

**Racial Differences in Access to New Deal Work Relief in 1940**

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Prior to the Great Depression governments at all levels actively discriminated against Blacks. In the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century governments at all levels have discriminated much less. The question arises. When did this transition begin? It might have begun during the New Deal when the federal government began playing a much larger role in welfare, labor regulation, housing, and many other areas. The reduction of discrimination was likely to be highly uneven, however, because there were so many different types of New Deal programs with administrative authority delegated to governments at all levels.<sup>1</sup> We focus in this paper on access to federal work relief for Blacks and whites in 1940. The national government reports claimed that the program sought to eliminate discrimination. The Federal Works Agency (1940, p. 23), for example, argued that its programs—including the Public Works Administration, the Works Projects Administration, the Public Roads Administration, and the Public Buildings Administration—actively sought to ensure no racial discrimination in employment and in the distribution of benefits. Although the national government may have attempted to create equal access to these programs based on race or socioeconomic status, its oversight was limited because nearly all of the relief programs were administered in conjunction with state and local authorities who determined who was eligible to receive relief.

Many of the state and local governments in the South had developed policies that had significantly retarded black progress for decades. Racial differences in program participation may also have led to an unequal distribution of program funds. Blacks with limited education may have faced more obstacles in determining their eligibility for relief programs. In addition, past experiences with local public programs may have discouraged them from applying. While working with Gunnar Myrdal, Richard Sterner (1943, 213–323) wrote an extensive study using state level means and frequencies from a wide variety of surveys to develop a complex picture of the extent to which black families participated in New Deal relief programs. There were racial differences in the participation in New Deal programs that varied across programs and varied from state to state and probably from county to county within most programs. Sterner found from surveys in 1933 and 1935 that the share of the black population receiving relief was higher than the white share of the population in southern cities, but it was lower in southern rural areas. Black families seem to have fared the worst from the Aid to Dependent Children program, which was largely administered by state and local agencies. Sterner (1943, 282–286) found that the percentage of black children accepted for ADC in the late 1930s in nearly every southern state

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<sup>1</sup>Some of the federal government’s “race-blind” rules were discriminatory in the sense that the categories they excluded contained a higher share of blacks than whites. The national pension system in the Social Security Act of 1935 excluded the workers in domestic service and agriculture and the self-employed, which meant that 65 percent of all black workers in 1930 were excluded, compared with 45 percent of native white workers and 37 percent of white workers (Sterner 1943, 214-215). Lieberman (1998, 80-111) describes how eligibility expanded to eventually include blacks. Alston and Ferrie (1999) and Ira Katznelson (2013) discuss the role of race and Southern leader’s opposition to Social Security in the political disputes over the Social Security Act. Fishback (2015) broadens the discussion to show that the Southern leaders were joined by leaders from other parts of the country in opposing the act. In housing Black households accounted for 4.5 percent of the refinanced loans held by the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) compared with only 2.5 percent among all other types of lenders. When insuring mortgages the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) manuals into the 1940s recommended limiting lending in Black neighborhoods, while confidential maps created by the HOLC influenced FHA maps that were used to identify the riskiness of loans in neighborhoods based on incomes, housing quality, housing values, race, ethnicity, and poverty. Nearly all Black households were among the 50 percent of all households located in the lowest rated neighborhoods (See Fishback, LaVoice, Shertzer, and Walsh 2020 and a large number of sources cited there).

was smaller than the black percentage of children under age 16, even though black families were more likely to have low incomes. Meanwhile, ADC benefits per child recipient were lower for blacks than for whites in 11 of 24 states with more than 100,000 blacks, mostly in the South.<sup>2</sup>

The national government had much weaker control over the distribution of funds within states under the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) than it did over the programs of the Federal Works Agency. The national government distributed grants to the states, and then the state and local governments determined how to distribute the funds within the states. FERA head Harry Hopkins became dissatisfied with this system and fought with several states about their internal distributions. His only real option for changes in these cases were to either withdraw relief or to have the federal government take over administering relief. Hopkins' dissatisfaction was one of several reasons why the FERA was replaced by the WPA in 1935 as the primary source of relief (Wallis, Fishback, and Kantor 2006). We are analyzing differences in black and white access to New Deal programs that will eventually encompass county level data on access to relief under FERA in October 1933, 1935, and the WPA in 1937, as well as individual data for the WPA in 1940. We have already done an extensive amount of work in examining county-level evidence for blacks and whites under the FERA in 1933 and the WPA in 1937. In this paper we focus on analyzing the individual data for the WPA in 1940 county by county.

There are multiple aspects of the full paper. We examine access to work relief for black males and for black females separately. For each gender, there are two major steps in the analysis. First, since local officials were the first screen for access to WPA relief, the influence of various factors on the likelihood for blacks and whites to receive work relief likely varied by county. Therefore, for the 1401 counties with more than 20 black males on work relief or unemployed in March 1940, we estimate a linear probability regression to examine the impact of race and a variety of other factors on obtaining work relief once someone ended up without a regular job in the pool of people eligible for work relief. We then discuss the distributions of the black effects for household heads and nonhousehold heads, as well as other individual attributes that influenced who received work relief. Second, we then discuss potential political economic factors that influenced the racial distribution of work relief. In a regression for 1348 counties, we then estimate the relationship between the political economic factors and the likelihood of blacks receiving work relief. We then repeat the process for black women. In the draft for this conference we focus on the results for males, particularly household heads.

### **County by County Estimation for Individuals**

To examine the extent to which people who were eligible for work relief were actually on work relief, we limited the sample in 1940 to black and white males who reported to the Census that they were on emergency work relief or unemployed during the last week of March in 1940. Since local government officials were the ones who determined who was eligible for work relief, we estimated a separate regression for each county in America that had 20 or more black males who were either on work relief or unemployed. We followed the same procedure for females separately.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Lieberman (1998) added information to the Sterner study by examining the statistics for ADC and Old Age Assistance from state reports for 1940, 1950, and 1960. Unfortunately, he could not obtain race-specific information about the benefits in those years.

$$R_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Black_i + \beta_2 HHHHead_i + \beta_3 Black_i * HHHHead_i + X_i \beta_4 + \varepsilon_i. \quad 1)$$

