

Strategic Migration under Duress: Evidence from the Great Migration, 1900-1930

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Abstract

Historical scholarship documents the contours of the Great Migration, the movement of millions of black people out of the American South between 1910-1970. Political science literature focuses on the political behaviors of residents after black migrants arrive. Deviating from this perspective, we focus on the strategic reasons for black people to migrate and the factors drawing them to particular locations. We theorize migration from violence and economic distress compelled black migrants to travel different distances and seek different institutions. We leverage micro-census data between 1900-1930 to trace the movement of millions of black individuals after lynchings and the introduction of the boll weevil pest, combined with novel measures of civil society. Black individuals experiencing lynching migrated within the South. Individuals experiencing the boll weevil migrated out of state and to the North and also moved to areas with strong black civil society.

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Introduction

A great deal of historical scholarship documents the impetus and consequences of the Great Migration, the movement of millions of black people out of the American South to other regions of the United States between 1910 and 1970. The in-migration of black Americans to predominantly white towns, cities, and neighborhoods had striking effects on American politics. Literature in political science and economics emphasizes how the Great Migration reshaped racial attitudes (Reny and Newman, 2018), spurred partisan alignment (Grant, 2020), and broke apart existing social networks (Derenoncourt, 2022). While this literature shows that changing racial demographics drove racial backlash and political realignment in the places that black people migrated to, less is known about what attracted black migrants to those places.

Literature in comparative politics and international relations demonstrates the strategic nature of forced, internal migration and international displacement, even under conditions of extreme stress and duress (Davenport et al., 2003). These choices are not happenstance and reflect a calculus of decision-making on the part of the migrants. A significant portion of this literature considers migration in comparative contexts of civil war (Sun, 2025; Adhikari, 2013). Yet, we suggest there is much that can be brought to bear on the nature and consequences of racial violence and economic distress in the United States.

Thus, we extend this perspective to the United States and theorize that patterns in the first wave of the Great Migration (between 1900-1930) can be understood as a result of characteristics and circumstances of the place from which individuals were migrating. That is, the degree of migration and the choice of location is a function of what prompted an individual's initial decision to leave their home. We consider two impetuses of displacement: displacement due to the occurrence of racial violence and displacement due to economic hardship.

First, we propose that individuals displaced in the aftermath of racial violence demonstrate distinct migration patterns from those displaced on account of limited or declining economic prospects. Prior work has established that black out-migration between 1910-1930 was higher in counties that experienced lynchings (Tolnay and Beck, 1992). We build upon this research to consider patterns in *where* migrants relocate, both geographically and institutionally. For those fleeing racial violence, decisions must be made with greater urgency. This means that their migration is less likely to be cross-country and more likely to be to a neighboring county or state, even if those counties might not offer long-run protection or other benefits (i.e., economic opportunities). Additionally, we posit that those facing lynching events in their counties may seek out counties with institutional protections (e.g., high state capacity and strong black civil society) against future violence.

Second, we consider migration chosen not just for those exposed to lynchings, but to those confronting economic hardship in the wake of the boll weevil cotton plague's spread across the South. For those fleeing economic hardship, the lack of immediate physical threats allows individuals to consider moving geographically farther away. Moving farther away to a county with better future economic prospects reduces the short-term ease of moving nearby via local social networks, but potentially increases the long-term benefits of higher wages. Migrants will seek out black civil society institutions. These black civil society institutions not only provide protection, but further benefit their members economically and socially. In summary, we theorize these two impetuses – violence and economics –delineate relocation within the South and outside of the South, and delineate relocation to place with strong institutions of physical and economic protection.

To test this theory of migration, we analyze just under six million black individuals living in the American South from 1900 and 1930. Using data linking individuals across US censuses, we track the migration patterns of black migrants after facing lynching events in their counties and/or the boll weevil entering their county. In identifying where black individuals

migrate, we build a series of novel datasets on black civil society institutions (presence of the National Negro Business League, black newspapers, members of black congregations, and historically black colleges and universities) and combine those with newly geocoded National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) data at the county-level to generate a comprehensive measure of black civil society at the county-level. Supplementing our black civil society measure with county-level metrics on bureaucratic and racially coercive state capacity, we can determine not just the geographic identity of black migrants' new counties, but also the institutional makeup of those counties.

We find that lynching increases the likelihood of an individual moving to a new county within their state, but has no impact on the probability of moving out of one's state or moving out of the South. Contrastingly, experiencing the boll weevil in a county increases the probability that an individual migrates out of their state and out of the South, but does not increase the probability of moving within one's state. In terms of the institutional characteristics of counties, we find Southern black residents exposed to lynchings are less likely to move to counties with high state capacity or strong black civil society. However, exposure to the boll weevil increases the probability of a black resident moving to a county with high state capacity and increases the probability of moving to a county with strong black civil society. Our findings hold when challenged via a series of placebo and robustness tests.

