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That Old Time Religion: Christianity and Black Economic Progress After Reconstruction

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That Old Time Religion: Christianity and Black Economic Progress After Reconstruction

Luke Petach*

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Abstract

This paper studies the effect of religion on the economic progress of Black Americans after Reconstruction. Southern religious institutions—particularly the Southern Baptist church—played a key role in the development of the Lost Cause mythology that helped legitimate the white supremacist political order which dominated the American South well into the twentieth century. Using county-level data on religious adherence from the 1860 Census and data on county economic characteristics from the full count Census for the years 1850 to 1910, I show that from 1870 onward Black incomes, Black literacy rates, the share of Black individuals with “high-skill” occupations, and the share of Black individuals with manufacturing occupations were lower in counties with a greater pre-Civil War Baptist membership share. This finding is robust to county-fixed effects, year-fixed effects, state-specific linear time trends, and controlling for the county slave population share prior to 1860. No such negative effect on Black economic outcomes exists for the Catholic church, which never formally recognized the Confederacy. I highlight the relationship between Baptist church membership and Lost Cause ideology by demonstrating a positive effect of Baptist membership on Confederate monument construction, lynching, and showings of D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*.

Keywords: Economics of Religion, Stratification Economics, Economic History, Post-Reconstruction, Lost Cause

JEL Codes: Z12, Z13, J15, N31

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1 Introduction

Is there a relationship between religion and economic inequality? Although a large literature examines the relationship between religion and economic growth (Barro and McCleary, 2003; Becker and Woessmann, 2009; Caidedo, 2019; Becker et al., 2024)—highlighting the role of religious institutions in incentivizing investment in human capital (Becker and Woessmann, 2009; Caidedo, 2019), the development of character traits conducive to economic growth such as honesty and thrift (Barro and McCleary, 2003), and legitimating political and/or economic institutions which either hinder or facilitate the development of state power, markets, and private property (Chaney, 2013; Rubin, 2017; Seror, 2018)—few scholars have examined the influence of religion on economic inequality. Becker and Woessmann (2008) highlight the positive effect of religion on gender equality in 19th century Prussia. In contrast, McKenzie and Rouse (2013) show that conservative Christianity fosters less egalitarian views of gender among white adults in the United States. In this paper, I explore the effect of religion on racial inequality in the United States in the Post-Reconstruction era.

Between the end of Reconstruction and the early twentieth century Southern religious institutions—particularly the Southern Baptist church—played a key role in the development of the “Lost Cause of the Confederacy.” A “civil religion” and pseudo-historical cultural movement, the “Lost Cause” sought to reshape public memory in the aftermath of the Civil War, depicting the Confederacy as a mythic, heroic society. In their role as the “prime celebrants” of the Lost Cause (Wilson, 2009, p.11), Southern religious leaders worked to promote not just the Lost Cause narrative itself, but the entire value system associated with the former Confederacy, thereby aiding in the construction and legitimization of the revanchist white supremacist political order that would dominate the American South well into the twentieth century.¹ Using county-level data on religious adherence and economic characteristics from the US Census for the years 1850 to 1910, I show that Black incomes, Black literacy rates, the share of Black

¹Wilson (2009) writes: “[W]hite supremacy was a key tenet of the Southern Way of Life, and Southern ministers used the Lost Cause religion to reinforce it” (p.100).

individuals with “high-skill” occupations, and the share of Black individuals with manufacturing occupations were lower in counties with a greater pre-Civil War Baptist membership share. In particular, a one percentage point increase in the 1860 Baptist membership share is associated with a 1% decrease in the Black occupational income score, a 0.15 percentage point decrease in the share of Black individuals employed in manufacturing, a 1.3 percentage point decrease in the Black literacy rate, and a 0.42 percentage point decrease in the share of Black individuals employed as professionals, managers, craftsmen, or in clerical and/or sales occupations in the period after 1870. These findings are robust to county-fixed effects, year-fixed effects, state-specific linear time trends, controlling for the county slave population share prior to 1860, and controlling for capital destruction during the Civil War via exposure to General Sherman’s march across the South. I find no such effect for the Catholic church, which never formally recognized the Confederacy. Similarly, other mainline Protestant denominations appear to be positively associated with Black economic progress in the Post-Reconstruction era. To highlight the role of Lost Cause ideology as a key mechanism linking the Southern Baptist church to racial inequality, I show that Southern Baptist adherence in the late 19th and early 20th century is positively associated with Confederate monument construction, lynching, and showings of D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides historical background on the link between religion and the Lost Cause of the Confederacy in the Post-Reconstruction era. Section 2 also discusses the related literature. Section 3 introduces the data and discusses the estimation strategy. Section 4 presents the results. Section 5 offers some concluding remarks.

2 Historical Background and Related Literature

2.1 Historical Background: Reconstruction, Religion, and the Lost Cause of the Confederacy

Even before the Compromise of 1877 landed Rutherford B. Hayes in the White House in exchange for the withdrawal of federal troops from the South—marking the informal end of Reconstruction—many of the economic and political gains realized by Black Americans in the initial phases of Reconstruction began to erode. The 1870’s were rife with politically motivated violence against Black politicians, Black voters, and other prominent Black citizens (Valelly, 2004; Williams et al., 2021; Logan, 2023). Supreme Court cases in 1873 and 1876 starkly narrowed the scope of the 14th amendment and neutered federal authority to prosecute anti-Black violence committed by individuals (Foner, 2015)². After 1877, anti-Black, anti-civil rights forces spread across the South. The Post-Reconstruction period is characterized by a virulent (often violent) rejection of Black civil rights in Southern states. The threat of lynching discouraged Black innovation and political participation well into the 20th century (Cook, 2014; Jones et al., 2017). Between 1890 and 1908 ten Southern states adopted new constitutions that enshrined Black disenfranchisement as state law via poll taxes and literacy tests (Perman, 2003). In 1896, the Supreme Court provided the legal foundation for the racial segregation of public accommodations in the Jim Crow era with its decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (163 U.S. 537, 1896). Du Bois (1935) describes Reconstruction and its aftermath as a period in which “the slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery” (p.30).

²In the *Slaughterhouse Cases* (83 U.S. 36 , 1872), the Court ruled that the Privileges and Immunities Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment is limited to the rights pertaining to federal (rather than state) citizenship. In *U.S. v. Cruikshank* (92 U.S. 542 , 1876), the Court reversed three federal convictions for civil rights violations committed in aid of anti-Black, anti-Reconstruction violence during the Colfax Massacre, ruling that the postwar constitutional amendments allowed the federal government to prohibit civil rights violations committed by states, but not those committed by individuals. Analyzing the *Cruikshank* decision, Foner (2015) writes: “[I]n the name of federalism, the decision rendered the national prosecution of crimes committed against Blacks virtually impossible and gave a green light to acts of terror where local officials were unable or unwilling to enforce the law” (p.225).

A central pillar of the anti-civil rights, white-supremacist political agenda that dominated Southern states in the late 19th century was the “Lost Cause of the Confederacy,” a “civil religion” and cultural movement which sought to reshape public memory in the aftermath of the Civil War, depicting the Confederacy as a mythic, heroic society (Wilson, 2009). The most institutionally advanced phase of the Lost Cause took place after 1890, when core Lost Cause organizations—including the United Confederate Veterans, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the United Sons of the Confederacy—commenced operations (Wilson, 2009, p.162). Lost Cause organizations sought to reshape public memory by dedicating public monuments to Confederate heroes (Ferlenga, 2023; Taylor, 2023), policing historical narratives about the Confederacy in public school textbooks and school curricula (Bailey, 1991; Wilson, 2009; King, 2018), establishing certain institutions of higher education as “Lost Cause” universities (Wilson, 2009)³, and creating works of art that valorized Lost Cause ideals (Ang, 2023; Eposito et al., 2023).