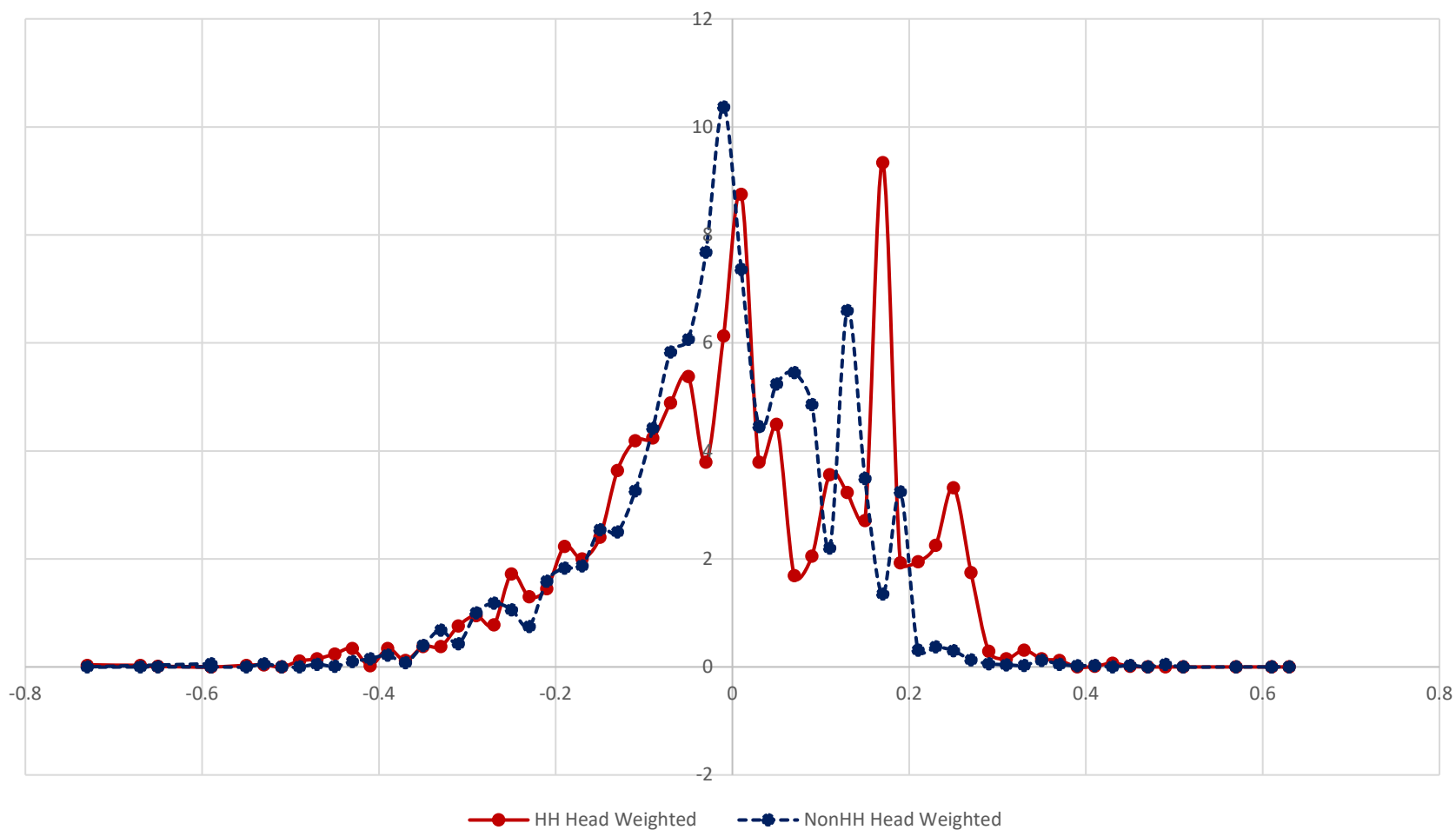
$R_i$  is a dummy with value 1 for on work relief and 0 for unemployed given the nature of the sample,  $Black_i$  has value 1 for blacks and 0 for whites; other races were left out of the sample. Our reading of the reports suggest that household heads were treated more favorably than secondary earners in the household; therefore, we included  $HHHHead_i$  with value one for household heads. To determine whether this was true for black households, we included a multiplicative interaction term  $Black_i * HHHHead_i$ . We also include a vector of correlates  $X_i$  that likely influenced relief official's decisions about whether to offer work relief or not. The foreign-born may have been treated differently from native whites and blacks, so we included a measure among the  $X_i$ . Work relief assignment was probably less likely as the number of other people in the household working regularly rose, while the effect of the number of others in the household on work relief was uncertain. Also included were age and age-squared, years of schooling, location on farms, and whether a married spouse was present. Many local governments imposed residency requirements, so we included dummies for individuals born in the same state, those living in the same house as in 1935, and people who had moved but still resided in the same state as in 1935. The left-out category includes people who were in different states or in different countries in 1935. We also included number of the own children and number of own children under 5 in the household as well as the total number of people in the household, including other families. An error term ( $\varepsilon_i$ ) is incorporated to show the impact of unmeasured factors. The data for the study come from the full Census sample for 1940 at Ruggles, Steven, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, and Matthew Sobek.

### Results of Access to Work Relief Regressions

There were 1401 counties that had 20 or more male blacks that were unemployed or on work relief. As expected, black male household heads fared somewhat better than black male non-household heads. The unweighted mean of the black coefficient for household heads across the counties was -0.023, compared with -0.042 for non-household heads. When we weight the means by the black population aged 16 to 64 in 1940 to take into account the number of blacks facing these situations, the means are -0.005 for household heads and -0.023 for non-household heads. The weighted correlations between the estimates for heads and nonheads is .710; unweighted it .633).

In both cases there is a large amount of variation. Figure 1 shows the distributions of coefficients across counties for household heads and nonhousehold heads when weighted by the black population. In Table 1 roughly 48 percent of blacks were located in counties with positive black effects for male household heads and 51.6 were in counties with negative black effects. [I don't yet have statistical tests for this group because I need to rerun and include a test of the sum of two coefficients.] As expected given the means, the distribution of black coefficients for nonhousehold heads is more heavily weighted at lower values. Roughly 43 percent of blacks aged 16 to 64 were in counties where there were positive black coefficients for non-household heads, of which 28 percent were in counties with statistically significant coefficients and 15 percent were in counties with statistically insignificant coefficients. Of the 57 percent of blacks aged 16 to 64 in counties with negative coefficients, 36 per cent of black male non-household heads faced statistically significant coefficients and 21 percent did not.

Figure 1  
Distribution of Black Regression Effects for Male Household Heads  
and Non-Households on Probability of Work Relief by County in 1940  
Weighted by Number of Blacks in County in 1940



There were strong regional differences in the coefficients. In each of the three Census regions outside of the South, more than 92.6 percent of black male household heads were in counties with positive black effects. The means weighted by the black population were 0.108 in counties in the Northeast, 0.165 in the Midwest, and 0.141 in the West. For black male non-household heads the share in counties with positive black coefficients were above 82.5 in the nonSouth regions with weighted mean coefficients of 0.067 in the Northeast, 0.11 in the Midwest and 0.114 in the West. In contrast, in the South the weighted mean black male effects were -0.062 for non-Household Heads and -0.054 for Household Heads. Yet, even in the South 32 percent of blacks were in counties where the Household Head coefficient was zero or positive, while 31 percent were in counties where the non-Household Head coefficient was zero or positive; 54.8 percent were in counties where the black non-Household head coefficients was not statistically significant at the 10 percent level.

Table 1  
Weighted Averages and Distributions of Effects for Black Household Head and Black NonHousehold Head in Work Relief Regressions, by Region, Sign, and Statistical Significance.