Our analyses and findings shift the focus of work on the Great Migration, or internal displacement more generally, to one of apriori migration decision making, rather than the outcomes of that migration. The focus of the Great Migration in political science often falls to considerations of racial threat prompted among whites by the in-migration of African Americans (Reny and Newman, 2018). Similarly, quantitative research on the Great Migration has considered migration as a treatment rather than an outcome, focusing on how changing population demographics in the North spurred political responses to migration.

While there is rich and robust descriptive research centering the stories of African Americans taking part in this exodus (Wilkerson, 2010), it is limited in its ability to generalize beyond the cases it features. Our work seeks to balance these perspectives through how the exact type of duress an individual faces influences if and where black people choose to migrate. Additionally, our holistic measures of institutions that may attract black migrants further increases our quantitative emphasis on reasons for migrating as a consequence of where one can migrate.

A Theory of Strategic, Black Migration

Social scientists have expressed great interest in the Great Migration – from its onset, to patterns of movement, to its immediate impacts and lasting legacies. Political scientists have considered the Great Migration from the perspective of “racial threat” (e.g., Reny and Newman, 2018). This scholarship draws on the work of Key (1949), Blalock (1967), and others to measure the impact of black migration into white communities on the (hostile) racial attitudes and behaviors of white Americans. Changing racial demographics, particularly in residential settings, are shown to increase racial animus and prejudicial expressions of animus, including violence (e.g., Green et al., 1998; Lyons, 2008). An adjacent literature has focused on the impact that this migration had on electoral outcomes, particularly support for the Democratic Party (Calderon et al., 2023, Grant, 2020). Calderon et. al. (2023), for instance, find that Northern in-migration of African Americans from the South increased support for pro-Civil Rights measures and also increased Democratic Congressional vote shares in these areas. Alternatively, Reny and Newman (2018) find that increasing African American populations on the West Coast strengthened support for anti-Civil Rights ballot measures.

As the Great Migration hit a stride in 1920, hundreds of thousands of African Americans

left the South to move to Northern states and cities. There are a multitude of reasons – personal, political, social, economic – which may have contributed to an individual’s decision to leave their home. We focus on two, which are prominent in narratives from the time: racial violence and the boll weevil cotton plague. In fact, Louisiana Governor John Parker wrote to Georgia Governor Thomas Hardwick in 1923, highlighting the impact of both concerns, which we elaborate upon below:

“To my mind the menace of the Ku Klux Klan is even more dangerous to prosperity of our farmers than boll weevil...”¹

The Urgency of Racial Violence

Prominent narratives of the Great Migration suggest long, bold journeys across the country to flee the wreckage of racial violence. However, we propose that grander trajectories overshadow more local migration occurring within the South and, particularly, in response to racial violence. Consider lynching. When lynching occurred in a community, individuals of shared racial identity had several options in response. This included, but was not limited to, voicing their discontent with the acts of extralegal violence, acquiescing to the demands of perpetrators, or leaving the community in which the violence occurred. Our focus is on those considering the decision to leave and where they decide to move.

We are not the first to consider the options presented to individuals when they are confronted with racial or ethnic violence (e.g., Finkel, 2017, Hirschman, 1970, Milliff, 2023), nor the first to consider racial exodus in the aftermath of lynching. The historical census record provides a rich source of information for gauging the many ways in which lynching might influence behavior and migration. A study of families of lynching victims finds that

¹Governor John M. Parker (though misstated in article) of Louisiana in a message to Governor Thomas Hardwick of Georgia. Quoted in “America’s Super-Attraction: ‘Murder Within the Law.’” *New York Amsterdam News*. February 28, 1923.

family members of the murdered were more likely to move to a different county than neighbors who were not related to a lynching victim (Gabriel et al., 2023). Other work identifies dozens of racial cleansings – the disappearance of black communities – across the United States that stem from outbreaks of racial violence (Jaspin, 2008). In each of these studies, it is clear that significant out-migration from a location experiencing lynching occurs – but where do the displaced go? And what, plausibly, informs their decision?