Religious leaders and institutions played a key role in advancing the Lost Cause narrative. Confederate monument dedications struck a religious tone, often featuring a sermon as part of the ceremony (Wilson, 2009). Popular Southern writers and preachers—counting the likes of Samuel P. Jones, Thomas Dixon Jr., and J. William Jones—marshaled theological rhetoric to justify support for white supremacy (Poole and Blum, 2005; Tisby, 2019). D.W. Griffith’s 1915 film, *Birth of a Nation*—which glorified the activities of the Ku Klux Klan—was based on a 1905 novel by Baptist preacher Thomas Dixon Jr.. Wilson (2009) describes Baptist preacher J. William Jones as the “single most important link between Southern religion and the Lost Cause” (p.136), also noting that “[S]outhern ministers were among the leading defenders of white supremacy” in the Post-Reconstruction era (p.101). Widely read Lost Cause periodicals—such as the *Christian Index* (Baptist) and the *Christian Advocate* (Methodist)—

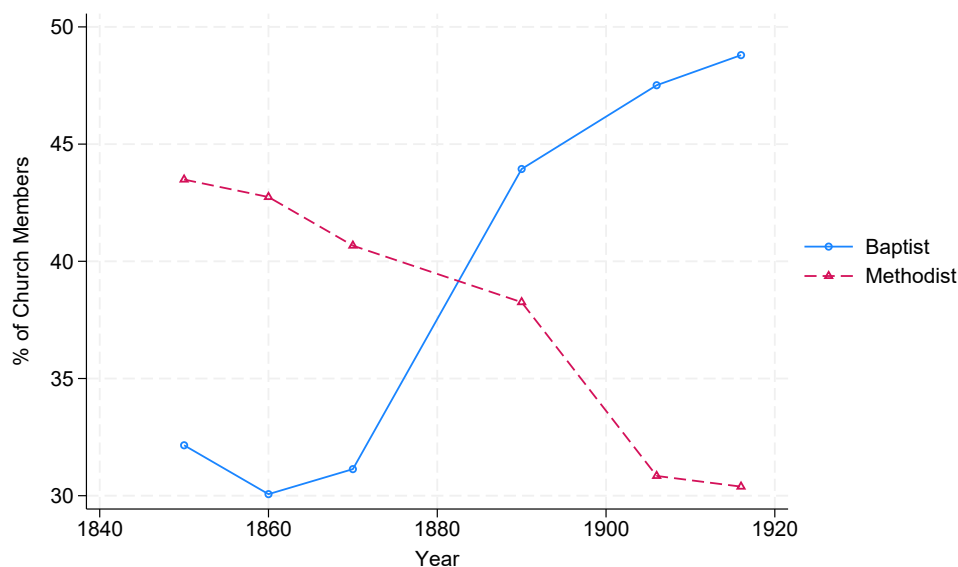
³Wilson (2009) discusses both The University of the South (Sewanee) and Washington & Lee University (where Robert E. Lee was university president from 1865 to 1870, and remains buried beneath the university chapel) as significant Lost Cause universities, describing them as “major institutional shrines to the Lost Cause.” (p.145).

were religiously affiliated⁴. Surveying the role played by religion in phenomena such as the production of Lost Cause mythology, the creation of the Ku Klux Klan, and white terrorist violence (e.g., lynching), Poole and Blum (2005) describe the resulting amalgam as an “unholy alliance” of “white Southern racism, popular religion, and Southern theology” (p.7).

Not all religious groups participated equally in Confederate mythopoeia. The two largest Southern religious denominations in the Post-Reconstruction era—the Baptists and the Methodists—played an outsize role in the dissemination of the ideology of the Lost Cause. The involvement of Baptist and Methodist denominations in the production of Lost Cause mythology can be traced back to attitudes of the two denominations toward the issue of slavery (particularly in the South). In 1845, the Southern Baptists separated from the Triennial Convention over the refusal of the former to support slavery (Tisby, 2019, p.78). William Bullein Johnson—first president of the Southern Baptist Convention—stated the reason for the denominational schism plainly: “[T]hese [northern] brethren, thus acted upon a sentiment they have failed to prove—that slavery is, in all circumstances sinful” (Tisby, 2019, p.78). Similarly, at the 1844 General Conference of the Methodist Church, a “Plan of Separation” was adopted in which the Methodist Episcopal Church, South separated from the Methodist Episcopal Church over the issue of chattel slavery (United Methodist Church, 2016). In the wake of Southern defeat, Southern ministers “in effect extended the pro-slavery argument to include new elements needed to justify the prewar institution and, later, segregation” (Wilson, 2009, p.103). Although Methodists dominated the Southern religious scene at the start of the Civil War, by 1890 Southern Baptists claimed the largest adherent share in former Confederate states (See Figure 1). Thus, to the extent that the cultural influence of religious institutions is limited by the number of adherents, the Southern Baptist church stands out as perhaps *the* central religious institutional architect of Lost Cause mythology in the Post-Reconstruction era.

⁴The *Confederate Veteran*—described by Wilson (2009) as the “most important organ of the Lost Cause after 1890” (p.34)—was published by the Publishing House of the Southern Methodist church.

Figure 1: Baptist and Methodist Adherent Shares in Southern States, 1850-1916 (% of Church Adherents)



Notes: Figure presents share of Southern church members belonging to either Baptist or Methodist denominations, 1850-1916. States covered include Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Membership share data obtained from Gurrentz (2020).

2.2 Related Literature

The findings in this paper contribute to the growing literature in economic history on the political and economic consequences of the Lost Cause of the Confederacy movement in the Post-Reconstruction era. Taylor (2023) shows that the construction of Confederate monuments between 1878 and 1912 increased Democratic party vote share, decreased voter turnout, and decreased the local Black population share. Similarly, Ferlenga (2023) shows that Confederate monument construction is associated with substantial reductions in a county's Black population share in the decades that follow. Logan (2023) shows that political violence at the end of Reconstruction was a reaction to Black political efficacy. Ang (2023) and Eposito et al. (2023) demonstrate that showings of D.W. Griffith's 1915 blockbuster *A Birth of a Nation*—a fictional depiction of the founding of the Ku Klux Klan which reinforced negative racial stereotypes and valorized the KKK's racist pursuits—increased hate crime, the prevalence of hate groups, and labor market discrimination. This paper builds on the previous literature by establishing a link

between religiosity, Black labor market outcomes, and support for Lost Cause activities in the Post-Reconstruction era.

The second contribution of this paper is to the body of work in stratification economics that explores the causes of racial economic inequality (Darity et al., 2015; Williams, 2022; Petach and Rumbaugh, 2024; Brundage and Tavani, 2024). In contrast to explanations of inter-group inequality that assert group-based dysfunction on behalf of the subordinate community, stratification economics asserts that inter-group inequality and group-based discrimination may emerge as the result of a rational attempt on behalf of a privileged group to preserve their *relative* social status and the material benefits which that status confers (Darity et al., 2015; Darity, 2022). Importantly, group-based discrimination does not imply that all members of the dominant group engage in conscious discriminatory behavior. Instead, discrimination becomes *institutionalized* in informal social norms, organizational rules, and formal law (Small and Pager, 2020). Institutional discrimination is solidified through “legitimizing myths” which reify the unequal status quo (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999; Brundage and Tavani, 2024), such that individual members of the dominant group may receive the benefits of their relative group position without actively discriminating. Brundage and Tavani (2024) point to the use of racist myths of Black inferiority (e.g., that myopia or “excessive time preference” among Black households is to blame for the racial wealth gap⁵) to justify racial inequality as an example of how “legitimizing myths” function to preserve the status quo. This paper contributes to the stratification economics literature by highlighting the role of religious institutions in maintaining social stratification, both via the effect of religion on Black economic outcomes and via the role of religious institutions in perpetuating legitimizing myths which act to support institutional discrimination. To the extent that religious ideology functions to reinforce legitimizing myths on behalf of a dominant social group, religious participation is likely to increase inter-group inequality.

⁵Using data on differential rates of return by race, Petach and Tavani (2021) show that a standard lifecycle model of consumption requires Black households to discount the future *less* than white households in order to match the data on relative consumption, effectively ruling out explanations for the racial wealth gap based on myopia or excessive time preference.

Finally, this paper contributes to the literature on the economics of religion. Recent work has examined the relationship between religion and human capital accumulation (Becker and Woessmann, 2009; Caidedo, 2019), long-run economic growth (Barro and McCleary, 2003; Petach and Powell, 2023; Becker et al., 2024), technological change and innovation (Bénabou et al., 2015, 2022), and political and economic institutions (Chaney, 2013; Rubin, 2017). This paper contributes to the literature on the economics of religion by examining the influence of religion on economic inequality. One core mechanism by which religion may influence economic inequality is via the extent to which religion legitimates and/or problematizes the institutions—laws, norms, cultural myths—which produce unequal outcomes. If religious belief and religious institutions lend legitimacy to an unequal sociopolitical order, religion is likely to increase inequality. On the other hand, if religious ideology criticizes the dominant social order, an increase in religiosity may serve to reduce economic inequality. By investigating the role of religion as an obstacle to Black economic progress in the late 19th century, this paper provides one example of how religious institutions can function to increase economic inequality.

