporary behaviors and explanations through path dependence. When it comes to path dependence, it becomes necessary to explore the historically rooted explanations for contemporary voting behaviors, particularly the legacy slavery left and how it has persisted throughout time. Additionally, looking at behavioral path dependence as a developing theory in contrast with the standard institutional path dependence and examining the faults of contemporary factors as explanations for contemporary voting behaviors allows for a more well-rounded understanding of how not only slavery, but also the American Civil War, may continue to influence recent voting patterns and political predispositions.

To begin, I explore the history and legacy of slavery, which left behind consequences manifested in localized anti-black institutions that made it difficult for blacks to vote. Slavery's collapse in the 1860's catalyzed the creation of black codes, racial violence, and Jim Crow (Woodward, 2001, Ruff and Fletcher, 2003, Adamson, 1983). Of course, anti-black voter suppression measures did not exist until the emancipation of slavery necessitated their existence with the 15th Amendment in 1870, but southern whites faced the threat of lost power due to black enfranchisement and felt forced into codifying effective restrictions on the black population's new right (Woodward, 2002, Key, 1949, Bullock and Rozell, 2016). With voter suppression efforts in place, the rest of the Jim Crow era followed suit. Studying the presence of these historical changes and their political motivations indicates that voter suppression was of the utmost importance to, as well as found to be the strongest among, whites living in places where the black population having the vote could do the most damage to the political institutions that the white political powers had built (Key, 1949, Bateman et al., 2015). This area is now known as the deep Southern Black Belt, which was the most aggressive when it came to voter suppression,

because the whites in these areas had the most concern about maintaining white supremacy both politically and economically. Combined with the pre-existing racial hostility in the south, the political and economic changes in the period after slavery's collapse gave white elites incentives to further promote local anti-black sentiment by encouraging violence and racism (Roithmayr, 2010), which intensified racially conservative attitudes within the Black Belt and have been passed down from one generation to the next over time.

This passing-down effect is wherein the mechanisms of historical persistence and path dependence lies. Literature documents that contemporary differences in political institutions often have their origins in history, where they have persisted via path dependencies (Pierson, 1993). Sewell (1996) defines path dependence to mean that "what has happened at an earlier point in time will affect the possible outcomes of a sequence of events occurring at a later point in time", but a more narrow definition held by Levi determines that path dependence "has to mean...that once a country or region has started down a track, the costs of reversal are very high" and that once a path has been set in motion, it is difficult for society to change the course it is on, even if the initiating event ends.

In the context of my study, this theory would mean that today's Black Belt is following the path set in motion by slavery and furthered by Civil War battles, and that the historical origins of current differences within the South can be traced back to regional differences rooted in that history. This is not to mean that southern voters have remained stagnant in their political and social expectations, but rather than the changes that have occurred are in line with the path set in motion by historical events like slavery and Civil War battles. For instance, literature has demonstrated that areas of the American South that had higher numbers of slaves have greater inequality between blacks and whites today (O'Connell, 2012) and there is a negative relationship between the prevalence of slavery in an area and today's income level (Nunn, 2008) and labor productivity levels (Mitchener and McLean, 2003). This body of literature furthers the argument that regional differences found in the presence of historical institutions can affect modern-day regional differences even after the historical institutions have disappeared, and emphasizes path dependence of institutions (Pierson, 2000). Of note, is that regional differences are not due only to historical path dependence, but that for the purposes of this study, the root of regional voting behavior will be explored in the context of path dependence.

Similarly, I take this idea, that not only slavery had lasting effects on political attitudes and behaviors, and further hypothesize that Civil War battles had similarly lasting effects. In the Black Belt, the prevalence and ultimate fall of slavery undermined the power of Southern white elites, making them more hostile toward African Americans and more conservative in their political views (Key, 1949), but the nature of the responses to slavery's collapse varied according to how important slavery was in the area, where areas with more slaves reacted more strongly and, further, were

more hostile and ultimately more conservative in their attitudes (Acharya, Blackwell, & Sen, 2014). I extend this idea to Civil War battles, where the hostility and conflict occurring due to the Civil War itself manifested in the locale of the battles, where counties with battles had more racial conflict, aggression, and resentment, which set in motion a path of racial antagonism that is seen in today's more conservative attitudes.