	U.S.	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Weighted Mean of Black Effects					
Nonhousehold Head	-0.023	0.067	0.111	-0.062	0.114
Household Head	-0.005	0.108	0.165	-0.054	0.141
Number of Counties	1,402	105	235	1,013	48
Black Pop. Aged 16-64 (Millions)	7.64	0.92	0.96	5.71	0.11
Weighted Share of Household Head coefficients'					
	U.S.	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Positive	48.2	95.6	94.0	32.0	92.7
Zero	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0
Negative	51.6	4.4	6.0	67.7	7.3
Weighted Share of non-Household Head coefficients'					
Positive	43.1	78.6	94.7	27.9	88.6
Zero	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0
Negative	56.7	21.4	5.3	71.8	11.4
Weighted Share of nonhousehold head coefficients					
	U.S.	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Positive and st. sig.	28.3	74.1	86.8	10.9	76.5
Positive and Not st. sig.	15.0	8.5	7.9	17.3	12.1
Negative and Not st. sig.	20.7	2.3	4.3	26.6	6.6
Negative and st. sig.	36.1	19.1	1.0	45.2	4.8

### **The Other Factors Influencing the Distribution of Work Relief**

A variety of factors aside from race influenced who received access to work relief. The information in Table 2 shows the average of the coefficients and t-statistics from the 1401 county regressions based on individual observations. The table also shows the shares of the t-statistics that based on sign and statistical significance. All the calculations are weighted by the number of blacks aged 16 to 64 in 1940. On average across the counties, the likelihood of obtaining work relief was 5 percent higher in a household with another work relief worker, 2.9 percent lower if the household had a regularly employed worker, 4.5 percent lower for homeowners, 8.6 percent more if living on a farm, 3.7 percent higher if a married spouse was present, 10.6 percent higher if living in the same house as in 1935, 11 percent higher if in a new house in the same state, 1.4 percent higher with a child in the family, and an extra 2.8 percent higher if the child was under 5. The average age and age-squared coefficients imply males were more likely to obtain work relief at in their teens, but the positive relationship weakened and then turned negative at age 31.

Foreign-born males fared worse than blacks at receiving work relief if they were eligible in counties with more than 20 blacks. Among nonhousehold heads, the foreign born were 11.2 percent less likely to obtain work relief than native whites, compared with 2.3 percent less likely for blacks. The unweighted average difference between the foreign-born and black household head coefficient was -0.058 with a median of -0.08 but a value of 0.12 at the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile; when compared with the black nonhousehold head coefficient, the average difference was -0.061, the median -0.07 and the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile was 0.099. When we weight by the foreign-born white population in the 1402 counties with more than 20 blacks, the foreign-born fare even worse. The mean coefficient for the percent foreign born is -0.097 with a median of -0.094 and a 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of -0.066. The mean for the difference between the coefficients of the foreign born and black household heads is -0.22, the median -0.25 and the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile -0.16; the mean for the difference in coefficients between the foreign born and black nonhousehold heads is -0.177, the median -0.207, and the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile -0.103. Across regions relative to blacks, the foreign-born fared the worst in the West with an average coefficient difference weighted by the foreign-born population in these 1402 black counties of -0.27, then the Midwest at -.2735, the Northeast at -0.1943, and then the South at -0.158. Without the weights the difference in coefficients between the foreign born and black household heads was -.24 in the Wests, -.199 in the Northeast, -0.18 in the Midwest, and -.006 in the South.

Table 2  
Male Regressions: Weighted Average Mean Coefficients, t-statistics, and Shares of Coefficients that Were Statistically Significant at the 10 Percent Level

	Avg. Coeff.	Avg. t	Number of Coefficients with t-statistics that are			
			Negative		Positive	
			St. Sig.	Not St. Sig.	Not St. Sig.	St. Sig.
Black	-0.0227	2.53	36.1	20.7	15.0	28.1
Household Head	0.0982	3.04	3.7	7.4	26.1	62.9
Black*HH Head	0.0181	1.63	14.3	22.4	27.3	35.9
Foreign Born	-0.1120	-6.90	67.9	18.0	8.4	5.7
Number of others in HH on emergency work	0.0495	6.07	6.6	16.7	23.1	53.7
Number of others in HH employed	-0.0290	-7.17	68.2	18.8	10.8	2.2
Owned Home	-0.0454	-6.69	57.0	28.3	13.0	1.8
Age	0.0060	4.13	6.5	16.8	27.5	49.2
Age Squared	-0.0001	-3.34	47.7	23.8	22.8	5.7
Years of Schooling	-0.0003	-0.68	20.2	36.1	34.3	9.4
On Farm	0.0859	2.63	3.5	10.8	25.2	60.5
Married Spouse Present	0.0368	2.55	4.1	17.8	31.1	46.9
Born Same State	0.0163	0.12	17.5	25.2	39.1	18.3
Living in Same House as in 1935	0.1057	5.01	1.1	9.5	25.3	64.1
Living in New House in Same State as in 1935	0.1099	6.27	1.3	8.4	24.5	65.8
Number of persons in Household	0.0075	-0.96	23.0	16.9	28.3	31.8
Number of Children in Family	0.0139	4.65	2.7	17.4	29.5	50.5
Number of Children Under 5 in Family	0.0284	3.43	0.6	16.0	32.1	51.3

Notes. Population weights are the number of blacks aged 16 to 64. Statistical Significance is based on the 10-percent confidence interval.

### Access to Regular Employment and Wages and Earnings in Regular and Work Relief Jobs

Thus far, we have shown that once black males in the labor force no longer had regular jobs, they had more access to work relief than whites in a very large share of counties in the three regions outside the south, but in only about one-third of the locations in the South. One question to consider is what was happening to them in the regular labor market. For household heads we estimated an equation similar to equation 1 in which we looked at all male household heads in the labor force and the dependent variable was one when the individual did not have a regular job and thus fell into the pool of males who were unemployed or on work relief and zero when they were employed in regular jobs. Nationwide the results suggest that blacks were much more likely to end up without regular jobs. The weighted average black coefficient in Table 4 was



0.049 and 58.2 percent of blacks were located in counties with positive and statistically significant coefficients. However, 25.6 percent of blacks were located in counties where blacks were statistically significantly less likely to be without a regular job. Nearly all of those were in the South.

In a reversal of the situation for obtaining work relief positions, the regular labor markets outside the South were much worse for blacks than for whites. A black male household head in the labor force was around 12 percentage points more likely NOT to have a regular job in the average county in the Northeast, around 14 percentage points more likely in the Midwest, and 11.3 percentage points more likely in the West. In the South, on the other hand, the average difference between blacks and whites was 0.07 or 0.3 percentage points. The situation in the South was a bi-modal distribution with 44.5 percent of the blacks in counties with positive and statistically significant coefficients and 34.3 percent in counties with negative and statistically significant coefficients; among counties with insignificant coefficients 10.9 percent of blacks were in counties with positive coefficients and 10.1 in counties with negative coefficients.<sup>3</sup>

The results suggest that racial disparities in access to regular jobs and to work relief varied greatly across the United States. Local governments outside the South gave blacks more access to work relief but this occurred after the labor markets in those regions were much more likely to leave them without regular jobs in the first place. In the South most local governments gave blacks less access to relief than whites for those without jobs, but 34.4 percent of southern blacks were in counties where they were statistically significantly more likely to have regular jobs than whites and another 21 percent were in counties where the black-white difference in the probability of being out of a regular job was not statistically significant. This is a far more complex picture of race in markets and governments than scholars have realized. Further below, we examine what factors are related to these differences.

Access to work relief describes only one dimension of the treatment of blacks and whites on work relief by local officials. The next step is to look at the weekly wages paid and the number of weeks of work offered. Unfortunately, the 1940 Census data cannot describe the full story on these dimensions. In the 1940 census people reported their work relief status in late March 1940 and also reported how long they had been unemployed. Robert Margo (1991, 1992) suggests that a relief worker who listed an unemployment duration that lasted 65 or more weeks could be inferred to have been either unemployed or on work relief during the year 1939. When asked about annual earnings and weeks worked in 1939, the relief worker with 65 or more weeks unemployed was expected to report the number of weeks worked and annual earnings while on work relief.