3 Data and Estimation Strategy

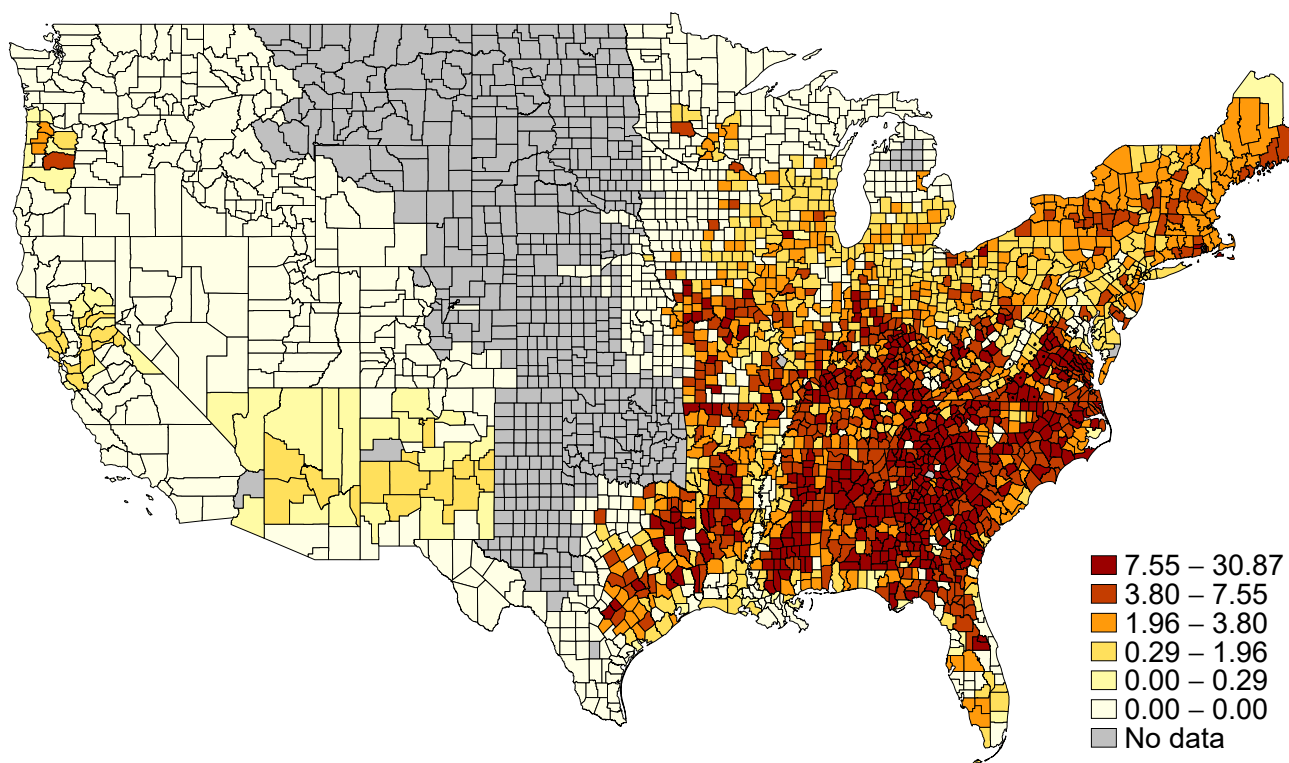
3.1 Data

Religious Participation. Data on county-level religious participation for the year 1860 are obtained from the 1860 Census using the Integrated Public-Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) National Historical Geographic Information System (NHGIS) database (Manson et al., 2023). I apply the methodology developed by Finke and Stark (1986)⁶ to construct estimates of county-

⁶Prior to 1890, Census data on religious activity included only information on the number of churches, the value of church property, and church seating capacity. In 1890 the Census began a special enumeration of religious bodies, which included a count of church membership in addition to church seating capacity, church property values, and the number of churches. Finke and Stark (1986) use data from the 1890 Census to estimate a regression model for each denomination where church membership is regressed on property values, seating capacity, and number of churches. The regression coefficients are then used to obtain predicted church membership in years prior to 1890. See Finke and Stark (1986), Table 1.

level church membership by denomination using data on total church seats, the value of church property, and the number of churches for each denomination in a county. Throughout the paper county boundaries are harmonized to 1990 following Eckert et al. (2020) to allow the creation of a unified panel. I obtain additional data on county-level religious membership for the years 1890, 1906, 1916, and 1926 from the Association for Religion Data Archives (ARDA). For 1890 I obtain data on church membership from the Statistics of Churches in the United States county-level file (Carroll, 1894). For 1906-1926 I obtain data on church membership from the county-level files for the United States Census of Religious Bodies (Department of Commerce and Labor, 1910, 1920, 1930). Figures 2 and 3 map population membership shares for Baptist and Catholic denominations for the year 1860.

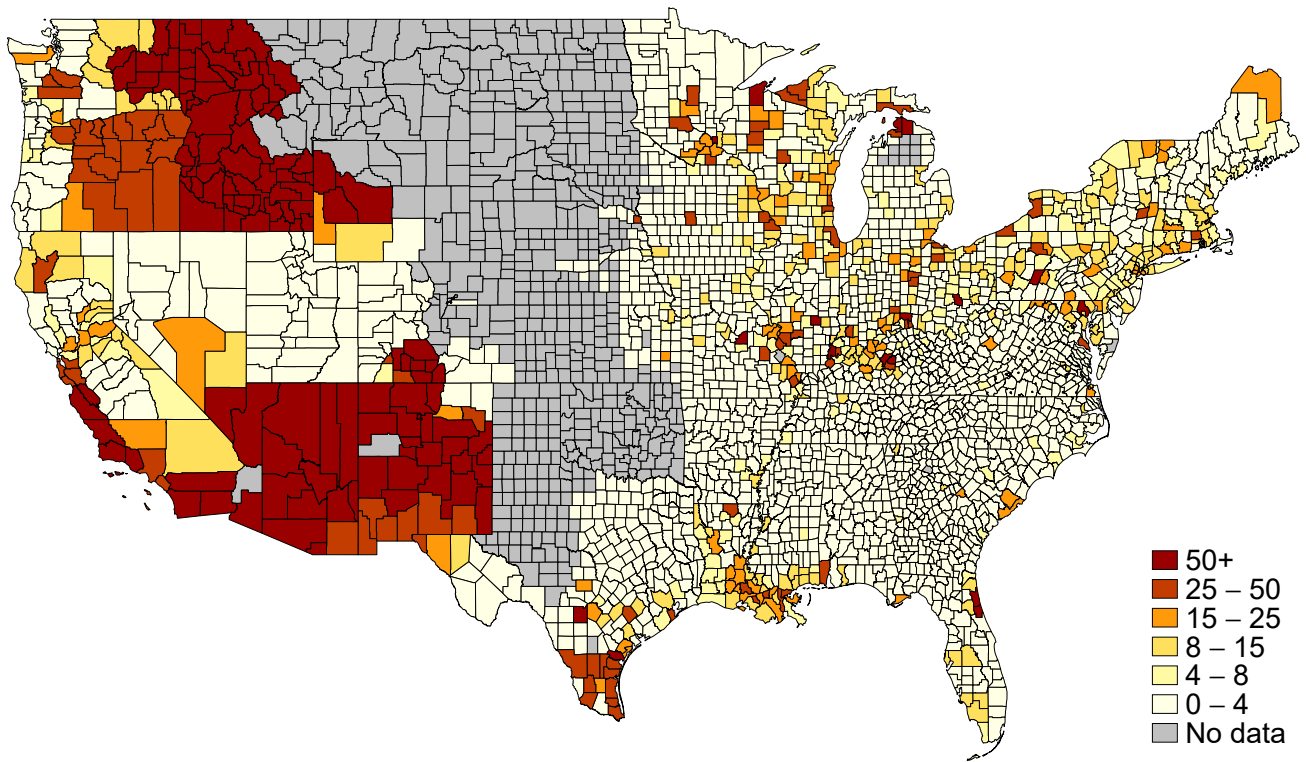
Figure 2: 1860 Baptist Membership Share



Notes: Figure maps Southern Baptist church membership as a share of the population. Data obtained from Manson et al. (2023).

Figure 2 and Figure 3 are suggestive of important regional variation in church membership by denomination in 1860. Unsurprisingly, Southern Baptist church membership is concen-

Figure 3: 1860 Catholic Membership Share



Notes: Figure maps Catholic church membership as a share of the population. Data obtained from Manson et al. (2023).

trated in Southern states associated with the former Confederacy⁷. In contrast, counties located in Western states have the highest rate of Catholic church adherence. Figures 2 and 3 also demonstrate the relatively low level of overall religious adherence in 1860. The low level of religious adherence is consistent with the findings of Finke and Stark (1986), who estimate a total rate of religious adherence in 1860 of 37%.