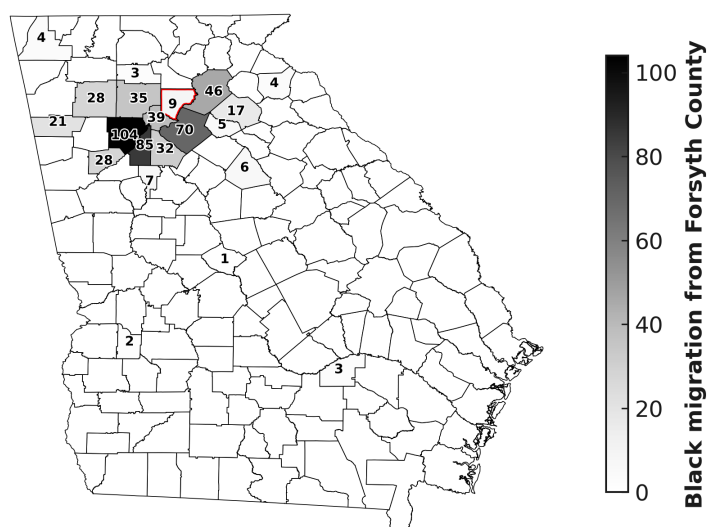
We suggest that those migrating in the aftermath of racial violence seek out locations near their original counties of residence (i.e., other counties within their home state or counties within the South). This is in comparison to more distant locations that could be classified as “safer” (i.e., counties in the North). The time for decision making is shorter for these individuals, and we expect that the urgency of flight in the aftermath of lynching means less time for planning or weighing options for relocation. This abbreviated decision-making also means that the high costs of moving large distances are less tenable in the short-term. Individuals may, therefore, flee in close proximity to their previous homes. Places like this are likely more connected to their existing social and familial networks, which potentially reduces the financial costs and social burdens of moving. We set the expectation that African Americans migrating in the aftermath of a lynching (in the prior decade) are more likely to move within their state (H_{1a}) or within the South (H_{1b}) when compared to African Americans living in counties which did not experience a lynching.

Further grounding for these expectations is found, descriptively, in the case of Forsyth County, Georgia. Ninety-seven percent of Forsyth County’s black population fled the area after an extended period of racial violence in 1912, which included the lynching and executions of several black residents.² Of the 1117 black residents of Forsyth County reported in the 1910 Census, subsequent locations have been identified for 705. Of those who were

²Rob Edwards was lynched on September 10, 1912; Ernest Knox and Oscar Daniel were publicly executed on October 25, 1912.

alive at the time of the 1920 Census, 549 – 83 percent – remained in the state of Georgia. Among the 105 who left Georgia, only 33 were located in Northern states, which included Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, and Ohio.³ This descriptive work from the Atlanta History Center’s *Forsyth 1912* exhibition suggests that black residents fleeing Forsyth County had a high likelihood of relocating to a neighboring county. Figure 1 shows a distribution of identified migrants across Georgia. While Forsyth County represents one case of extreme out-migration, we consider broader patterns in our analyses.

Figure 1: This figure is derived from data obtained from the Atlanta History Center’s *Forsyth 1912* project, showing where residents of Forsyth County on the 1910 Census were located on the 1920 Census. The majority of Black Forsyth County residents moved to nearby counties within the state. Forsyth County is noted with the value 9.



Boll Weevil and Economic Distress Alter Migration Pressures

In contrast to lynchings, we expect that economic disruptions push migrants further

³<https://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/blog/forsyth-1912-examining-the-displacement-of-the-countys-black-residents/>

from their homes. One of the most considerable economic disruptions to the South’s cotton production came in the form of the boll weevil. The boll weevil is an insect pest which lays waste to cotton crops as it spread across the South between 1893 to 1922, when it reached the edge of the cotton belt (Hunter, 1923). The boll weevil devastated cotton crops, depleted cotton yields, increased unemployment, drove up the price of cotton, and soured the prospects of black (and white) farmers and sharecroppers (Lange et al., 2009).

When facing the threat of a severe economic downturn, individuals make a different calculation than those facing racial violence. We expect that individuals impacted by the boll weevil’s devastation make more dramatic moves, out of state (H_{2a}) and out of region (H_{2b}). The arrival of the boll weevil in a county necessitated drastic changes in lifestyle for many. Boll weevils destroyed not only one season of cotton crops, but drastically reduced prospects for growing cotton in the future (Lange et al., 2009). This meant that many African American farmers and sharecroppers were forced to uproot and rebuild their lives and their livelihoods in new places.

Such a story can be seen in the example of the Owens Family, originally of Decatur, Alabama. In 1936, the *Atlanta Daily World* reported:

“The second oldest Owens child [Lilla May], struck out for herself. She went to Cleveland, Ohio, where she found work. On her visits back home she urged her father, Cleveland Owens, to come north and bring the family. But Cleveland Owens stuck with his cotton. In 1922 the weevils came. A splendid crop was wiped out. Cleveland Owens didn’t need any more urging, so he sold out, and with his oldest son, Prentiss, he headed for Cleveland. Arriving, they found jobs and three months later Mrs. Cleveland and the other children, including Jesse, followed. The move to Cleveland was the first big ‘break’ in young Jesse’s life. If the Owens family had stayed in Decatur, the name Jesse Owens might never

have been calssified [sic] in the history of sports.”⁴

Olympic Gold-Medalist Jesse Owens would go on to hone his athletic talents at the flagship institution in his family’s new home state, Ohio State University. Descriptively, the Owens family’s journey is indicative of the migration trends that we theorize – relocation out-of-state and out of the South, taking place over an extended period. These longer migrations are facilitated by the ability to consider long run economic benefits of long distance migration.