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<sup>3</sup> The black-population-weighted correlation between the black coefficients for household heads representing the probability of being on work relief out of the pool without a job and the probability of being without a regular job out of the work force was 0.62 for the nation as a whole. Within regions the correlations were -.13 within the Northeast, 0.24 for the Midwest, 0.43 in the South, and 0.33 in the West.

**Table 3**  
**Weighted Average Black Coefficients and Average t-statistics for Aspects of Private Work and Work Relief from regressions for Household Heads within Counties, by Region, 1940**

	U.S.	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Probability of Being on Work Relief or Unemployed in March 1940	0.049	0.118	0.147	0.012	0.122
(t-statistic)	(13.65)	(36.23)	(38.39)	(3.44)	(20.08)
LN Emerg. Weekly Earnings in 1939	-0.179	-0.148	-0.125	-0.199	-0.089
(t-statistic)	(-5.38)	(-9.17)	(-8.93)	(-3.85)	(-4.34)
LN Regular Weekly Earnings in 1939	-0.488	-0.423	-0.387	-0.526	-0.377
(t-statistic)	(-55.82)	(-104.3)	(-75.46)	(-41.34)	(-54.68)
LN Regular Weekly Earnings for Laborers in 1939	-0.321	-0.26	-0.225	-0.356	-0.222
(t-statistic)	(-22.53)	(-41.47)	(-28.63)	(-17.09)	(-27.21)
LN Emerg. Weeks Worked in 1939	-0.020	-0.019	-0.016	-0.021	-0.014
(t-statistic)	(-0.44)	(-0.21)	(-0.79)	(-0.42)	(-0.43)
LN Regular Weeks Worked in 1939	-0.027	-0.010	-0.013	-0.035	0.011
(t-statistic)	(-2.50)	(2.03)	(-1.01)	(-3.93)	(4.16)
LN Regular Weeks Worked by Laborers in 1939	-0.007	0.002	0.010	-0.014	0.045
(t-statistic)	(0.09)	(2.83)	(2.27)	(0.012)	(7.83)

Notes: Weights were the black population aged 16-64 in counties. There were 604 Counties with 6.1 million blacks aged 16-64 that had enough black males with emergency wage information to estimate regressions; therefore, we restricted the sample of counties for weekly wage and weeks worked to that group of 604 counties. There were 1380 counties in the probability of being on work relief or unemployed regressions. Laborers include household service workers, farm laborers and other laborers from the IPUMS 1950 Occupational categories.

To get a sense of male black-white differences in relief pay per week and weeks of work relief offered during 1939, we had to limit the sample to household heads who were on work relief in March 1940 who listed their duration of unemployment as 65 or more weeks, so that they would not be reporting earnings or weeks worked from anything but work relief jobs. We then run a set of separate regressions by county on individuals with the natural log of weekly earnings as the dependent variable, and another set for the natural log of weeks worked. To ensure that there were enough blacks in the county to be meaningful, we restricted the counties to ones where the number of black household heads in the sample was 20 or higher. These unavoidable restrictions limit the sample to 605 counties with relatively large black populations because the number of black household heads who were unemployed for 65 weeks is relatively small. In consequence, black access to work relief was better on average for this group of counties than for all counties. For example, the black-population-weighted average black

coefficient for Household heads is 0.021 for this smaller sample compared with -0.005 for the larger sample of 1402 in Table 1.

In considering the comparisons of weekly earnings and weeks worker, note also that household heads with 65 continuous weeks of unemployment or work relief are an unusual group that may be less well qualified for regular employment. This will not lead to any more biases in the finding for black-white comparisons after controlling for correlates than if we had all work relief workers if the unmeasured features in the error terms are similar.

The results in Table 3 for male household heads show that the average number of weeks worked on emergency jobs in 1939 were lower by about 2 percent on average for blacks than for whites when the means are weighted by the black population aged 16-64. The weighted means varied from -0.014 to -0.021 across the four census regions. The weighted means for the t-statistics were also low at around -0.49 for the nation as a whole and ranged from -0.377 to -0.526 across census regions. The wage differences, however, were quite large, as the black population-weighted mean coefficients was -0.179 for the nation as a whole with a low of -0.089 in the West and a high of 0.199 in the South.<sup>4</sup>

The black-white differences for work relief, however, are not as large as the black-white differences in regular jobs. The range of jobs on work relief tended to be much smaller than in the regular economy. In 1939 roughly 63 percent of work relief jobs were unskilled, 12 percent intermediate, 11 percent skilled, and 3.5 percent professional and technical (WPA Annual Report 1939, 92-93). Only about 30 percent of the usual occupations of males on work relief in 1935 were in unskilled or household jobs, while 17 percent were skilled, and 21 percent were semi-skilled and around 3 percent were managers and professional or technical workers. (Workers on Relief in the U.S. in March 1935: A Census of Usual Occupations, 1937, 8-9). To make comparisons for regular jobs, we ran regressions in each county for two samples of workers: 1) all workers with regular jobs and 2) laborers and household workers. Since the range of wages is largest for all workers and smallest for the laborers, we believe this would give us upper and lower bounds on the black-white wage differences for regular workers. The results show that the ranking of the typical black coefficients in the wage regressions were least negative for emergency workers, more negative for laborers and most negative for all workers. Thus we will focus on the comparisons between emergency workers and laborers in regular jobs.

In Table 3 the black coefficients for weekly earnings of emergency workers were much less negative than for laborers in regular jobs for the U.S. as a whole and in all regions. For the U.S. as a whole, blacks in emergency work received an average of 17.9 percent less compared with 32 percent less for laborers in regular jobs. Similar differences were found in each region. In terms of weeks worked over the year, however, the blacks in regular laborer jobs fared slightly better than blacks in emergency work. The black coefficient for the U.S. as a whole in laborer jobs suggests they had 0.7 percent fewer weeks than whites, compared with 2 percent less on emergency jobs. But most of the coefficients from the regressions were not statistically significant. Across regions the black coefficients for laborers in regular jobs were positive in 3 of the four regions, compared with negative in all for regions for emergency workers.

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<sup>4</sup> We considered running regressions for the work relief members who reported their "usual occupation" with dummies for different occupation skill levels. When we tried this for counties in one region, the sample sizes in each county were so much smaller that we gave up on this idea.

## **Predicting the Political Economic Factors That Influenced the Differences in Black Access to Work Relief**

Local administrators distributed opportunities and funds between blacks and whites based on the interests of the voting public, key economic stakeholders, and their own personal interests and ideology. The limits on voting rights for blacks in the South during the period meant that the voting public was dominated by white voters with an array of discriminatory attitudes. Whites were often the median voters and also the voters at higher percentiles of the electorate in situations where the winning candidate was seeking to claim a larger mandate to follow through with policies.<sup>5</sup> Outside, the South blacks had political clout as swing voters. In all areas of the country major economic actors, employers, the wealthy, and other organizations like churches, unions, and clubs were likely to influence political decisions through donations and the ability to stimulate turnout during elections and support between elections. This way of organizing thinking about the political process suggests a series of correlates that can be grouped in the following way: political power and agency of blacks, factors related to white attitudes toward blacks, factors that influence the economic interests of whites, the extent of the problem with unemployment and economic downturns, the presence of foreign-born workers, attitudes associated with political parties, and the availability of resources to combat the problems in the form of local and state revenue and of federal funds to the area. Some correlates might appear in multiple categories, sometimes with conflicting predictions.