Existing literature has focused on institutional path dependence, where the institutions, like slavery and wartime battles, are "humanly devised constraints" on political and social behavior (North, 1991, p. 97), but while institutions can constrain behaviors, there are also cultural and intrinsic forces that act to influence individuals' choices. In their study, Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen (*forthcoming*) propose the idea of behavioral path dependence, where behavioral outcomes like political attitudes, values, customs, and beliefs are influenced by cultural mechanisms including intergenerational socialization, the passing down from generation to generation. Often, behavioral path dependence may be reinforced by institutional mechanisms when the historical institutions bolster the same behavioral outcomes as are being passed down culturally, as is the case with my study. Institutions such as slavery and the Civil War left a legacy of racial segregation and violence (Woodward, 2002), and the hostility reinforced by these practices was passed down within white families from generation to generation throughout the Civil War, the post-slavery period, and to the present. This generational reinforcement allows for historical persistence of certain behaviors based on not only the institutions of the past, but also the cultural socialization that carries the attitudes and behaviors into the present even after the institutions have ceased to exist (Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen, *forthcoming*).

While path dependence suggests that the historical persistence of both institutions and behavior are at the root of regional variation in voting outcomes, it is also important to examine contemporary factors as explanations, though they are found to be inconsistent. Key (1949) has often been interpreted to mean that whites become more conservative when there are high concentrations of African Americans living in proximity and, theoretically, the large numbers of African Americans in the Black Belt today could threaten white dominance, resulting in more conservative political beliefs today (Giles and Buckner, 1993). Literature has linked negative white attitudes toward blacks (Glaser, 1994) and support for racially conservative candidates (Giles and Buckner, 1993) with high concentrations of blacks, but does not consider slavery or its historical persistence as an independent predictor of present day attitudes. Rather than contemporary high concentrations of blacks influencing whites' conservatism, it is very well that it is the legacy of slavery in areas with historically high concentrations of blacks and the hostility associated with the fall of slavery and the racial conflict of the Civil War that influences conservative attitudes today.

Additionally, income differences, urban-rural gaps, and other individual

level and contextual covariates may be explanations for contemporary attitudes, as well as justifications citing white mobility throughout the 20th century, but several works have highlighted the connection between slavery and these contemporary factors (O'Connell, 2012, Nunn, 2008). Public opinion literature focusses on the contemporary and individual-level factors for explaining beliefs, over the historical persistence of institutions and behaviors, but even V.O. Key (1949) noted the importance of the historical legacy of slavery, and we are extending that historical importance to the idea that Civil War battles may also predict contemporary voting behaviors.

Based on the theory of path dependency, I expect that the historical legacy of both slavery and Civil War battles affect contemporary voting behaviors. Both the institutions of slavery and war and the behavioral forces of generational reinforcement shape regional differences within the American South, specifically when examining counties prevalence of slavery and the occurrence of Civil War battles. After examining historically rooted explanations for contemporary voting behaviors, specifically the racial threat of enfranchised blacks viewed by Southern white elites and the conflict and hostility arising from the Civil War, historical persistence seems to be a better fit than contemporary factors in explaining conservative vote choice in the South.