In summary, we set several expectations about migration trends – we should expect to see distinctions in where individuals move, as a result of what has, plausibly, led them to relocate. We expect that individuals moving in the aftermath of racial violence are more likely to move within their state (H_{1a}) and also more likely to move within the South (H_{1b}) than those African Americans in counties that did not experience a lynching. On the other hand, we expect that migration after the boll weevil spread is more likely to result in more distant migration. These individuals are more likely to move outside of their original state (H_{2a}) and out of the South (H_{2b}) than individuals in southern counties not impacted by the boll weevil.

The Draw of State Capacity and Civil Society

We also set several expectations about the characteristics of where migrants are most likely to move. Those fleeing racial violence may be more likely to seek out localities that are high in bureaucratic state capacity.⁵ Even those fleeing dire circumstances are strategic in the choices they make as they seek to resettle. In a study of the settlements of runaway slaves in Brazil, Kustov and Pardelli (2020) show that patterns of contemporary sub-national state capacity can be explained by the preferences that the formerly enslaved had for locations

⁴“Owens the World’s Greatest Track Athlete, Left Farm Because of Boll Weevils.” *Atlanta Daily World*. August 10, 1936.

⁵We define bureaucratic state capacity as the ability to carry out administrative mandates.

that were remote and had weaker state presence. In our context, higher state capacity – and also closer proximity to origin – might be more crucial for those fleeing racial violence than it is for those who are searching for new economic opportunities. These factors might be less important for the economic opportunity seeker, in part because they may not have had to experience the consequences of lacking state capacity and a state unable to protect civilian life. Therefore, we test the expectation that those displaced in the aftermath of lynchings will seek out locations with higher state capacity – that is, a greater potential capacity to protect black citizens (H_{3a}).

Yet the occurrence of the lynching itself is a manifestation of extralegal violence, a circumnavigating of the state and the state enforcement of laws. In some cases, there is also a physical circumventing of the law, when victims are extracted from police custody to be lynched. Ultimately, this represents an inability or unwillingness of local police and sheriffs to protect African Americans, and, in some cases, their facilitation of the violence. Thus, alternatively, we suggest that an inverse relationship may exist between migration and state capacity for racial coercion. Stronger law enforcement presence may characterize a less promising location for those fleeing racial violence (H_{3b}). In this context, we consider racially coercive state capacity with a measure of African American executions within a county.

For those moving in the aftermath of the boll weevil spread, we expect considerations for strong black civil society to be an important factor in where these individuals relocate. Considering the Second Great Migration (specifically 1940 to 1970), Derenoncourt (2022) finds that the prospects for upward economic mobility were reduced for black children born in the 1980s and in Northern cities with higher levels of black in-migration. Baran et. al (2024) point to the presence of organizations like the NAACP as an indicator of expanding social capital and community growth. Such social capital, the authors propose, expands educational opportunities for children beyond traditional classrooms. Indeed, they find a positive impact of migration between 1910 and 1940 on childhood schooling. The children

of families migrating from the South to the North received almost an additional year of schooling in comparison to those who did not leave. And Derenoncourt (2022) posits that a breakdown of social capital, spurred by black in-migration and subsequent white flight, can explain economic disparities today. These papers highlight an important variable for our consideration. Namely, these studies point to social capital as a crucial mechanism for their outcomes of interest.

Contemporaneous news also reports the importance of this civil society for helping black Southerners moving North to adjust to their new communities:

“Here then is a new problem. The Negroes who have gone North for good must be helped in adjusting themselves to their new conditions. The Negro churches and fraternal organization like the National League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes, the Young Men’s Christian Association and the National Negro Health Week which will be conducted by the National Negro Business League next spring, all will contribute something in the way of helping the Negro to fit efficiently into the new relationship.”⁶

Similar to Baran et al. (2024), Calderon et. al. (2023), and others, we believe that the presence of strong black community and civil society is a plausible consideration, drawing in those migrating in response to the economic turmoil of boll weevil. Drawing from this literature, we create a new measure of black civil society which measures the prevalence of NAACP branches, educational institutions, African Methodist Episcopal Churches, African American newspapers, and the local presence of the National Negro Business League as an indicator of strength of black civil society. Therefore, we test the expectation that individuals migrating after economic devastation or downturns – given their longer time horizon for consideration – are drawn to areas of strong black civic society (H_4).

⁶“Finding the Causes of Migration.” *New Journal and Guide*. January 13, 1917.