County Characteristics. Data on county-level economic and demographic characteristics are obtained from the Integrated Public-Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) for the full count decennial Census for the years 1850 to 1910 (Ruggles et al., 2024)⁸. The primary sample is restricted to working-age men aged 15 to 64. As data on wages were not collected in the decennial Census until 1940, I follow the literature and use occupational income scores as a measure of income (Abramitzky et al., 2014; Ferrara and Testa, 2023; Tabellini, 2020). Occupational income scores assign an individual the median income of their job category in 1950, and are sometimes interpreted as a measure of permanent income. I follow Katz and Margo (2014) and Long et al. (2022) in defining occupational skill groups. In particular, “high skill” occupations are defined to include professionals, managers, craftsmen, and clerical and sales occupations. Additional county-level variables obtained from the Census data include the manufacturing occupation share, the agricultural occupation share, and literacy rates by race. The final sample consists of a balanced county-level panel of 2,212 counties for the years 1850 to 1910.

Lost Cause Activity. I obtain data on Lost Cause activity from three main sources. First, I obtain data on Confederate monument construction from the Southern Poverty Law Center’s (SPLC) “Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy” database (Southern Poverty Law Cen-

⁷Figure 4 in Appendix A maps the Methodist church membership share across counties for the year 1860. Figure 5 in Appendix A maps the membership share for non-Baptist, non-Methodist Mainline Protestant denominations across counties for the year 1860. Mainline Protestant groups include Presbyterian, Congregational, Episcopal, Reformed, and Lutheran denominations. Figure 4 illustrates that Methodist church membership is less regionally concentrated than Baptist church membership in 1860, emphasizing the uniquely Southern character of the Baptist church in the 19th century. Similarly, Figure 5 illustrates that Mainline Protestant membership is relatively concentrated in the Northeastern United States.

⁸This time frame excludes the 1890 Census, which was destroyed by a fire.

ter, 2024). The SPLC database features information on the location and date of construction for Confederate symbols (schools, monuments, public parks, etc.) from the late 19th century to the present. I use the SPLC data to create a county-by-decade panel of monument construction from 1890 to 1920. Second, I obtain data on lynchings between 1883 and 1941 from Seguin and Rigby (2019). Seguin and Rigby (2019) extend the lynching data compiled by Tolnay and Beck (1995) for the American Southeast to the entire United States. Third, I obtain data on showings of D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* from Eposito et al. (2023). In addition to the variables measuring Lost Cause activity, I also obtain data on the 1850 county slave population share from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Samples (IPUMS) of the Slave Population of 1850-1860 (Menard et al., 2004). Summary statistics for all variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary Statistics

	Mean	Std. Dev.	<i>N</i>	Years	Source
Baptist Share, 1860 (%)	4.123243	4.589839	13,272	1860	IPUMS-NHGIS
Catholic Share, 1860 (%)	5.021368	12.8863	13,272	1860	IPUMS-NHGIS
Slave Share, 1850 (%)	12.7318	19.42645	13,026	1850	IPUMS Slave Population, 1850-1860
Population (Men Aged 15-64)	6,422.6	19,586.26	13,272	1850-1910	IPUMS Census
Population (Total)	20,953.6	58,245.56	13,272	1850-1910	IPUMS Census
Black Population Share (%)	12.16294	19.57491	13,272	1850-1910	IPUMS Census
Occupational Income Score (100’s of 1950 \$)	18.03796	3.132251	13,260	1850-1910	IPUMS Census
Black Occupational Income Score (100’s of 1950 \$)	16.57351	3.924135	12,238	1850-1910	IPUMS Census
White Occupational Income Score (100’s of 1950 \$)	18.58497	3.120773	13,260	1850-1910	IPUMS Census
Literacy Rate (%)	81.5534	17.08826	13,272	1850-1910	IPUMS Census
Black Literacy Rate (%)	58.10587	30.54036	12,364	1850-1910	IPUMS Census
White Literacy Rate (%)	87.75243	11.96838	13,272	1850-1910	IPUMS Census
Manufacturing Occupation Share (%)	6.402936	6.895071	13,272	1850-1910	IPUMS Census
Black Mfg. Occupation Share (%)	4.375842	8.49088	12,414	1850-1910	IPUMS Census
White Mfg. Occupation Share (%)	6.568724	6.842106	13,272	1850-1910	IPUMS Census
Agriculture Occupation Share (%)	53.42202	20.44738	13,272	1850-1910	IPUMS Census
Black Ag. Occupation Share (%)	40.91461	30.17748	12,414	1850-1910	IPUMS Census
White Ag. Occupation Share (%)	52.83052	20.22907	13,272	1850-1910	IPUMS Census
High Skill Occupation Share (%)	15.75908	9.382702	13,272	1850-1910	IPUMS Census
Black High Skill Occupation Share (%)	7.163694	12.30634	12,414	1850-1910	IPUMS Census
White High Skill Occupation Share (%)	18.0204	10.60387	13,272	1850-1910	IPUMS Census
Lynchings (per-million)	2.603532	29.08087	11,515	1890-1920	Seguin and Rigby (2019)
Confederate Monuments Constructed (per-million)	1.874346	13.76142	11,515	1890-1920	SPLC “Whose Heritage?” Database
Baptist Share, 1896-1926 (%)	8.323824	12.18768	11,515	1896-1926	Association of Religion Data Archives
Catholic Share, 1896-1926 (%)	10.64176	33.51476	11,388	1896-1926	Association of Religion Data Archives
Total <i>Birth of a Nation</i> Screenings, 1915-1920	4.8	22.7	2,949	1915-1920	Eposito et al. (2023)

Notes: Table 1 presents summary statistics for all main variables. “High Skill” occupations are defined following Katz and Margo (2014) as professionals, managers, craftsmen, and clerical and sales occupations. The occupational income score assigns an individual the median income of their occupation in 1950 (in hundreds of constant 1950 dollars). Religion shares are calculated as a share of the total county Census population.

3.2 Estimation Strategy

3.2.1 Religion and Black Economic Progress

To estimate the effect of religious adherence on Black economic progress in the Post-Reconstruction period, I implement the following quasi-difference-in-differences specification for the years 1850 to 1910:

$$Y_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(AdherentShare_{i,1860}^R \times \mathbb{1}\{t \geq 1870\}) + \mathbf{X}_{it}^T \alpha + \gamma_i + \delta_t + \epsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

Where Y_{it} is the outcome of interest in county i at time t , $AdherentShare_{i,1860}^R$ is the share of the population in county i that are adherents to religion R in 1860, $\mathbb{1}\{t \geq 1870\}$ is an indicator variable equal to one if the time period is 1870 or later and 0 otherwise, \mathbf{X}_{it} is a vector of county-level covariates, γ_i is a county-fixed effect, δ_t is a time-fixed effect, and ϵ_{it} is an idiosyncratic error term. The coefficient of interest, β_1 , gives the effect of a unit increase in the 1860 adherent share of denomination R on the outcome of interest in the period after 1870. In this setting, $AdherentShare_{i,1860}^R$ is a continuous treatment variable, representing the intensity of treatment (the level of religious adherence in 1860) applied to each county⁹. Religious adherence is measured prior to 1870 to avoid any contemporaneous effects on religiosity stemming from changes in county economic conditions. The identifying assumption of the estimation strategy is that—absent religiously motivated resistance to Reconstruction and Black equality—the outcomes of interest would have evolved in parallel trends across counties with different 1860 religious adherent shares in the Post-Reconstruction period.

3.2.2 Religion and the Lost Cause

Support for the “Lost Cause of the Confederacy” is—by definition—restricted to the sample period after 1870. Thus, I am unable to observe the evolution of activities such as Confederate

⁹In Section 4.1.6 I present results from a discrete-treatment specification akin to a standard difference-in-differences approach where only counties with a high (above the 75th percentile) 1860 religious adherent share are included in the treated group. The results are qualitatively similar to those obtained from the continuous treatment specification.

monument construction in the “pre-treatment” period¹⁰, rendering a difference-in-differences approach of the sort presented in Section 3.2.1 infeasible. Instead, to estimate the effect of religious adherence on support for the Lost Cause I implement the following panel-fixed effects approach for the years 1890 to 1920¹¹:

$$LostCause_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 AdherentShare_{it}^R + \mathbf{X}_{it}^T \alpha + \gamma_i + \delta_t + \epsilon_{it} \quad (2)$$

Where $LostCause_{it}$ is a measure of support for the Lost Cause and/or resistance to racial equality in county i at time t —including Confederate monument construction, lynching, or showings of *Birth of a Nation*— and all other variables are defined as before. For specifications where the dependent variable is screenings of *Birth of a Nation*, I estimate a single cross-sectional regression where total showings in a county between 1915 and 1920 are regressed on the 1906 adherent share. Because religiosity is not randomly assigned across counties and Lost Cause activity may itself influence the level of religious adherence, I emphasize the descriptive (rather than causal) nature of the results from this specification. Nonetheless, the results obtained from Equation 2 provide important suggestive evidence as to the mechanism linking religious activity to racial economic inequality in the Post-Reconstruction period.

