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September 25, 2013

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The slavery effect

by Tim Louis Macaluso

White Southerners living in the former Cotton Belt are more likely to have negative attitudes toward African Americans than other Southerners, according to a new University of Rochester study.

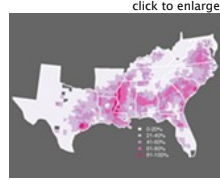


PHOTO PROVIDED
The enslaved population of the Cotton Belt by county, 1860 census. Full map at www.rochestercitynewspaper.com

And they are more likely to be Republican and to express opposition to social and economic justice policies such as affirmative action, the study says.

Researchers Avidit Acharya, Matthew Blackwell, and Maya Sen say that the study provides quantitative evidence of the long-lasting effects of slavery on political attitudes in the South.

The research doesn't suggest that slavery is the root cause of racism in contemporary America. But it does show that there is a link between the cotton plantation economy of the Old South — and its reliance on slave labor — and stronger racial bias in the region.

And the repression of black Americans after emancipation encouraged the persistence of these attitudes.

The researchers conducted a county-by-county analysis of census data and opinion surveys of more than 39,000 Southern whites. The "slavery effect" accounts for up to a 15 percent difference in political parties. About 30 percent of whites in former plantation areas identify as Democrats, compared to 40 percent to 45 percent in counties where slaves were less than 3 percent of the population.

The South, in political terms, might look similar to the North if it hadn't been for the South's dependence on slavery, according to the study.

The study also showed that there was a correlation between racial violence and economics in the Cotton Belt. Post-slavery lynching rates were highest in the Cotton Belt compared to other parts of the South.

Tags: News, University of Rochester, slavery, race, racial policies, plantation South, Cotton Belt, politics, Democrats and Republicans, white Southerners, southern blacks

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