Hypothesis	Impetus	Migration
H_{1a}	Lynching	Within State
H_{1b}	Lynching	Within South
H_{2a}	Boll Weevil	Outside State
H_{2b}	Boll Weevil	Outside South
H_{3a}	Lynching	Stronger State Capacity
H_{3b}	Lynching	Weaker State Capacity
H_{3c}	Lynching	Stronger Black Civil Society
H_4	Boll Weevil	Stronger Black Civil Society

Table 1: Expected Relationships between impetus, migration, and relocation characteristics

We also recognize that more robust black civil society may offer additional protections to African American migrants, socially and politically. The NAACP, for example, was an organization built upon anti-lynching advocacy (Francis, 2014). Seeking out locales with robust organization presence such as this could be a priority of those who were proximate to such violence. And so we test the expectation that individuals moving in the aftermath of racial violence were likely to seek out counties with strong black civil society (H_{3c}).

Data and Measurement

Our results leverage analyses of just under six million black individuals living in the American South from 1900 to 1930. To evaluate racial violence, economic shocks, and county-level characteristics, we develop a novel dataset on black civil society, which we then link to individuals. The components of this dataset are described below.

Migration

To measure individual migration, we rely on data from Ruggles et al.(2025) that links individuals across complete U.S. censuses for the 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930. We compare linked individuals’ county of residence in a base census year to the next census year. We do this for

three census pairs: 1900 to 1910, 1910 to 1920, and 1920 to 1930. There are 5,916,106 individuals for whom we have individual-level migration status, our two treatments of interest, individual covariates, and county-level covariates.

Non-random sampling is a potential empirical concern with relying on the IPUMS historically linked data. Ruggles et. al. (2025) rely on family and genealogical records to train a matching algorithm. The initial data they use to link individuals could be biased in a way that affects our estimates. For example, poorer, black individuals in the South might have faced higher rates of lynching, been more exposed to the economic shock of the boll weevil, and likely to migrate. Crucially, poorer black individuals also likely have a lower probability of their genealogical records surviving, meaning they would be underrepresented in the linked census sample. To see if this is the case, we compare the means of covariates between the full 1900, 1910, and 1920 censuses to the linked sample we employ in our results (See Figure A1 in the appendix.). We do find that along all covariates, the linked sample differs in a statistically significant way. To help combat this bias, we control for covariates that not only simultaneously impact the likelihood of our treatment and outcome, but also those that impact whether an individual is in our linked sample: gender, urban status, age, literacy status, family size, and average county travel costs.

Racial Violence

To operationalize racial violence we rely on incidents of lynchings across counties in the American South from 1900 to 1930. This data was originally collected by Tolnay and Beck (1995; 2006).⁷ This data is plotted descriptively in Figure 2, where we have also noted our time period of interest. Racial provocateurs throughout the 20th century employed a variety of violent tactics, however lynchings are the most well-documented form of racially-targeted

⁷The data were originally obtained from the Historical American Lynchings website (Project HAL), which is now inactive. Data have been archived here.

violence against African Americans. This is due, in part, to the emphasis placed on anti-lynching advocacy through enumeration by organizations like the NAACP and Tuskegee Institute (Francis, 2014; Waldrep, 2000). The definition of “lynching” varies over time due to inter-organization disagreements (Waldrep, 2000), and so note that the inclusion criteria for this dataset, following other scholars, adheres to the definition put forth by the NAACP in 1940.⁸

⁸The incident was fatal for the victim; the incident involved three or more perpetrators; the incident was committed illegally; the incident was perpetrated in service of justice or tradition.

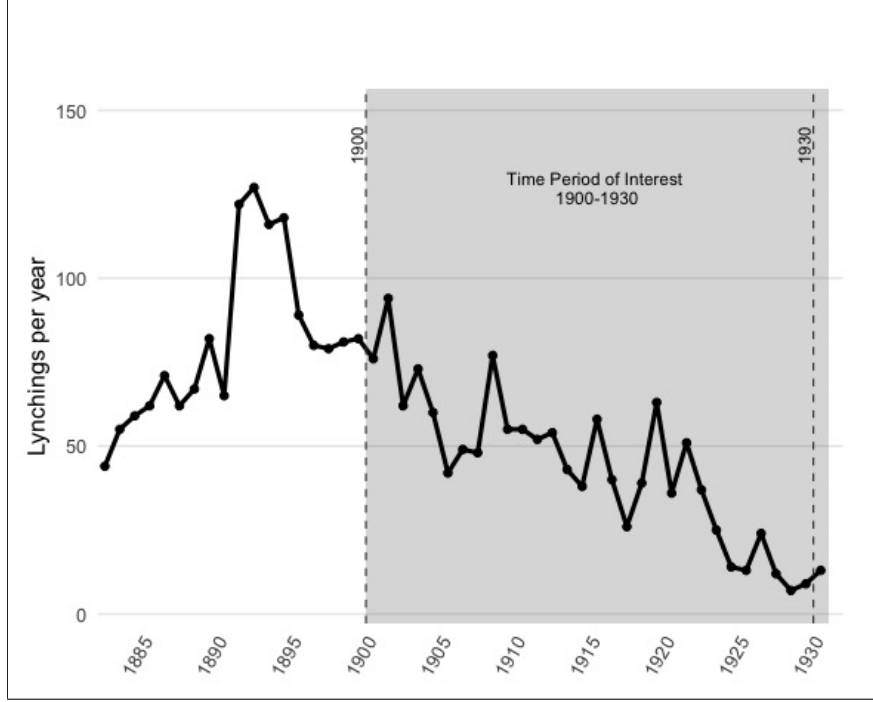


Figure 2: Yearly reported lynchings of Black Americans in the United States between 1882 and 1930. Our time period of consideration 1900-1930 is noted within the shaded area.