4 Results

4.1 Religion and Black Economic Progress: Results

4.1.1 Baseline Results

Table 2 presents results from estimating Equation 1 using the 1860 Baptist church membership share and various measures of Black economic progress for the Post-Reconstruction period. The standard errors are clustered at the county-level to address the possibility of serial correla-

¹⁰The SPLC database records seven monuments constructed prior to 1860. Similarly, lynching activity undoubtedly occurred prior to 1860 (although the Seguin and Rigby (2019) data begin in 1883). In any case, it would seem anachronistic to attribute either activity to support for a Confederacy that had yet to exist.

¹¹In the absence of data from the 1890 Census, I use 1880 values for Census covariates for the year 1890.

Table 2: Estimation Results - Baptist Church Membership and Black Economic Progress, 1850-1910

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Ln(Occ Score)	Mfg Share	Ag Share	Literacy	High Skill Share	White-Black Gap
$BaptistShare_{i,1860} \times 1\{t \geq 1870\}$	-0.0104*** (0.00118)	-0.149*** (0.0339)	1.752*** (0.144)	-1.299*** (0.138)	-0.432*** (0.0715)	0.00505*** (0.000983)
<i>N</i>	12,238	12,414	12,414	12,364	12,414	12,238
County FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
County Population Control	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Notes: Standard errors in parenthesis, clustered at the county level. * $p < 0.10$ ** $p < 0.05$ *** $p < 0.01$. Each regression includes county-fixed effects, year-fixed effects, and a control for the (log-) county population. The dependent variable in Column (1) is the (log-) average occupational income score in county i for Black males aged 15-64. The dependent variable in Column (2) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with a manufacturing occupation. The dependent variable in Column (3) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with an agricultural occupation. The dependent variable in Column (4) is the Black literacy rate. The dependent variable in Column (5) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with professional, managerial, craftsmen, clerical, or sales occupations. The dependent variable in Column (6) is the log difference between the white occupational income score and the Black occupational income score.

tion over time within each county, the presence of which would erroneously shrink the confidence interval in the absence of clustering. The dependent variable in Column (1) is the (log-) average occupational income score in county i for Black males aged 15-64. The dependent variable in Column (2) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with a manufacturing occupation. The dependent variable in Column (3) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with an agricultural occupation. The dependent variable in Column (4) is the Black literacy rate. The dependent variable in Column (5) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with professional, managerial, craftsmen, clerical, or sales occupations. The dependent variable in Column (6) is the log difference between the white occupational income score and the Black occupational income score (a measure of white relative income).

The results in Table 2 suggest that an increase in pre-Civil War Baptist membership has a significant negative effect on Black economic progress in the Post-Reconstruction period. A one percentage point increase in the 1860 Baptist membership share is associated with a 1% decrease in the average Black occupational income score, a 0.15 percentage point decrease in the share of Black individuals engaged in manufacturing, a 1.75 percentage point increase in the share of Black individuals engaged in agriculture, a 1.3 percentage point reduction in

the Black literacy rate, and a 0.4 percentage point decrease in the share of Black individuals engaged in high skill occupations. Importantly, Table 2 also suggests that a 1% increase in the 1860 Baptist church membership share results in a 0.5 percent increase in the white-Black relative income gap (measured by the log-difference in occupational income scores), a finding consistent with the stratification economics conjecture that group-based discrimination may arise out of concerns over *relative* social status. Taken together, the results in Table 2 provide *prima facie* evidence that religious participation—in particular, Southern Baptist church membership—increased white-Black inter-group inequality in the Post-Reconstruction period.

4.1.2 Catholic Share Regressions

In contrast to the full-throated defense of slavery, segregation, and white supremacy proffered by 19th century Southern Baptists, the stance of the 19th century Catholic church on slavery is at best characterized as ambivalent. In 1839, Pope Gregory XVI issued a papal bull condemning slavery—making specific reference to slavery in the New World (Gurrentz, 2024). During the Civil War, the Vatican never formally recognized the Confederacy (despite attempts by the Confederate government to establish diplomatic relations) (Bigelow, 1893). Following the Civil War, Catholicism itself was often the subject of Lost Cause ire, particularly in the response of Southern ministers to European immigration. Wilson (2009) notes that Southern preachers visualized new European immigrants as “Catholic and urban,” portraying them as a “moral threat to the South’s civilization” (p.91). Thus, to the extent that the negative impact of Baptist membership on Black economic progress is the result of the influence of ideology on economic and political institutions, the effect of Catholic church membership should be either null or positive. Catholic membership share regressions thus act as a sort of quasi-placebo test, insofar as the “treatment” is one that is not expected to produce a negative effect on measures of Black economic progress.

The results presented in Table 3 suggest that the 1860 Catholic membership share has a

Table 3: Estimation Results - Catholic Church Membership and Black Economic Progress, 1850-1910

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Ln(Occ Score)	Mfg Share	Ag Share	Literacy	High Skill Share	White-Black Gap
$CatholicShare_{i,1860} \times \mathbb{1}\{t \geq 1870\}$	0.00415*** (0.000502)	0.0166* (0.0100)	-0.403*** (0.0489)	0.433*** (0.0489)	0.170*** (0.0204)	-0.00351*** (0.000563)
<i>N</i>	12,238	12,414	12,414	12,364	12,414	12,238
County FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
County Population Control	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Notes: Standard errors in parenthesis, clustered at the county level. * $p < 0.10$ ** $p < 0.05$ *** $p < 0.01$. Each regression includes county-fixed effects, year-fixed effects, and a control for the (log-) county population. The dependent variable in Column (1) is the (log-) average occupational income score in county i for Black males aged 15-64. The dependent variable in Column (2) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with a manufacturing occupation. The dependent variable in Column (3) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with an agricultural occupation. The dependent variable in Column (4) is the Black literacy rate. The dependent variable in Column (5) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with professional, managerial, craftsmen, clerical, or sales occupations. The dependent variable in Column (6) is the log difference between the white occupational income score and the Black occupational income score.

small positive effect on Black economic progress in the Post-Reconstruction period¹². For each dependent variable in Table 3, an increase in the 1860 Catholic membership share positively impacts Black economic well-being. An increase in the 1860 Catholic membership share increases the (log-) occupational income score, increases the share engaged in manufacturing, decreases the share engaged in agriculture, increases the literacy rate, increases the share employed in high skill occupations, and decreases the white-Black occupational income score gap. These results are consistent with the main findings, insofar as it is expected that the primary effect of church membership on economic outcomes in the Post-Reconstruction period is via support for (or opposition to) political and economic institutions advancing Black equality.

4.1.3 1850 Slave Population Control

An important question concerns whether the negative effect of Baptist church membership on Black economic progress constitutes an independent effect of religion or whether this result simply captures the historical effects of slavery. E.g., if Baptist adherence is greater in counties with a large historical slave presence, then the negative effect of Baptist membership on

¹²Table 10 presents results from a similar exercise using the Mainline Protestant membership share.

Black economic outcomes presented in Table 2 may simply be the result of omitted variable bias. Thus, Table 4 presents results from a specification adding a control for the 1850 slave population share interacted with a post-1870 indicator variable.

Table 4: Estimation Results - Baptist Church Membership with 1850 Slave Population Control, 1850-1910

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Ln(Occ Score)	Mfg Share	Ag Share	Literacy	High Skill Share	White-Black Gap
$BaptistShare_{i,1860} \times \mathbb{1}\{t \geq 1870\}$	-0.00452*** (0.00115)	-0.0807** (0.0352)	1.016*** (0.140)	-0.721*** (0.140)	-0.194*** (0.0733)	0.00222** (0.000996)
$SlaveShare_{i,1850} \times \mathbb{1}\{t \geq 1870\}$	-0.00504*** (0.000223)	-0.0559*** (0.00828)	0.631*** (0.0273)	-0.491*** (0.0325)	-0.212*** (0.0161)	0.00246*** (0.000208)
<i>N</i>	12,054	12,221	12,221	12,173	12,221	12,054
County FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
County Population Control	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Notes: Standard errors in parenthesis, clustered at the county level. * $p < 0.10$ ** $p < 0.05$ *** $p < 0.01$. Each regression includes county-fixed effects, year-fixed effects, and a control for the (log-) county population. The dependent variable in Column (1) is the (log-) average occupational income score in county i for Black males aged 15-64. The dependent variable in Column (2) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with a manufacturing occupation. The dependent variable in Column (3) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with an agricultural occupation. The dependent variable in Column (4) is the Black literacy rate. The dependent variable in Column (5) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with professional, managerial, craftsmen, clerical, or sales occupations. The dependent variable in Column (6) is the log difference between the white occupational income score and the Black occupational income score.