## **Method**

For my study I collected county-level data on the former Confederate states as well as Kentucky and Missouri to test my two hypotheses regarding the impact of slavery and Civil War on contemporary vote choice. Based on the theory of path dependency as outlined in the previous section, I have two expectations, the first of which is confirmatory of the conclusions reached in Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen (forthcoming)'s piece on the impacts of the legacy of slavery and the second of which is my own empirical extension:

*H1: Southern counties that have a high degree of difference between "free" and slave populations in 1860 will be more likely to vote for the Republican presidential candidate in 2012.*

*H2: Southern counties with Civil War battlegrounds will be more likely to support contemporary Republican candidates.*

My units of analysis were counties in the Southern United States, including Kentucky and Missouri. The county-level variables on which I collected data were slavery population, black and white populations in 1900, 1920 and 1940, civil war battles, and Republican vote in the ten most recent presidential elections, 1976-2012. The main source of slavery data is the 1860 census, the last year that the Census collected data on the number of slaves per county. The black and white population data for 1900, 1920 and 1940 were also obtained from census data spreadsheets.

I also identified the counties that had a direct Civil War battle by using the National Park Service Soldiers and Sailors Database of Battles and the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission Report Battle Summaries as compiled by The American Battlefield Protection Program. The caveat with this data source is that the organization is still compiling the data for each battle and there are some smaller, more regionally known, battles that were not listed in the database at the time of collection. The description or requirements that they used to determine what constituted a battle is unknown; I do not know if there was a requirement for number of people involved or a number of casualties. While the criteria used for this database is unknown, the source was the best available and included mid-sized and major battles.

My unique dataset matched the battles and population variables with county-level data from the ten most recent presidential elections between 1976 and 2012. This data was taken from Dave Leip's "Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections." Percent of support for the Republican candidates in the general election was the only information from the atlas deemed necessary for our study and was therefore the only data collected from this source. The percentages used did not distinguish between black and white voters, but I addressed this issue by using lagged dependent variables to take into account changes in republican vote over time. The problem I ran across when using this data set was that not all of the counties that existed in 1976 exist today. There are some counties that have been lost and some that have been added through the years, and county lines have been redrawn as well. Because of this, there may have been some misalignment with the data available and collected for nearby counties. To remedy this, counties that had missing data were omitted from the analysis and spatially autoregressive analyses were employed for comparison across spatially related units.

My analysis used both bivariate and multivariate techniques to ascertain the impact of racial disparity (free minus slave population) and Civil War battles on today's political behavior and public opinion. For my bivariate analysis we compared the counties on a scale of free versus slave population in 1860 and percentage Republican vote in 2012. This analysis used the 1860 population county census data and the 2012 county level voting data in the analysis, where the free versus slave dichotomy ranged from mostly slaves to mostly free and vote was indicated by percentage republican vote, assuming, as many studies do, that a vote for the Republican candidate, Mitt Romney, was reflective of conservatism as it is generally understood.

My multivariate analysis used a lagged dependent variable to account for any variables that would influence the racial disparity and Civil War battles' ability to predict Republican vote. I chose to use the lagged dependent variables for the presidential election years 1976-2008 because the best predictor of what will happen in the future, including vote choice, is what happened in the past. Additionally, this is where the spatially autoregressive model comes into play, to account for surrounding counties and their influence on each other.

Maps were also utilized for univariate analyses to visually demonstrate patterns in the South (with the addition of Kentucky and Missouri) for the two independent variables: slavery in 1860 and civil war battles. Figure 1 displays the concentration of slavery in the counties with a scaled color indicator by assigning progressively darker shades to counties with increasingly higher slave population. This map highlights the area commonly known as the “Black Belt” of the South, the band through the middle of the deep southern states up through the Carolinas where there was a high prevalence of slaves during slave time, and where there are still large numbers of African Americans living today. Additionally, this map indicates the Appalachian area of eastern Kentucky and West Virginia where there were few to no slaves, despite the presence of slaves in the areas surrounding Appalachia. Figure 2 indicates the location of a Civil War battle with a red dot on the county where in the battle occurred. Most battles seem to have occurred to the northern side of the deep south and Black Belt, closer to the border between the North and South and in the newer territories of Arkansas and Missouri. Many battles also occurred along the coast of Virginia, down into North Carolina, and along the Gulf Coast of Louisiana.