For our purposes, a county is considered “treated” in a given census year if at least one lynching was reported within its borders in that census year or the previous four years (e.g., a county in 1900 is considered “treated” if a lynching occurred in 1900, 1899, 1898, 1897, or 1896). We match black individuals to lynchings via their county of residence. This approach does not guarantee that an individual personally received threats, saw a lynching, or heard about an incident. Thus, our individual-level analyses would capture intent-to-treat (ITT) estimates at worst.

Economic Shock

For our economic shock variable, we leverage the spread of the boll weevil across the American South between 1892 and 1922. The boll weevil was an agricultural pest that ate cotton plants and reproduced inside the plant’s bolls, thus “boll” weevil. The boll weevil devastated the

southern cotton crop as it moved across the region. In an extreme case, Louisiana’s cotton yield in 1909, after the introduction of the boll weevil, was only 42 percent of the previous year’s yield (Higgs, 1976).

The plausibly exogenous arrival of the boll weevil to a county also worsened the impacts as cotton farmers could be caught unprepared. County residents or officials could not effectively prevent the weevil from entering their county, and boll weevil survival heavily depended on weather patterns (i.e., it thrived in dry areas, but was susceptible to cold temperatures). There was little farmers could do to alter, or predict, the arrival time and intensity of the pest (Lange et al., 2009).

Figure 3 shows the spread of the boll weevil across the American South between 1892 and 1922, noting the years in which the pest is reported in a county. We construct a dataset of the boll weevil infestation’s spread using a series of United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) pamphlets and drawing on the approach of Lange et al. (2009) and Bloome et al. (2017). USDA maps from 1909, 1913, 1917, and 1923 were geo-referenced based on 1920 country boundaries. Using these maps, our dataset estimates in which year the boll weevil reached each county. The dataset also notes whether each county is located within the “cotton belt,” the term used to describe areas of the South suitable for the production of cotton. This data is recorded by county-decade. Using the USDA geocoded data on the spread of the pest across the American South, we note a county as “treated,” if the boll weevil reached the county in the census year or in one of the four years leading up to a census year. This procedure follows our measurement strategy for county lynchings.

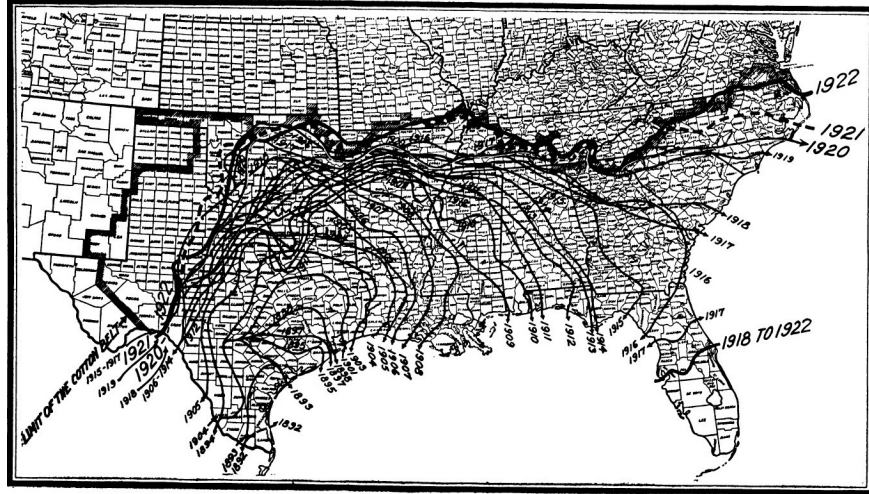


Figure 3: Original Caption: “Map showing spread of the Mexican cotton boll weevil in the United States from 1892 to 1922, inclusive.” Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture. Farmer’s Bulletin No. 1329. *The Boll Weevil Problem*. W.D. Hunter and B.R. Coad. June 1923.

Community Characteristics

Black Civil Society

When measuring black civil society, we take a more comprehensive approach than previous work. Mc Kenzie (2008), for example, defines black civil society as independent institutions with primarily black membership that operate outside of the state and business sector. These non-state institutions help their members and the black community they serve further their political and economic interests. We expand on this work and construct a measure of black civil society drawing on five binary dimensions from 1900 to 1930: economic, social, educational, religious, and political. Within our index, we collect a host of novel historical data on black institutions ranging from archives of black leaders to early 20th-century religious censuses to the scope of black newspapers.