The results in Table 4 suggest that Baptist church membership exerts a negative effect on economic outcomes for Black individuals independent of the historical effects of slavery. In particular, after controlling for the 1850 slave population share a one percentage point increase in the 1860 Baptist share produces a 0.4 percent decrease in the average county occupational income score, decreases the share engaged in manufacturing by 0.08 percentage points, increases the share engaged in agriculture by one percentage point, reduces the literacy rate by 0.72 percentage points, reduces the share engaged in high skill occupations by 0.19 percentage points, and increases the white-Black occupational income score gap by 0.2 percent. A one percentage point increase in the 1850 slave share exerts negative effects of a similar magnitude, suggesting that the historical effects of slavery may account for approximately half the effect size found in Table 2. Nonetheless, the negative effect of Baptist membership on Black economic progress remains economically and statistically significant after controlling for the

historical presence of slavery in a county, suggesting that religion exerts an independent effect on Black economic progress in the Post-Reconstruction era.

4.1.4 Civil War Capital Destruction Control

Table 5 presents results from an additional regression specification including a control for destruction of the local physical capital stock during the Civil War. War-related destruction of physical capital reduces the marginal product of labor—thereby lowering wages and employment in counties with high levels of capital destruction. If destruction of physical capital is concentrated in counties with high Southern Baptist membership shares, then failing to control for exposure to war-related destruction of physical capital will result in a biased estimate of the effect of Southern Baptist membership on measures of Black economic progress. To control for local exposure to Civil War-related destruction of physical capital, I obtain data on the path of Sherman’s March from Feigenbaum et al. (2022). General William Sherman’s March differed from other Civil War campaigns in that it was undertaken with the express purpose of destroying the South’s economic infrastructure. From late 1864 to early 1865 General William Sherman’s troops “enforced devastation” on the Southern states of Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina, destroying railroad lines, telegraph lines, homes, farms, businesses, mills, and cotton-gins (Feigenbaum et al., 2022). Table 5 includes a control variable interacting an indicator for counties in the path of Sherman’s March with a post-1870 indicator.

The results in Table 5 suggest that exposure to Civil-War related capital destruction alone cannot explain the negative effect of Southern Baptist membership on measures of Black economic progress. In particular—although Sherman’s March appears to exert a significant negative effect on the economic outcomes of Black individuals located in counties in the path of the march—the negative effect of Baptist membership nonetheless remains statistically and economically significant in every specification.

Table 5: Estimation Results - Baptist Church Membership with Civil War Capital Destruction Control, 1850-1910

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Ln(Occ Score)	Mfg Share	Ag Share	Literacy	High Skill Share	White-Black Gap
$BaptistShare_{i,1860} \times 1\{t \geq 1870\}$	-0.00949*** (0.00119)	-0.121*** (0.0342)	1.627*** (0.146)	-1.139*** (0.140)	-0.377*** (0.0722)	0.00462*** (0.000998)
$Sherman_i \times 1\{t \geq 1870\}$	-0.111*** (0.0196)	-3.135*** (0.647)	14.18*** (2.205)	-18.10*** (2.561)	-6.219*** (1.355)	0.0499*** (0.0159)
<i>N</i>	12,238	12,414	12,414	12,364	12,414	12,238
County FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
County Population Control	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Notes: Standard errors in parenthesis, clustered at the county level. * $p < 0.10$ ** $p < 0.05$ *** $p < 0.01$. Each regression includes county-fixed effects, year-fixed effects, and a control for the (log-) county population. $Sherman_i$ is an indicator variable for whether a county was in the path of General William Sherman’s March (1864-1865), obtained from Feigenbaum et al. (2022). The dependent variable in Column (1) is the (log-) average occupational income score in county i for Black males aged 15-64. The dependent variable in Column (2) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with a manufacturing occupation. The dependent variable in Column (3) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with an agricultural occupation. The dependent variable in Column (4) is the Black literacy rate. The dependent variable in Column (5) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with professional, managerial, craftsmen, clerical, or sales occupations. The dependent variable in Column (6) is the log difference between the white occupational income score and the Black occupational income score.

4.1.5 Population Weighting, State Trends, and Additional County Controls

Table 6 presents results from additional specifications adding population weights, state-specific linear time trends, and additional county-level controls. Weighting by the county population produces estimates such that the results are interpreted as the effect on the average person (rather than on the average county). Inclusion of state-specific linear time trends controls for changes over time that impact all counties within a given state similarly. Inclusion of additional county-level controls—including the Black population share, the overall average occupational income score, the white average occupational income score, the overall literacy rate, and the overall share engaged in manufacturing—adjusts for other time-varying county-level characteristics that may influence the relationship between the Baptist membership share and measures of Black economic progress. Panel A of Table 6 presents estimates from a specification adding population weights and state-specific time trends. Panel B of Table 6 presents estimates from a specification adding population weights, state-specific time trends, and additional county-level controls.

Table 6: Estimation Results - Baptist Church Membership with Population Weights, State-Specific Linear Time Trends, and Additional County Controls, 1850-1910

A: Weights + State Trends, No Additional Controls						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Ln(Occ Score)	Mfg Share	Ag Share	Literacy	High Skill Share	White-Black Gap
$BaptistShare_{i,1860} \times \mathbf{1}\{t \geq 1870\}$	-0.00855*** (0.00131)	-0.131*** (0.0485)	1.594*** (0.167)	-1.795*** (0.171)	-0.218*** (0.0735)	0.00367*** (0.00117)
<i>N</i>	12,233	12,410	12,410	12,359	12,410	12,233
County FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
County Population Control	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
State-Specific Time Trend	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Population Weights	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Additional Controls	N	N	N	N	N	N
B: Weights + State Trends + Additional Controls						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Ln(Occ Score)	Mfg Share	Ag Share	Literacy	High Skill Share	White-Black Gap
$BaptistShare_{i,1860} \times \mathbf{1}\{t \geq 1870\}$	-0.00423*** (0.00104)	-0.0926* (0.0501)	0.909*** (0.138)	-0.517*** (0.141)	-0.0353 (0.0751)	0.00423*** (0.00104)
<i>N</i>	12,233	12,399	12,399	12,348	12,399	12,233
County FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
County Population Control	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
State-Specific Time Trend	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Population Weights	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Additional Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Notes: Standard errors in parenthesis, clustered at the county level. * $p < 0.10$ ** $p < 0.05$ *** $p < 0.01$. Observations weighted by county population. Each regression includes county-fixed effects, year-fixed effects, state-specific linear time trends, and a control for the (log-) county population. The dependent variable in Column (1) is the (log-) average occupational income score in county i for Black males aged 15-64. The dependent variable in Column (2) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with a manufacturing occupation. The dependent variable in Column (3) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with an agricultural occupation. The dependent variable in Column (4) is the Black literacy rate. The dependent variable in Column (5) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with professional, managerial, craftsmen, clerical, or sales occupations. The dependent variable in Column (6) is the log difference between the white occupational income score and the Black occupational income score. Additional control variables included in regressions in Panel B include the Black population share, the overall occupational income score, the white occupational income score, the overall literacy rate, and the overall share engaged in manufacturing.

The results in Table 6 support the baseline estimates. In every case except Column (5) of Panel B, the effect of the 1860 Baptist membership share on post-1870 economic outcomes for Black individuals remains negative and statistically significant. Even in the case where the effect of the Baptist membership share is imprecisely estimated—the effect on the share of Black individuals engaged in high skill occupations when county controls are added—the sign remains negative. Importantly, because of the inclusion of the white occupational income score as an additional control in Panel B, the estimated effect on the white-Black income gap in Column (6) is simply the negative of the effect on the Black occupational income score obtained in Column (1), given that both regressions hold the white occupational income score constant. Taken together, the results in Table 6 suggest the initial findings presented in Table 2 are robust to a wide variety of controls, fixed-effects, and weighting schemes.

4.1.6 Discrete Treatment

Table 7 presents results from an alternative regression specification using a discrete treatment indicator variable. In particular, rather than interacting the continuous 1860 Baptist membership share variable with a post-1870 indicator, in Table 7 I classify all counties with an 1860 Baptist membership share at or above the 75th percentile as treated, and the rest as untreated.

The results in Table 7 are qualitatively similar to those presented in Table 2. Counties in the top quartile of Baptist membership have significantly lower average Black occupational income scores, have a lower share of Black workers engaged in manufacturing, have a higher share of Black workers engaged in agriculture, have a lower Black literacy rate, a lower share of Black workers engaged in high skill occupations, and a greater white-Black occupational income score gap.