## **Results**

After analyzing my unique dataset using bivariate and multivariate techniques, I find strong empirical support for both of my hypotheses. As the difference between “free” and slave population in Southern counties in 1860 increased, the counties are more likely to favor the Republican presidential candidate in 2012. Additionally, the counties that experienced a Civil War battle were more likely to vote for the conservative presidential candidate in 2012. With both hypotheses finding support, it becomes possible to ascertain the impact of past events and institutions on contemporary political behaviors because data from the 1800’s is able to predict today’s voting patterns.

Figure 3 displays the relationship found when considering the difference between “free” and slave population in Southern counties in 1860 and the Republican vote percentage in 2012. Along the horizontal axis is the dichotomy of free versus slave population in 1860 on a range from mostly slave to mostly free population, subtracting the slave population from the free population to estimate the dichotomy. On the vertical axis is the percentage Republican vote in 2012. This scatterplot bolsters the support for the main research hypothesis for Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen’s project, which proposed that counties that had more slaves versus free population in the nineteenth century are more likely to exhibit conservative attitudes in contemporary elections. In their study, they looked at America in its entirety, and used the black and white populations separately for each county.

Our analysis differs in its methods by looking at the dichotomy of the two populations, the difference between free and slave populations, to

gauge the racial disparity and therefore perceived conflict between the two. Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen examined the number of black slaves against the number of free whites to determine a proportion of slaves and gauge the prevalence of slavery. They were able to do so because they examined the United States in its entirety, where states (and therefore counties) that prohibited slavery would have had a much different proportion than states that allowed slavery. I, on the other hand, examined only the south, where the difference in proportions of slaves would have been present but not necessarily an effective predictor with such little range. In addition to the difference in measurements, Acharya, Sen, and Blackwell aimed to assess a different concept than I did. They focused on measuring the prevalence of slavery and found high conservative voting. I focused on measuring racial disparity as an indicator of conflict and found high conservative voting. Our intents and measurements were different, but we arrived at similar conclusions that the legacy of slavery impacts contemporary voting behaviors.

Despite the different approach, my analysis finds support for the same conclusion. Where there is more racial disparity and conflict in 1860, based on the dichotomy of the populations, there is a higher Republican vote percentage in 2012, indicating increased contemporary conservative attitudes. Just as it supports Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen (forthcoming)'s main hypothesis that historical events can influence present day politics, the positive relationship shown by the red line of best fit supports my first hypothesis as well, that Southern counties that have a high degree of difference between "free" and slave populations in 1860 will be more likely to vote for the Republican presidential candidate in 2012.

My second hypothesis, regarding Civil War battles, was tested in the multivariate analysis, and results can be seen in the regression table, Table 1. Not only does the table show positive and statistically significant coefficients for the independent variable of Free vs. Slavery Population in 1860, the variable of interest for our first hypothesis, but also for the Civil War Battleground by itself and when it is combined with the slavery variable. This indicates that counties where a Civil War battle occurred are associated with higher Republican vote percentages in the 2012 presidential election. Additionally, the Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> of .93 for the combination of the legacy of slavery and Civil War battleground indicates that the model explains 93% of the variation in 2012 Republican vote, increasing from 92% when only considering the legacy of slavery.

To take into account additional independent variables such as education, income, and gender, the model included lagged dependent variables, as mentioned in the previous section. Including these lagged Republican presidential vote percentages allowed the model to capture the dynamics of political processes and prevented the autocorrelation in the model, because the best predictor of present vote choice is past vote choice. Including the most recent ten years of Republican vote percentage made sure the model would show that the presidential vote percentage was truly associated with

the dichotomy between black and white population and the occurrence of a Civil War battle and was not just indicative of past vote percentages. The final column of the regression table displays the spatially autoregressive model, which takes into account the counties surrounding each individual county and their influence, assuming that counties close to each other will be more similar than counties that are farther away. When considering the impact of nearby counties, free versus slave population dichotomy remained positive and significant, most likely due to the effects of slave owners (free population) owning slaves in nearby counties, but Civil War battleground was not significant. This may be due to the limited effect of having a battle in a county, where the effects of the battle are only felt in the small area, the county, in which the battle occurred, not surrounding areas.