The Jim Crow laws kept the vast majority of Blacks from voting in southern states, but blacks who moved outside the south became voters in their new locations. Although they composed a relatively small percentages of voters, they had power as swing voters. Doug McAdam (2010, pp. 98) and Ralph Bunche (1940, 572-606) find that they had significant influence on elections in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. Prior to the New Deal Black support primarily went to Republicans. After the start of the New Deal, Jill Watts (2019, pp. 142-3, 192-3) and Bunche (1940, pp. 572-606) provide evidence that both Democrats and Republicans competed more to woo black voters. We expect that higher black population shares would have given them more swing voting clout.

Outside the South and even within the South blacks had some degree of agency in dealing with white leaders through organizations, like the black churches and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Black workers had some degree of clout with employers who benefited from hiring workers during the Great Migration associated with the First World War or those employers in the South who lost black workers may have put more pressure on relief officials to provide access to work relief to keep black workers available to help fuel a recovery. Black homeowners, professionals, and college graduates might have been able to make the case for better treatment more effectively. The presence of successful blacks and churches, however, might have contributed to attitudes that blacks were not in need of special treatment or even to a potential backlash.

White attitudes toward blacks varied across the country and likely influenced the local relief process. Our primary measure of discriminatory attitudes is a housing segregation index from 1930. Trevon Logan and John Parman (2017) created a block-level housing segregation

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<sup>5</sup> We do not want to focus on a median voter model because we believe the political economy of local governments involves a mixture of winning elections, seeking mandates in elections, and satisfying key interest groups, like employers, who have economic power but account for relatively small shares of the electorate, such as employers.

index that covers rural and urban areas. It is expected that greater separation of the races in housing would be consistent with more discriminatory attitudes and less access to work relief.<sup>6</sup>

Discriminatory attitudes also were likely influenced by the black share of the population. In his studies of labor market discrimination, Gary Becker argued that higher black shares of the population would lead to more wage discrimination because blacks would be forced to accept more jobs from employers with tastes for discrimination. In a similar fashion white voters faced with a large black population share and limited budgets likely feared that whites would not get the desired level of government resources if blacks and whites were given the same treatment.

Attitudes toward blacks were likely to be influenced by the economic status of the whites. In areas where blacks were complements in production for a significant number of whites, the whites likely would have pushed for better treatment of blacks. In contrast, the whites who were competing as substitutes for blacks would have pressed for worse treatment. The correlates include the shares of whites across a variety of occupations with the share in nonfarm labor as the left out category. Whites with occupations that were complementary to black workers were likely to be in professional, managerial, craft and skilled, clerical, services (not household), sales, and farmers. They likely would have pushed for better government treatment of blacks. In contrast whites who were operatives, household service, and laborers would have been likely competitors and thus would have pressed for less access for blacks.

White elites and better educated whites were likely to press for more favorable treatments of blacks. Several correlates capture this effect. The variable federal tax returns filed in 1929 per family in 1930 captures the relatively small share of families and individuals with enough earnings to be eligible to pay federal income taxes (2000 for individuals, 5000 for a family of four). Other measures of economic elite status include the share of whites owning homes, the average value of white homes, the white share owning automobiles. We also include a series of variables capturing the extent of schooling among whites with the expectation that more schooling would be associated with more positive attitudes toward blacks. We included a similar series for ages of white household heads to see if there were age cohort differences in attitudes toward blacks.

Given limited government resources, whites would have been less inclined to support black work relief access if they were hit harder by the downturn. Thus, we included a measure of the percentage drop in retail sales per capita between 1929 and 1933. In addition, we have included the percentage of white households in 1940 that were unemployed and the percentage of white households that were on work relief.

The results from the individual regressions show that the foreign-born were given even less access to work relief than blacks, suggesting the possibility of even more discrimination against them than against blacks. It is possible, therefore, that blacks would have been more likely to receive work relief when there was a significant share of foreign-born in the population.

Through the early 1930s the Republican party tended to be more closely associated with black because Lincoln freed the slaves and the Reconstruction under the Grant administration provided support for black schools and political strength during Reconstruction. It is not clear

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<sup>6</sup> Schools were segregated in the South, and Marianne Wanamaker and Celeste Peterson collected information on the resources in the schools. The earliest year for which they had full coverage for black and white enrollment rates and number of teachers across the Southern states is 1932. We have not yet included this information in the analysis because we did not have it for northern states. We have a similar problem for including lynchings because the only dataset available to us is one for the Southern states that has apparently been superceded by a national dataset to which we do not have access.

how much support Republicans provided thereafter, although they were the beneficiaries of black voting. To capture the impact of national attitudes based on political party, we have included the mean percentage voting for Democrats for President during the presidential elections from 1896 to 1928 and then a measure of the swing to Roosevelt in 1932 calculated as the percent voting for Roosevelt in 1932 minus mean voting Democrat from 1896 to 1928.

The final category of variables captures the availability of government resources to deal with the problems of the Depression. From the Census of Governments in 1932, we have estimates of the amount of revenue available at the county level to all local governments (county, town and city, school district). These includes grants and subventions distributed by the state government. This gives a sense of the local government capacity to provide benefits during the heart of the Depression before the federal government began delivering funds. We have also included measures of New Deal federal relief payments per capita from 1933 through June 1939, AAA payments per capita from 1933 through 1937, and public works grants per capita from 1932 through June 1939 to give a sense of the federal resources poured into the county during the decade. It is likely that increased resources would have made it more likely for whites to support work relief for blacks given their own situations.<sup>7</sup>

### Estimating the Political Economic Relationships

To estimate the relationships between access to work relief and various political economic variables, we compiled a county-level data set that includes the black household head coefficients from the 1401 county regressions with county data that capture many of the factors described above. We estimate the following cross-sectional regression and subsets thereof,

$$Access40_{is} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 X_{is} + S_s + \varepsilon_{is}. \quad 2)$$

$Access40_{is}$  represents the estimate of the access to work relief for black household heads in county  $i$  in state  $s$ ,  $X_{is}$  is a vector of correlates that likely influenced the decisions by local relief officials,  $S_s$  is a vector of state fixed effects that control for features of a state that were common to all counties within each state and  $\varepsilon_{is}$  is a stochastic error term that includes unmeasured factors. Missing values for some of the correlates reduces the number of counties to 1348 from 1401. Equation 2 is estimated with and without the state fixed effects for all counties. Because of the different voting environments in the South and the rest of the country, the equations are estimated without and with fixed effects for the 974 Southern observations and then again for the 374 counties in the of the country.<sup>8</sup> The equations are estimated using weighted least squares with the number of black males in the county as the weights to give more weight to the counties were more blacks resided.

Table 4 shows the change in the black household heads probability of receiving work relief when unemployed associated with an One Standard Deviation (OSD) change in each variable, along with the mean and the standard deviation from the sample. The coefficient can be calculated by dividing the OSD measure by the standard deviation. The goal in the table is to get a sense of the impact of a relatively common change in the correlate to get a sense of how

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<sup>7</sup> The data for the correlates largely come from aggregations of the full census from Ruggles, Steven, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, and Matthew Sobek 2015 or from county aggregates in Fishback and Kantor 2018.

<sup>8</sup> South in the estimation includes all states in the South Atlantic, East South Central and West South Central among the nine census regions.

much of the variation is related to each variable. In general, we use the standard deviation for the whole sample because the standard deviations for most variables do not differ much. In a couple of cases related to the relative size of the black share, we also discuss the OSD effects for the nonSouth standard deviation separately because it is much smaller than in the South. In discussions of the correlates the focus will be on the results with state fixed effects included and all coefficients discussed are statistically significant unless stated otherwise.