Table 8 presents results from a placebo test using the discrete treatment specification. In particular, I restrict the sample to the pre-treatment period (1850-1860), assign an alternative treatment date (1860) using the same treated group (counties with an 1860 Baptist membership share at or above the 75th percentile), and estimate the resulting treatment effect. Under the

Table 7: Estimation Results - Discrete Treatment Specification (Baptist Membership Share), 1850-1910

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Ln(Occ Score)	Mfg Share	Ag Share	Literacy	High Skill Share	White-Black Gap
$HighBaptistShare_{i,1860} \times \mathbb{1}\{t \geq 1870\}$	-0.0987*** (0.0108)	-1.496*** (0.367)	16.59*** (1.345)	-11.92*** (1.384)	-4.171*** (0.669)	0.0322*** (0.00904)
N	12,238	12,414	12,414	12,364	12,414	12,238
County FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
County Population Control	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Notes: Standard errors in parenthesis, clustered at the county level. * $p < 0.10$ ** $p < 0.05$ *** $p < 0.01$. $HighBaptistShare_{i,1860}$ is an indicator variable equal to 1 if a county has an 1860 Baptist membership share at or above the 75th percentile and equal to 0 otherwise. Each regression includes county-fixed effects, year-fixed effects, and a control for the (log-) county population. The dependent variable in Column (1) is the (log-) average occupational income score in county i for Black males aged 15-64. The dependent variable in Column (2) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with a manufacturing occupation. The dependent variable in Column (3) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with an agricultural occupation. The dependent variable in Column (4) is the Black literacy rate. The dependent variable in Column (5) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with professional, managerial, craftsmen, clerical, or sales occupations. The dependent variable in Column (6) is the log difference between the white occupational income score and the Black occupational income score.

parallel trends assumption, the resulting regression coefficient should be statistically insignificantly different from zero. If the placebo effect differs from zero this indicates a violation of the parallel trends assumption. The resulting estimates provide support for the parallel trends assumption. In each case the estimated regression coefficient is statistically insignificantly different from zero.

4.2 Religion and the Lost Cause: Results

Table 9 presents results from estimating Equation 2 using lynching, Confederate monument construction, and screenings of D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* as indicators of support for white supremacy and the Lost Cause. Columns (1) through (4) use a county-by-decade panel for the years 1890¹³ to 1920. Columns (5) and (6) use a single cross-section of counties, where total *Birth of a Nation* screenings between 1915 and 1920 are regressed on 1906 denominational membership shares. Columns (1), (3), and (5) present results using the Baptist membership share as an independent variable. Columns (2), (4), and (6) present results using

¹³I use the 1880 Census for 1890 Census variables.

Table 8: Estimation Results - Discrete Treatment Specification (Baptist Membership Share) Placebo, 1850-1860

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Ln(Occ Score)	Mfg Share	Ag Share	Literacy	High Skill Share	White-Black Gap
$HighBaptistShare_{i,1860} \times \mathbb{1}\{t = 1860\}$	0.0100 (0.0141)	0.249 (0.503)	-2.768 (1.835)	3.809 (2.373)	1.368 (1.151)	0.000832 (0.0141)
N	3,687	3,830	3,830	3,780	3,830	3,687
County FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
County Population Control	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Notes: Standard errors in parenthesis, clustered at the county level. * $p < 0.10$ ** $p < 0.05$ *** $p < 0.01$. $HighBaptistShare_{i,1860}$ is an indicator variable equal to 1 if a county has an 1860 Baptist membership share at or above the 75th percentile and equal to 0 otherwise. Each regression includes county-fixed effects, year-fixed effects, and a control for the (log-) county population. The dependent variable in Column (1) is the (log-) average occupational income score in county i for Black males aged 15-64. The dependent variable in Column (2) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with a manufacturing occupation. The dependent variable in Column (3) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with an agricultural occupation. The dependent variable in Column (4) is the Black literacy rate. The dependent variable in Column (5) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with professional, managerial, craftsmen, clerical, or sales occupations. The dependent variable in Column (6) is the log difference between the white occupational income score and the Black occupational income score.

the Catholic membership share as an independent variable.

The results in Table 9 suggest Baptist membership has a statistically significant and economically meaningful positive effect on support for the Lost Cause of the Confederacy and white supremacy. An increase in the Baptist membership share is positively associated with lynchings of Black Americans, Confederate monument construction, and total screenings of *Birth of a Nation*. In contrast, an increase in the Catholic membership share has either a statistically insignificant effect (in the case of lynchings and *Birth of a Nation* screenings), or a negative effect (in the case of Confederate monument construction). The differential effect of Baptist and Catholic membership shares suggests the positive effect of Baptist membership on measures of Lost Cause support is not merely an effect common to all denominational groups. Rather—consistent with the results in Table 3—estimating the effect of Catholic church membership acts as a quasi-placebo test, insofar as the different institutional history and relative lack of documented ideological support for the Lost Cause of the Confederacy in the Catholic church suggests that the *ex-ante* expected effect of Catholic membership should be null or negative. Taken together, the results in Table 9 suggest the unique religious ideology of the Southern

Table 9: Estimation Results - Religious Membership and Measures of Lost Cause Support, 1890-1920

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Lynching	Lynching	Monuments	Monuments	<i>BON</i>	<i>BON</i>
<i>BaptstShare_{it}</i>	0.0918** (0.0404)		0.152*** (0.0301)		0.381*** (0.144)	
<i>CatholicShare_{it}</i>		-0.000938 (0.00360)		-0.00582*** (0.00153)		0.215 (0.144)
<i>N</i>	11,510	11,510	11,510	11,510	2,949	2,949
County Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
County FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N
Population Weights	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Notes: Standard errors in parenthesis, clustered at the county level. * $p < 0.10$ ** $p < 0.05$ *** $p < 0.01$. Observations weighted by average county population. County-level control variables include the (log-) county population, (log-) average occupational income scores, the share of the county population that is black, and the share of the county population that is white. The dependent variable in Column (1) and Column (2) is the number of lynchings of Black victims in a county during a given decade (per million persons), obtained from Seguin and Rigby (2019). The dependent variable in Column (3) and Column (4) is the total number of Confederate monuments constructed in a county in a given decade (per million persons), obtained from Southern Poverty Law Center (2024). The dependent variable in Column (5) and Column (6) is the number of screenings of *Birth of a Nation* in a county between 1915 and 1920.

Baptist church—and the link between that ideology and support for white supremacy and the Lost Cause—as one possible mechanism translating Baptist church membership to economic stagnation for Black Americans and Black-white racial inequality in the Post-Reconstruction era.

5 Conclusion

Religion matters for economic inequality. In this paper, I provide evidence that Southern Baptist church membership negatively impacted Black economic progress in the Post-Reconstruction era, increasing white-Black inter-group inequality. Using county-level Census data for the years 1850 to 1910, I show that a one percentage point increase in the 1860 Baptist membership share is associated with a 1% decrease in the Black occupational income score, a 0.15 percentage point decrease in the share of Black individuals employed in manufacturing, a 1.3 percentage point decrease in the Black literacy rate, and a 0.42 percentage point decrease in the share of Black individuals in “high skill” occupations after 1870. These findings are robust

to county-fixed effects, year-fixed effects, state-specific linear time trends, controlling for the county slave population share prior to 1860, and controlling for county-level Civil War capital stock destruction. Importantly, the results in this paper also point to the heterogeneous effects of religion on inequality by denomination: both Catholic and Mainline Protestant church membership are *positively* associated with Black economic progress over the same period. I link the negative effect of Baptist membership on Black economic progress to Baptist support for white supremacy and the “Lost Cause of the Confederacy.” I show that Baptist church membership in the late 19th and early 20th century is positively associated with Confederate monument construction, lynching, and showings of D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*, suggesting the role of religion in legitimizing anti-Black political ideology as an important mechanism by which religious participation increases inter-group inequality during this period.

The findings of this paper suggest that—to the extent that religious beliefs and institutions continue to lend legitimacy to institutions, norms, and cultural myths that produce unequal outcomes—the effect of religion on inequality is unlikely to be limited to the late 19th century United States. Indeed, recent votes by the Southern Baptist Convention to expel congregations that appoint women to pastoral roles (DeRose, 2023) and condemn the use of in vitro fertilization (Graham, 2024) suggest that gender inequality may be affected by religious participation in the 21st century. Future work should examine the extent to which religion impacts economic inequality in other settings and contexts beyond the one examined in this paper.

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A Additional Tables and Figures

A.1 Additional Tables

A.1.1 Mainline Protestant Share Regressions

Table 10 presents results from a regression specification interacting the 1860 Mainline Protestant membership share with a post-1870 indicator variable. Mainline Protestant groups include Congregational, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Reformed, and Lutheran denominations. Ex-ante, the expected effect of the Mainline Protestant share on measures of Black economic progress is uncertain. Like the Baptists and Methodists, some Mainline Protestant denominations—such as the Presbyterians—also quarreled and split over the issue of slavery (Tisby, 2019)¹⁴. On the other hand, various Mainline Protestant groups were staunch abolitionists. Further, a large literature now exists demonstrating lasting positive effects of the Protestant Reformation on various 19th century economic outcomes via human capital accumulation (e.g., see Becker et al., 2016, for a review). Thus, there are reasons to believe that the effect of Mainline Protestantism could be either positive or negative in the current context.