Overall, both of this project's hypotheses were supported by the analyses conducted on my unique set of data. Bivariate analyses as demonstrated in Figure 3 provided further support for Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen (forthcoming)'s hypothesis regarding the lasting legacy of slavery on contemporary voting behavior through use of our method of accounting for racial disparity as an additional aspect of the impact of slavery rather than the separate black and white populations. The results of that analysis, as well as the multivariate regression, support my project's first hypothesis as well, that Southern counties that have a high degree of difference between "free" and slave populations in 1860 will be more likely to vote for the Republican presidential candidate in 2012. Further, the multivariate regression also supports my second hypothesis, that Southern counties with Civil War battlegrounds will be more likely to support contemporary Republican candidates. Although the spatially autoregressive model does not maintain significance when considering the impact of a Civil War battleground on contemporary political behavior, it does for the impact of slavery.

## **Discussion**

Path dependency theory indicates that Southern historical forces have predictive power over current-day voting behavior through both institutions the behavioral forces of generational reinforcement that shape regional differences within the American South, specifically when examining counties prevalence of slavery and the occurrence of Civil War battles. This project found support for the historical persistence of the legacy of slavery and lasting impact of the occurrence of a Civil War battle as predictors of Republican vote choice in the 2012 presidential election.

After analyzing my unique data set using both bivariate and multivariate techniques, the study found further support for Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen (forthcoming)'s hypothesis regarding the legacy of slavery on contemporary political behavior, and my study's own two hypotheses as an empirical extension concerning racial disparity and presence of a Civil War battlefield were also supported. Southern counties that had a high degree of difference

between “free” and slave populations in 1860 were found to be more likely to vote for the Republican presidential candidate in 2012 and Southern counties with Civil War battlegrounds were also found to be more likely to support contemporary Republican candidates.

This study was limited, however, in scope and data accumulation. Due to circumstantial constraints, data was only collected for counties in the American South, Kentucky, and Missouri, so the results can only be generalized for this region. Additionally, counties did not align across all data sources and, because counties change boundaries over time, there were instances of missing data and inaccurate data collection in our unique data set. Moreover, the dataset used was limited in size and breadth, which limits the evidence that can be achieved through analysis. Therefore, interpretations and implications of this study must be understood within the context of the available and utilized data.

Despite these limitations, the results of our study are suggestive of the importance of history in the present, especially when taken in the context of the scope of this study and when combined with the explanatory power of Avidit Acharya, Matthew Blackwell, and Maya Sen’s (forthcoming) study. The enduring characteristics of both social and historical forces as they pertain to politics indicates that the patterns observed in today’s political study may not be due simple to concurrently occurring factors, but are also continuously being shaped by the historical legacy of the past through institutional and behavioral path dependence. Understanding that historical institutions, behaviors, and cultures have an impact on contemporary politics means that politics as a field would benefit from exploring other relationships between historical forces and present day political behaviors.

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Table 1: Predicting Contemporary Republican Vote with Free vs. Slave Population in 1860

Predicting Contemporary Republican Vote with Free vs. Slave Population in 1860			
2012 Republican Vote			
	Slavery	Slavery + Civil War	Spatially Autoregressive
<b>Free vs Slavery Pop. in 1860</b>	0.03*	0.03*	0.03*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)
<b>Civil War Battleground</b>	---	0.33*	0.33
		(0.185)	(0.305)
Lagged DV - 2008	0.92*	0.92*	0.92*
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.03)
Lagged DV - 2004	0.29*	0.29*	0.29*
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.04)
Lagged DV - 2000	-0.09	-0.09	-0.09*
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.04)
Lagged DV - 1996	0.02	0.02	0.02
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.04)
Lagged DV - 1992	-0.18*	-0.19*	-0.19*
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.03)
Lagged DV - 1988	0.00	-0.00	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Lagged DV - 1984	-0.11*	-0.12*	-0.12*
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.03)
Lagged DV - 1980	0.07	0.06*	0.06*
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)
Lagged DV - 1976	0.06	0.06*	0.06*
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.03)
Intercept	1.58	1.52	1.59*
	(2.18)	(2.18)	(0.88)
<i>Adjusted-R<sup>2</sup></i>	.92	.93	--
<i>N</i>	1019	1019	1019