Economic. For the economic dimension, we generate a novel data set on local National Negro Business League (NNBL) presence in a given county. The NNBL was founded in

1900 by Booker T. Washington with the explicit goal of furthering black business prospects. Beyond direct business interest, the NNBL lobbied local, state, and federal agencies and organized protests. To identify the presence of the NNBL in a given county-year, we relied on a series of documents from the personal archives and letters of Booker T. Washington. The NNBL published annual reports for local leagues across the United States, but inconsistently. In 1910, we collected and geocoded local leagues to counties (204 in total). However, for 1900, we rely on the first NNBL annual reports list of delegates. We collect all delegate names (365 in total) and geocode their towns of residence to counties. Finally, for 1920, we rely on lists of NNBL life members (225 in total) in 1921 since the NNBL ceased publishing annual reports before 1920. We repeat our geocoding process for 1921 life members as we did for 1900 delegates.⁹

Social. Next, we compile and geocode a new dataset on all black newspapers publishing in the United States from 1900 - 1930 from the *Bibliographic Checklist of African American Newspapers* (Henritze, 1995). Black newspapers provide politically and economically relevant information to black residents. Black newspapers also served as coordinating tools for political advocacy and protests. And generally, local newspapers could wield significant political power (Ban et al., 2019). We identify and successfully geolocate over 3,500 black newspapers. The presence of any African American publication(s) in a county during a particular decade is coded as present for that entire decade.

Educational. We also triangulate an original and complete dataset of 151 historically black colleges or universities (HBCUs). We rely on lists from Badger (1951), Hill (1985), and a supplemental list from Wikipedia. HBCUs are not only institutions of higher education, but they also indicate a robust educational environment for black children prior to college or university. Such opportunities were likely a point of consideration for relocation, particularly

⁹Though the NNBL exists today under the name National Business League. We were unable to find specific documentation regarding NNBL county presence in 1930. Thus, we extend our 1920 county measure to 1930 as well.

for families.

Religious. Perhaps the most vital and the most ubiquitous institution of black civil society is the church (Calhoun-Brown, 2000; Mc Kenzie, 2008). Due to their commonality and variety, black churches differ greatly in their degree of formality, organization, and hierarchical structures. This makes measurement tricky, as every town with a sizable black population likely has a church, but not necessarily documentation on the size of its congregation, much less the precise racial breakdown of parishioners. Considering these challenges, we adopt a conservative estimate of black church attendance and measure attendance for two historically black denominations: African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and AME Zion. We choose these two denominations because they are largest and have the widest geographical spread, while also being recorded in the United States Census of Religious Bodies from 1906, 1916, 1926, and 1936 (Haines, 2010).¹⁰ We generate a binary cutoff for the sum of AME and AME Zion church attendees over a county’s total black population in a given census year, using the mean value for that census year as a cutoff.

Political. Finally, we geolocate chapters of the NAACP to their respective counties, derived from city-level data on NAACP chapters from the Mapping America’s Social Movements Project at the University of Washington.¹¹ While the early NAACP’s political advocacy focused on the anti-lynching movement, the presence of a local chapter suggests black political leadership who may lobby on behalf on the local community in other political and social domains. Note that the NAACP was founded in 1908, so this variable does not exist in our data before 1910.

¹⁰Since religious body census dates do not align with the regular U.S. Census we backshift the religious census dates to correspond with the regular census (e.g., 1906 numbers are used for the decade beginning in 1900.)

¹¹NAACP Branches Database. Mapping American Social Movements Project.