The relationship between relief and the black percentage of the population depends on two conflicting predictions, the positive relationship associated with greater swing voting power and Becker's negative prediction associated with greater discrimination. The relationships were sharply different between the South and the rest of the country. Outside the South where blacks had much better access to the vote, black household heads in counties with an OSD higher percent black were 8.4 percent more likely to obtain work relief when unemployed; therefore, the swing voting relationship dominated. The standard deviation for the percent black in the overall sample of 21.5 is much larger than the standard deviation for the sample outside the south of 4.4. Using the standard deviation of 4.4 the OSD relationship is 1.7 percent. In contrast, the OSD relationship was negative at around -0.3 percent within the South but was not statistically significant. Given the lack of access to voting in the South, the results suggest a weak Becker discrimination effect in the distribution of relief.

Several other measures of potential lobbying strength for blacks show weak or negative relationships with work relief access. Small and statistically insignificant relationships were found for the percent homeowners among blacks and for more highly educated blacks.<sup>9</sup> The OSD relationships for years with an NAACP chapter were associated with around 1 percent less access but the relationship in the North was not statistically significant. We did not expect that an OSD higher change in percent black between 1910 and 1930 associated with the Great Migration would be related to 3 percent less relief access outside the South.

The relationships for black church membership differed markedly in the North and South. In the South counties with an OSD higher share of black church membership as a share of the population had 2 percent more access to work relief in contrast to the OSD relationship in the rest of the country of -33.5 percent. As was the case with the percent black in the population, the standard deviation in the sample outside the South was much smaller at 1.4 than the 11.46 for the whole sample. Using the standard deviation of 1.4, the OSD relationship for church membership was -4.1 percentage points. The only group associated with greater access was black professionals with an OSD effect that raised access by 0.7 percent.

We had anticipated that the availability of greater resources for income and taxation in the county would have been associated with more access to work relief for blacks if white relief workers were given first access to relief. Counties with an OSD higher per capita New Deal public works gave blacks 0.8 percent more access in the South and the whole country. Higher long run consumption measured as retail sales per capita in 1929 had conflicting OSD effects of 3.6 percent better access outside the South and 3.4 percent less access in the South. The drop in retail sales per capita during the Great Contraction did not have statistically significant relationships with access. Surprisingly, local tax collections per family were negatively

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<sup>9</sup>In these estimations the relationships for the county's political economy with respect to black home ownership and college graduation should not be considered examples of situations in which black home owners and graduates were successful enough to avoid work relief because the dependent variable is the coefficient from the regressions on individuals in each county after controlling for the individual's schooling and home ownership.

associated with relief access outside the South. Federal tax returns per family, AAA spending per capita, and relief per capita did not have statistically significant relationships.

White attitudes toward the treatment of blacks on work relief were likely influenced by whether they saw blacks as complementary workers that raised their productivity and income or as substitutes who would compete with them for jobs. If they were complements, the whites were more likely to want to insure that black workers remained in the area to aid the recovery. In the South the complement story fits professionals (OSD relationship of 2.3 percent) white farmers (6.2 percent), white clerks (4.3 percent), white craftsmen (3.6 percent), white operatives (6.7 percent), and white household servants (1.3 percent). We had thought white operative and white household servants would have considered blacks as competition. The white household servant relationship might actually be a measure in which whites were wealthy enough to hire white servants and thus saw blacks as complementary. For the operatives, it might have been that white factory owners and operatives might have seen black operatives and laborers as complementary in areas where they were segregated into parts of the factory that increased the productivity of other parts of the factory where whites dominated. We know this type of internal segregation was present in Ford (Foote, Whatley and Wright 2003) and also occurred in textiles in the South. In the rest of the country the complementary story could be told for white craftsmen (3.5 percent), while the substitute story could be told for household servants (-4.5 percent) and whites with higher valued homes (-2.6 percent).

Blacks had better access to relief in areas with more foreign born outside the South with an OSD relationship of 5.6 percent in the South and 4 percent elsewhere.. Given that the foreign born were less likely to receive relief than blacks within most counties, we think this is likely more a situation where blacks were placed ahead of the foreign-born in access to government resources than to a notion that the foreign-born saw blacks as complementary workers.

In Figure 1 showing the distribution of the black coefficients weighted by population, many of the positive spikes near 0 and greater than zero were associated with cities, which led us to believe that areas with larger overall populations treated blacks better. However, once we control for a variety of other factors, larger populations were associated with less access to work relief for blacks. The OSD relationships were -2.3 percent in the South and -3.8 percent outside it.

One useful measure of racial relationships between whites and blacks is a measure of housing segregation developed by Trevon Logan and John Parman, which captures the residential mixing of blacks and whites at almost the street level. Greater segregation was associated with less access in the South, an OSD effect of -2.8 percent but more access with an OSD effect of 1.8 percent.

The relationship of black access with political parties and the Roosevelt administration is captured by measures of presidential voting used in the New Deal literature on the political economy of the distribution of funds, the average percentage of votes for the Democratic presidential candidate between 1896 and 1928 and a swing voting measure of the swing to Roosevelt in 1932, the difference between the Democratic vote in 1932 and the average from 1896 to 1928. In the estimations without fixed effects, the long run Democratic mean had a weak relationship with black work relief access overall and in the South, but a negative one in the North, while the swing measure was statistically insignificant. The OSD relationship of -7.2 percent suggests that areas with more Republicans gave blacks more access to work relief in 1940.



Table 4

Political Economy Results Based on County-Level Regressions with Household Head Male Black Coefficient in 1940 as Dependent Variable

Correlate	Coefficient Times One Standard Deviation						Mean	Std. Dev.
	All		South		NonSouth			
	No FE	FE	No FE	FE	No FE	FE		
							-0.016	0.156
Percent Black, 1940	-0.0233*	-0.0076	-0.0202	-0.0035	0.0737*	0.0843*	31.206	21.482
Democrats Avg. Percent of Presidential Votes, 1896-1928	0.0143	-0.0131	0.0119	-0.0083	-0.055*	-0.0716*	63.655	20.231
Swing to Roosevelt in 1932	0.0077	-0.0088	0.008	-0.0059	-0.0153	-0.0183	15.641	8.77
South	-0.0562*						0.723	0.448
Segregation	0.0013	-0.0165*	-0.0137	-0.0281*	0.0281*	0.0182*	0.632	0.160
Years with NAACP Chapter	-0.0078	-0.0093*	-0.0106	-0.0109*	-0.0047	-0.0078	11.443	12.000
Change in % Black, 1910-1930	0.0054	0.0009	0.0018	0.0018	0.012	-0.0302*	-3.687	5.835
Percent Homeowners Among Blacks, 1940	0.0041	0.0029	0.004	0.0029	-0.0024	-0.0001	22.772	13.339
Black Church Members 1926 as Share of Population	0.0122	0.0126*	0.0119	0.0112*	-0.3659*	-0.3354*	12.568	11.464
Share of Professionals Among Blacks	0.0046	0.0037	0.0019	0.0026	0.0099*	0.0069*	15.971	8.761
Share of Blacks with 10-12 Yrs of School	0.0138	-0.0009	0.0141	-0.0229	0.0065	0.0038	6.579	5.349
Share of Blacks with 13-15 Yrs of School	0.0093	0.0043	-0.0032	0.0037	0.0033	-0.001	1.395	1.201
Share of Blacks with 16 or more Yrs of School	-0.0087	-0.0035	-0.01	-0.008	0.0036	0.0057	1.232	1.115
Per Capita Relief	0.0146	0.0157	0.0212	0.0136	-0.0007	-0.0063	61.157	42.880
Per Capita AAA	0.0054	-0.0033	0.0076	-0.0016	-0.026*	-0.0112	17.020	19.034
Per Capita Public Works	0.0044	0.0067*	0.0055*	0.0081*	0.0056	0.0077	28.866	39.171
Retail Sales Per Capita, 1929	-0.0379*	-0.0219	-0.0422*	-0.0343	-0.0084	0.0363*	316.860	172.506
Minus % Chg. Retail Sales per Capita, 1929-1933	-0.0016	-0.0032	-0.0007	-0.0027	0.0402*	-0.0035	62.758	9.042
Ln (Population), 1930	-0.0266*	-0.0267*	-0.0194*	-0.0227*	-0.0312*	-0.0383*	10.320	1.000
Professionals as Share of Whites	0.0186*	0.0224*	0.027*	0.0228*	0.0103	0.0126	20.768	7.568
Farmers as Share of Whites	0.0671*	0.063*	0.0703*	0.0615*	0.1309*	0.0331	20.939	20.000