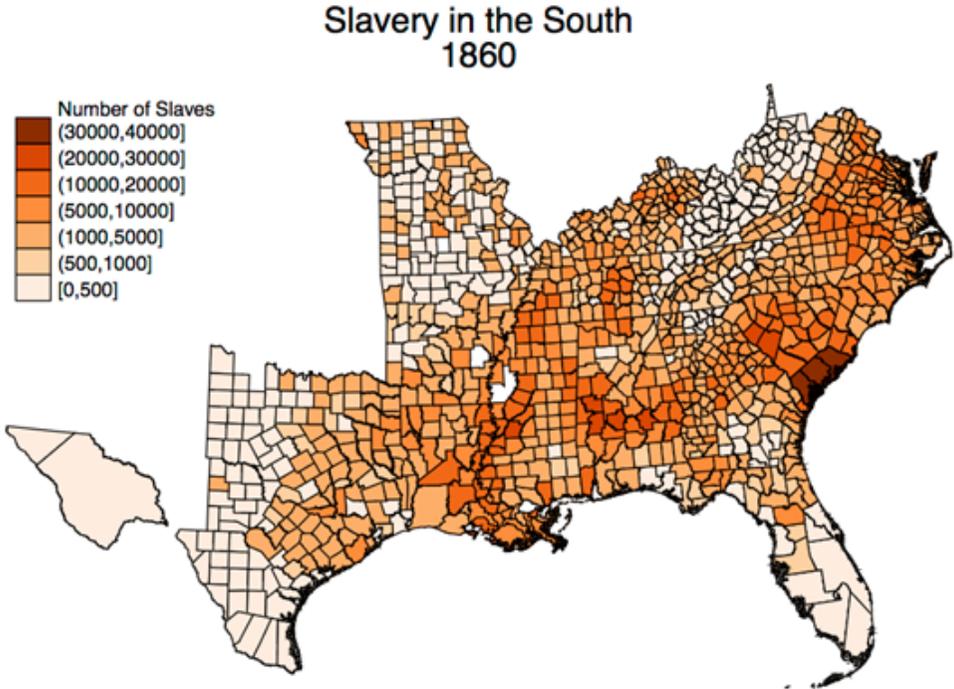
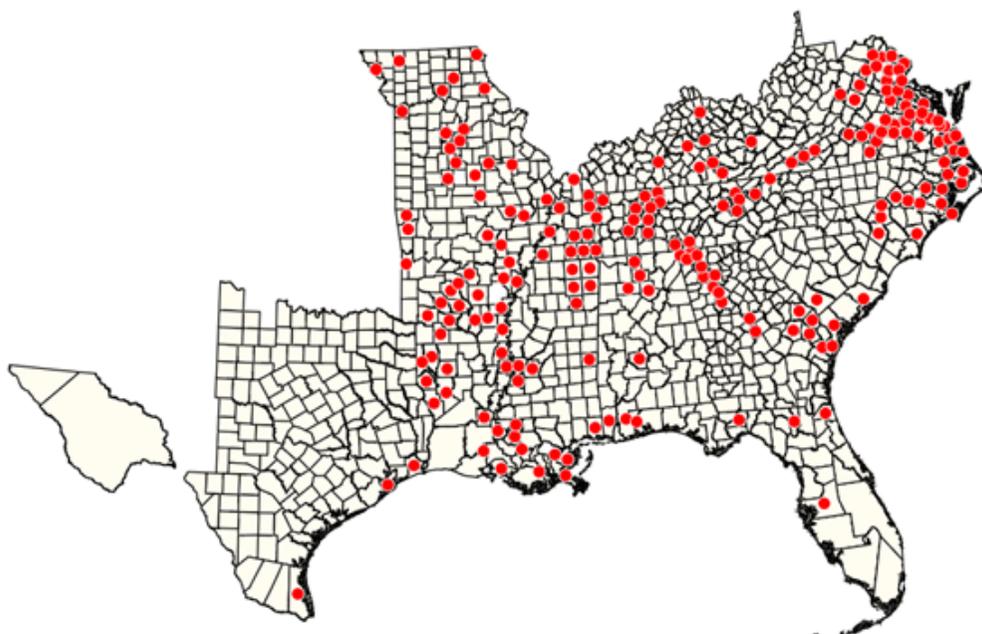