The results in Table 10 suggest a positive effect of the Mainline Protestant share on measures of Black economic progress, a finding that is consistent with the literature demonstrating the lasting positive effects of the Protestant Reformation in the 19th century via human capital accumulation (Becker et al., 2016).

¹⁴Further, the number of Mainline Protestant adherents in Southern states in the Post-Reformation period is much smaller than the number of Baptist and Methodist adherents, suggesting a lower level of cultural influence.

Table 10: Estimation Results - Mainline Protestant Membership and Black Economic Progress, 1850-1910

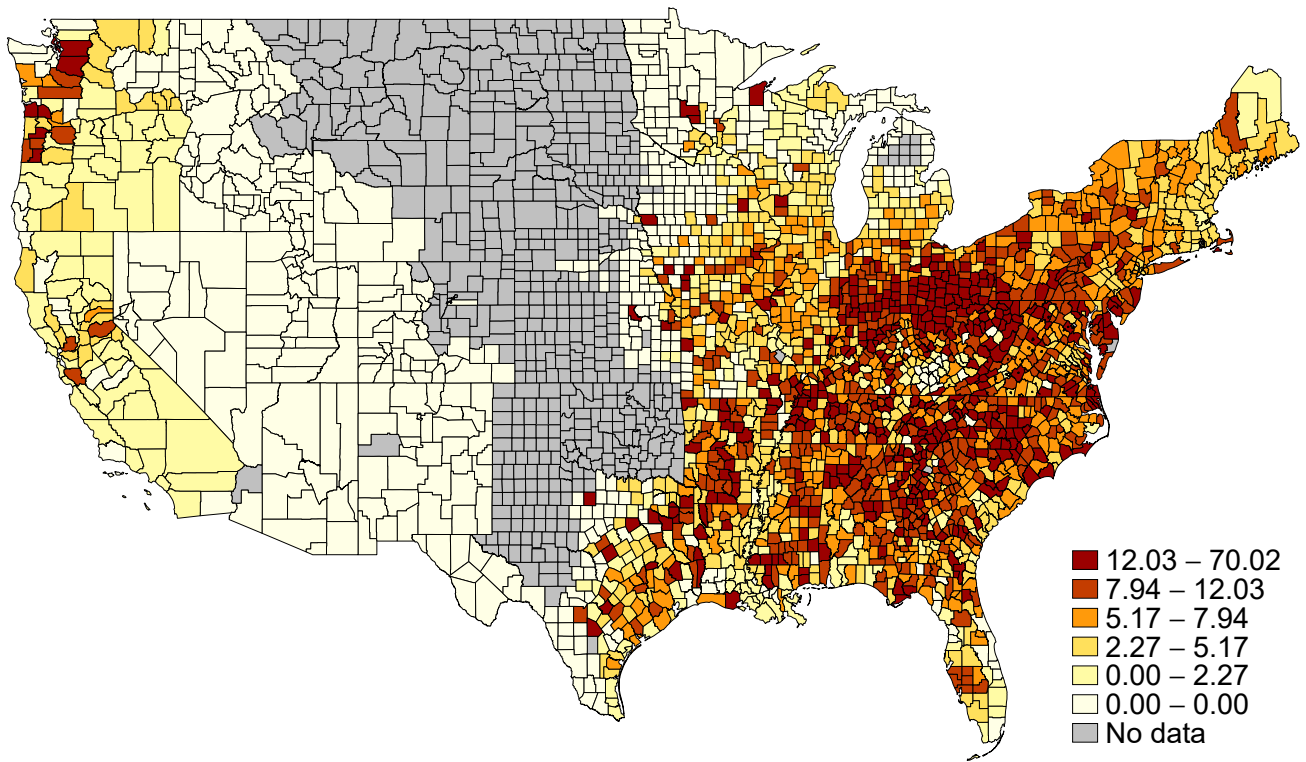
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Ln(Occ Score)	Mfg Share	Ag Share	Literacy	High Skill Share	White-Black Gap
$MainlineShare_{i,1860} \times \mathbb{1}\{t \geq 1870\}$	0.00477*** (0.00137)	0.0745** (0.0371)	-0.603*** (0.170)	0.554*** (0.200)	0.459*** (0.0933)	0.00150* (0.000896)
N	12,238	12,414	12,414	12,364	12,414	12,238
County FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
County Population Control	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Notes: Standard errors in parenthesis, clustered at the county level. * $p < 0.10$ ** $p < 0.05$ *** $p < 0.01$. Each regression includes county-fixed effects, year-fixed effects, and a control for the (log-) county population. The dependent variable in Column (1) is the (log-) average occupational income score in county i for Black males aged 15-64. The dependent variable in Column (2) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with a manufacturing occupation. The dependent variable in Column (3) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with an agricultural occupation. The dependent variable in Column (4) is the Black literacy rate. The dependent variable in Column (5) is the share of Black males aged 15-64 with professional, managerial, craftsmen, clerical, or sales occupations. The dependent variable in Column (6) is the log difference between the white occupational income score and the Black occupational income score.

A.2 Additional Figures

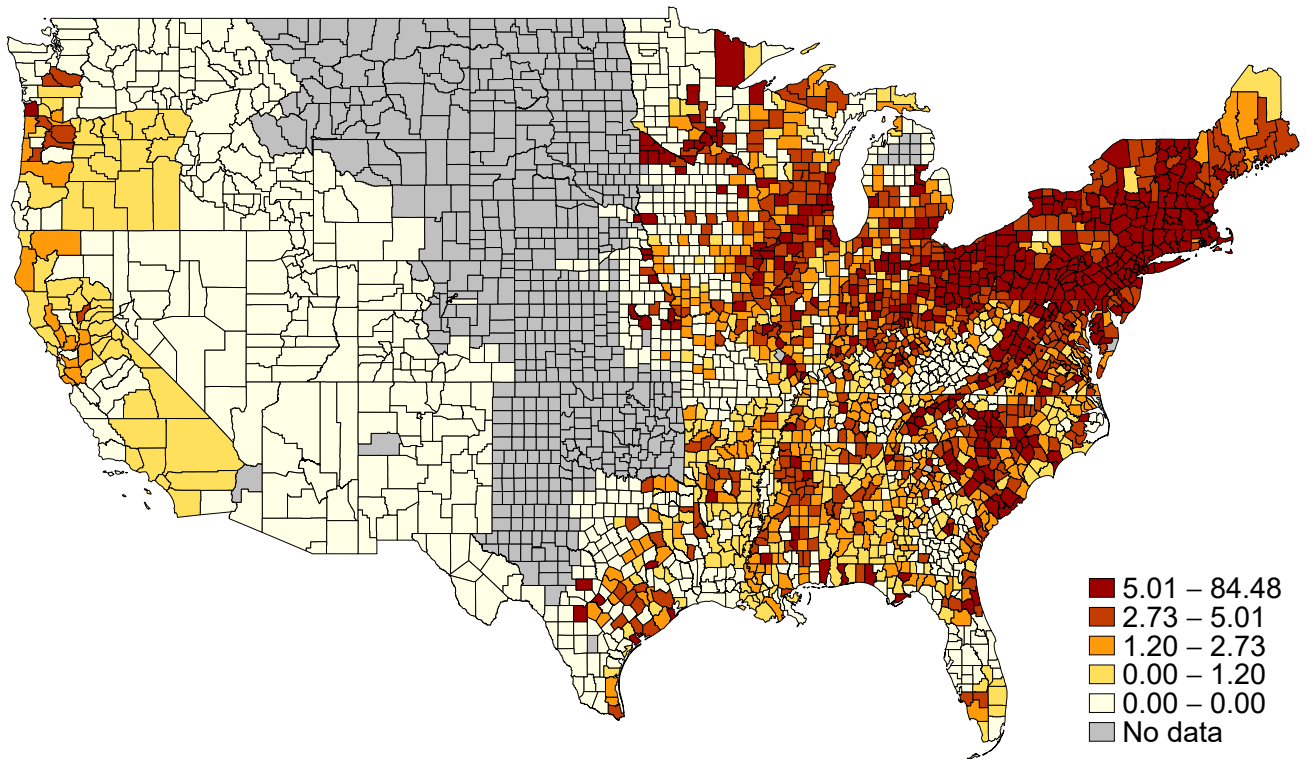
A.2.1 Additional Maps

Figure 4: 1860 Methodist Membership Share



Notes: Figure maps Methodist church membership as a share of the population. Data obtained from Manson et al. (2023).

Figure 5: 1860 Mainline Protestant Share



Notes: Figure maps non-Baptist, non-Methodist Mainline Protestant church membership as a share of the population. Data obtained from Manson et al. (2023). Mainline Protestant groups include Congregational, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Reformed, and Lutheran denominations.