Managers as Share of Whites	0.0071	0.0064	0.0098	0.0071	0.0075	-0.0004	9.608	3.576
Clerks as Share of Whites	0.0353*	0.0425*	0.0343*	0.0433*	0.0198	0.0139	5.289	3.338
Sales People as Share of Whites	0.0055	0.0102	0.0125	0.0135	-0.0188	-0.001	5.029	2.778
Craftsmen as Share of Whites	0.0373*	0.0343*	0.0366*	0.0361*	0.0448*	0.0349*	13.462	6.070
Operatives as Share of Whites	0.0589*	0.0592*	0.0646*	0.0672*	0.0148	-0.0087	12.520	7.947
HH Servants as Share of Whites	0.0101*	0.0095*	0.0141*	0.0126*	-0.0425*	-0.0467*	0.425	0.467
Service Workers as Share of Whites	0.0052	0.0091	0.0074	0.0081	0.0077	-0.0153	3.294	2.049
Percent Veterans	0.011	0.0132	0.0284	0.0082	0.0315*	0.0512*	0.444	0.166
Share of Whites Aged 20 and Over	-0.0009	-0.0007	-0.0024	-0.0012	0.0099	0.0122	99.657	0.307
Share of Whites with 10-12 Yrs of School	-0.002	-0.0016	-0.0023	-0.0034	0.0446	0.0219	23.418	6.505
Share of Whites with 13-15 Yrs of School	0.0059	-0.0116	0.0036	-0.0149	-0.005	-0.0284	5.898	2.343
Share of Whites with 16 or more Yrs of School	0.0063	-0.0033	-0.0009	-0.0066	0.0609*	0.0367	5.769	2.841
Share of Whites Who are Homeowners	0.0045	-0.0015	0.0076	-0.0033	-0.0256	-0.0098	41.111	9.655
Average Value of White Owned Homes	-0.0054	-0.0055	-0.0028	0.0044	-0.0106	-0.0263*	3013.231	1479.854
Percent Foreign Born	0.0292	0.0409*	0.028	0.0555*	0.0701*	0.0411*	8.147	12.584
Whites on Work Relief as Share of HHs	-0.0194*	-0.0219*	-0.02*	-0.02*	0.0067	0.0005	0.038	0.025
Local tax collections per family	0.0002	-0.0004	-0.0058	0.0075	-0.0218	-0.0379*	0.160	0.102
Federal Tax Returns Per Family, 1929	0.0242	0.0263	0.0387	0.0483	-0.0063	-0.0068	0.096	0.087

Notes. Dependent Variable is the estimate of the relationship between access to work relief and black household head calculated from 1401 regressions for counties with more than 20 black males who were unemployed or on work relief. These results come from county-level Weighted Least Squares Regression with robust standard errors clustered at the State Level. Each entry is the product of the coefficient from the WLS regression and the standard deviation of the variable for the entire sample.

\*Statistically significant in a two-tailed test at the 10-percent level or better.

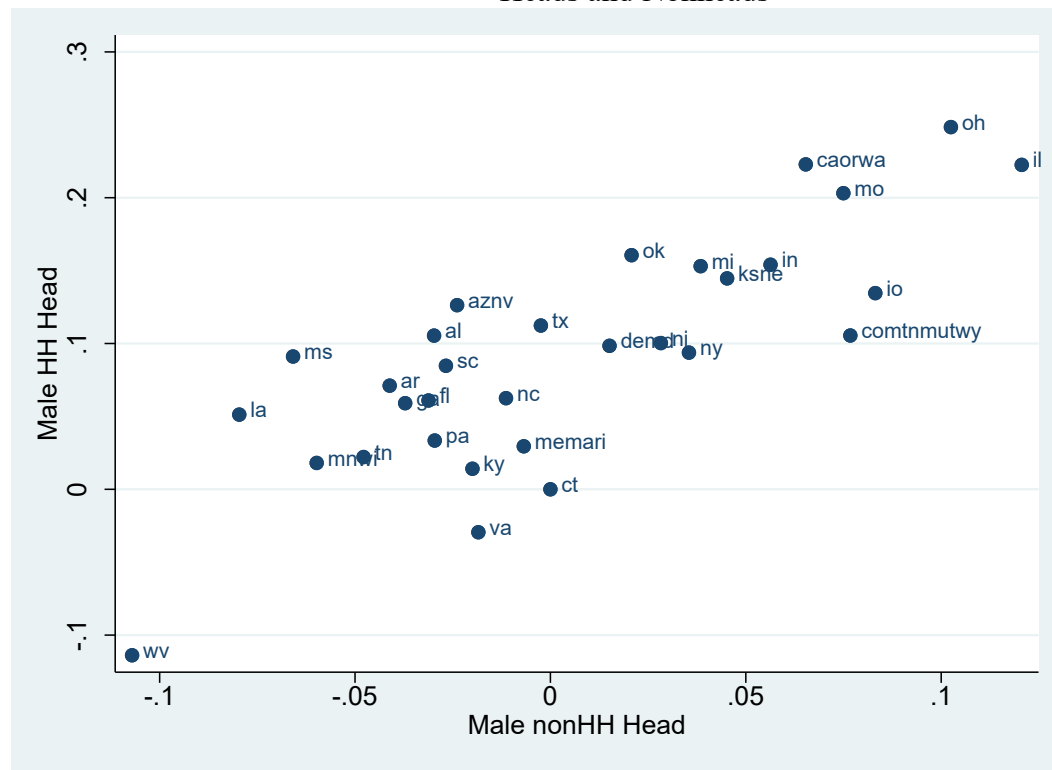
### Differences in Access by State

The state fixed effects from the political economy regressions provide an estimate of the net impact of various aspects of the state legal and economic environment that were common to all counties within the state. When estimating the fixed effects we combined some states outside of the South because some of the states had only one or two counties in the sample. The combinations, which typically tied together states next to each other, can be seen in the string of abbreviations in Figure 2, which show the fixed effects from the political economy regressions for black male household heads and black male nonheads.

The results for all states without state fixed effects for both heads and nonheads show that access to work relief was lower on average in the Southern States after controlling for the other characteristics. The correlation between the fixed effects for heads and nonheads was 0.80. The state fixed effects for heads and nonheads show that most of the Southern states tended to be in the lower half of the rankings. For household heads six southern states were in the bottom ten, while 8 southern states were in the bottom ten for nonheads.