Figure 1. Slavery in the South

### Civil War Battles



Source: National Park Services  
The American Battlefield Protection Program

*Figure 2. Civil War Battles*

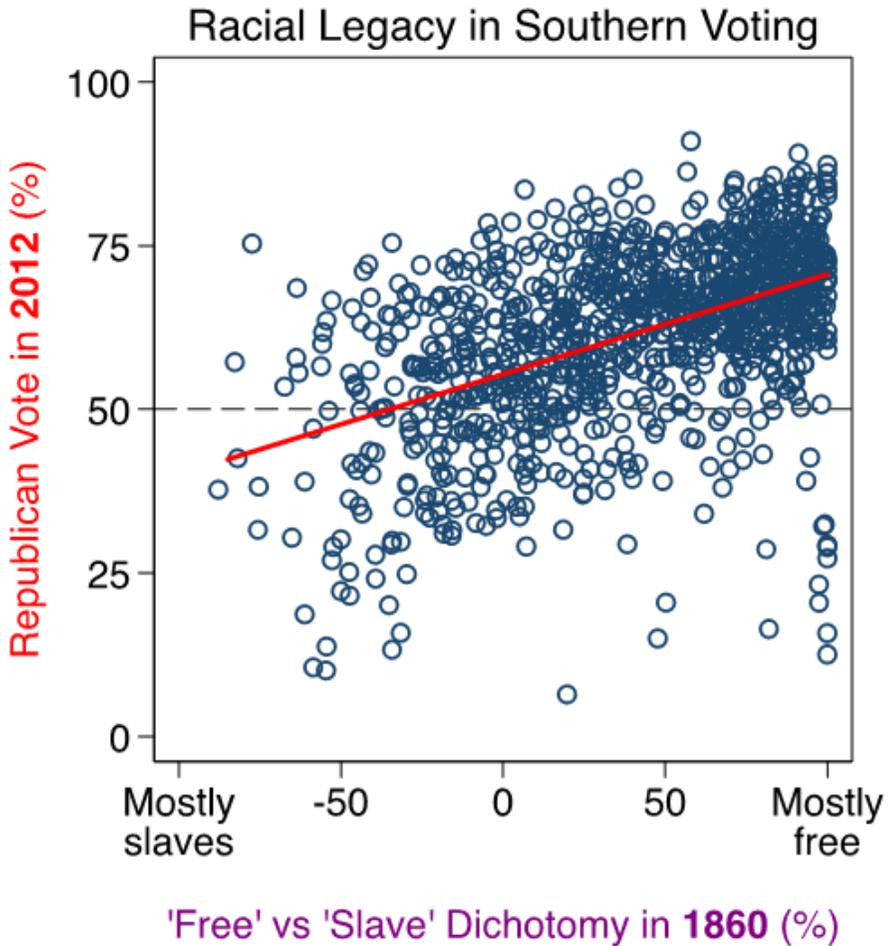


Figure 3. Racial Legacy in Southern Voting