Figure 2

State Fixed Effects Estimates from Political Economy Regressions for Black Male Household Heads and Nonheads



**We left out sections on the political economy for men who were not household heads and on the results for women, but they are summarized in the Conclusion.**

## **Conclusions**

The participation of the federal government in funding relief programs seems likely to have contributed to the transition to less differential treatment of blacks and whites by governments. Yet, many of the decisions with respect to work relief were still being made by local officials and Black-White differences in access after controlling for a broad set of correlates varied enormously across counties and between males and females. Black male household heads generally had better access relative to whites than male nonheads. Outside the South a very large majority of black males were located in counties where they were more likely than whites to receive work relief. Even within the south roughly 30 percent of black males were in counties where they were more likely to receive work relief. This does not necessarily imply favoritism in these areas for blacks over whites because they may have been unmeasured characteristics, access to jobs, location of neighborhoods that put them in a worse situation than whites.

The patterns for Black-White differences in access to regular jobs contrasted sharply with the access to work relief once unemployed. Outside the South black males had 12 to 14 percent less access to regular jobs, while southern black males were only 1.2 percent less likely to be employed in regular jobs than southern white males. Black males were substantially more likely to be unemployed or on work relief relative to in a regular job than white males outside the South (12 to 14.7 percent depending on the region. Inside the South black male heads were only 1.2 percent more likely than whites to be unemployed or on work relief.

In terms of wages and working time, black males were treated better on work relief than in regular jobs. The national averages for the Black coefficients in weekly wage regressions by county show that Blacks received about 17 percent less per week than whites on work relief, while unskilled black workers received about 32 percent less than unskilled whites in regular jobs. In both regular and work relief jobs, Blacks worked about 2 percent fewer weeks than whites. One caveat, there may be biases in these comparisons because our knowledge about work relief comes from March 1940 while the earnings and weeks worked information come from the year 1929.

The work relief situation for Black females was far worse than for Black males. Black women, both heads and nonheads, had much less access to work relief relative to whites than did black men. As was the case for men, the black women had more access outside the South than white women typically did. Inside the South over 90 percent of black female household heads were in counties where they had less access than white female heads to work relief. Other groups who had more limited access to work relief than native whites were foreign-born males (11 percent less) and foreign-born females (7 percent) less. A separate study needs to be done on these groups because the focus of the sample on counties with blacks here misses many counties with significant foreign-born populations.

We sought to isolate the reasons for these differences by estimating relationships between the Black coefficients from the county regression and a series of political economic factors. We emphasize the results for Black male household heads here. The results for females and male nonheads are generally similar. Blacks had enough swing voting power outside the South that they had greater access to work relief in areas where they had a larger share of the population. The access was improved further outside the South in areas where there were more long-time

Republican presidential voters. Within the South where Republicans had little clout, Blacks had better access where there were more Democratic presidential voters.

Among measures of black economic or organizational clout, access was better in counties outside the South where there were more black professionals and blacks with advanced degrees. Black churches contributed to better access in the South where blacks had no voting power but were of no help outside the South and the NAACP had little impact anywhere. The favoritism for blacks over the foreign born was confirmed because outside the South blacks had more access when the population share of foreign-born was higher. The presence of a significant population share of foreign born contributed to better access for blacks in the North. Among New Deal programs only AAA farm spending improved access to work relief for blacks and that was only in the South, but the AAA helped cause the unemployment problem in the first place by cutting the number of opportunities for black and white share croppers and tenants.

Black access to work relief was also better in areas where there were larger shares of people in occupations that could be considered complementary to black workers in the production process. White farmers, clerks, craftsmen, whites with higher value homes, and the hiring of more white household servants in the South all improved black access to work relief.

Some elements of the political economy of relief access were similar for male and female household heads and some were not. Both male and female heads had more access outside the South with higher shares of black populations, while both had less access where there were a higher share of black church goers among the whole population. Unlike males, female household heads had more access with more growth in the share of the black population, higher shares of families paying income taxes, higher per capita retail sales in 1929, and less AAA spending in the South. While higher shares of whites in several occupations were associated with more male head access, this was not true for female heads. Female heads had less access where there were more white service workers and more whites with 13-15 years of schooling.

### **A Preview of Future Work**

The focus in this paper has been on work relief in 1939/1940 because we could measure Black-White Differences in access while controlling for a broad range of individual correlates. Further, we could examine access to work relief among the portion of the labor force that did not have regular jobs. In addition to the individual data for 1940, we have county level information for black and white access to relief for the WPA in 1937 and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration in October 1933 and for the South in the Summer of 1935. The information reported differs for each period, so the most consistent measure that is available for blacks and whites separately is the number of people receiving relief, which we divide by the relevant populations aged 21 and over from 1930 for the FERA data in 1933 and 1935 and from 1940 for the WPA data in 1937 and 1940.

The regional patterns for unweighted and weighted means in Tables 9 and 10 show that the regional patterns for the raw county aggregates for the WPA and the FERA were similar to the patterns seen in Tables 1 and 6 for the male and female regression coefficients after controlling for a variety of correlates. Outside the South the share of the population receiving relief was substantially higher for blacks than for whites. The black-white gap was smaller in the South, positive in the FERA years and zero or negative in the WPA years. Note that these are raw differences, and that blacks had much lower incomes and were typically hit harder by the Depression than whites. In October 1933, we know that the mean black/white gap in urban areas was very large and positive while that gap was around zero in rural areas.

Table 9  
Mean Black Minus White Percent of People on Work Relief Per Person 21 and Over

	No. of Counties	U.S.	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
FERA, October 1933	1,398	9.5	21.3	25.5	4.6	8.5
FERA, Summer 1935	1,001	2.4			2.4	
WPA 1937	1,401	1.2	4.0	5.1	0.0	2.5
WPA March 1940	1,400	1.3	5.0	6.1	-0.5	9.1

Notes. FERA relief numbers divided by 1930 populations, WPA numbers by 1940 populations.

Table 10  
Mean Black Minus White Percent of People on Work Relief Per Person 21 and Over, Weighted by Black Population in 1940

	No. People	U.S.	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
FERA, October 1933	7,687,413	14.6	28.2	33.2	9.2	22.0
FERA, Summer 1935	5,650,646	3.3			3.3	
WPA 1937	7,689,628	1.9	4.2	5.4	0.9	5.0
WPA March 1940	7,689,628	1.9	3.9	7.1	0.6	5.6

Notes. FERA relief numbers divided by 1930 populations, WPA numbers by 1940 populations.

Although the regional aggregates show roughly the same patterns, it appears that unconditionally, blacks fared better relative to whites under the FERA than under the WPA. In addition, the correlations across counties suggest that the factors influencing the distribution of the FERA relief might well have been quite different from the factors influencing the distribution of WPA work relief. The black-population-weighted correlations across counties between the FERA black-white differences in 1933 and the WPA differences were only 0.140 for the 1937 WPA and 0.16 for the 1940 WPA. In the Southern states the weighted correlations between the FERA in 1935 and the 1937 and 1940 WPAs were both around 0.25. Meanwhile, the weighted correlation between the 1933 and 1935 FERA data weighted correlation was only slightly higher at 0.41, while the 1937 and 1940 WPA weighted correlation was extremely high at 0.987. We are currently estimating political economy regressions for the different programs to better understand these differences.

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