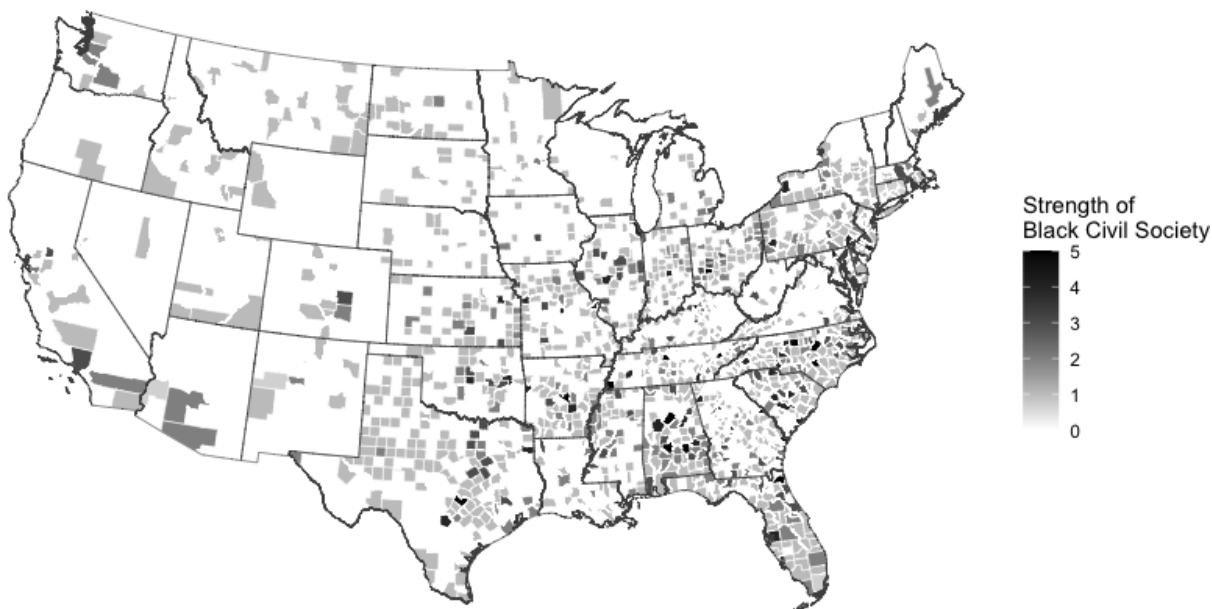


Figure 4: The distribution of county-level black civil society across the United States as measured in 1920. Counties with the strongest levels of black civil society (shaded darkest) had NAACP chapters, HBCUs, black newspapers, a NNBL presence, and high AME church attendance.

To generate an aggregate measure, we sum the binary measures of each of the five components. Though a county might have multiple NAACP chapters or more than one HBCU, we dichotomize to normalize each component before aggregation. After aggregation, we consider a county with three or more components as having “high” black civil society. Figure 4 shows variation in black civil society across the United States in the year 1920.

State Capacity

Our state capacity measure follows the conceptualization of bureaucratic capacity, or in our case state capacity more generally, as the ability of bureaucrats to embed themselves in society and carry out policy mandates from officials (Mann, 1987, Garfias, 2018, and Suryanarayan and White, 2021). Work on historical state capacity attempts to measure this bureaucratic ability through tax revenues per capita (Suryanarayan and White, 2021), age-heaping (i.e., the accuracy of an individual’s age) in censuses (Lee and Zhang, 2017, Suryanarayan and White, 2021), and total members of the bureaucracy (Suryanarayan and White, 2021).

From the complete censuses of 1900 to 1930, we calculate government workers per capita for each US county. We rely on standardized occupation scores from IPUMS and consider individuals with the occupations of Inspectors, Public Administration and Officials; and Administrators, Public Administration. For reference, just over 380,000 out of 347 million individuals identified as public administrators across the four censuses. We then code a county as having “high” state capacity if its county government worker per capita exceeds the 90th percentile (0.1505 percent) across all censuses.

Racially Coercive State Capacity. State capacity contains multiple dimensions beyond bureaucratic capacity (Berwick and Christia, 2018; Hanson and Sigman, 2021). While we argue that black economic migrants seek out counties with high state capacity to help alleviate their economic distress, black residents might not have access to county resources like their new white neighbors. Even worse, officials can cajole the coercive capacity of the county against black residents. To account for this possibility, we construct a measure of racially coercive state capacity to account for this potential tradeoff of black migrants moving to counties with high state capacity. Using data from Epsy and Smykla (2016), we create a binary measure that records if the county executed at least one black man for a sex-related crime in a given decade. We rely on sex-related crime executions because accusing black

men of sex crimes was a common tactic of racial control and was also often the nominal justification of lynching episodes.

Results

We present three sets of main results of the impact of racial violence and economic shocks: on migration out of one’s county, migration to geographies within the United States (within state, out of state, and out of the South), and migration to counties high state capacity, high levels of racial coercion, and high levels of black civil society. Each set of results follows the general empirical model:

$$m_{icy} = \alpha + \hat{\beta}_1 L_{icy} + \hat{\beta}_2 W_{icy} + \mathbf{X}_{iy} + t_{cy} + \kappa_c + \delta_y + \mu_{icy}$$

The subscripts refer to the individual (i), the county (c), and the census year (y). The results only consider black individuals, residing in the South, in census years 1900, 1910, and 1920. Both L_{icy} and W_{icy} refer, respectively, to whether an individual experienced a lynching in their county or the introduction of the boll weevil. Recall, both treatment variables are five-year lagged indicator variables, meaning a county is considered treated in census period n if a lynching or boll weevil introduction occurred in the year of the census or four years prior (e.g., for census year 1900; 1900, 1899, 1898, 1897, and 1896). Since the level of treatment is at the county-level, all models calculate clustered standard errors by county id. A vector of individual-level controls that are specific to a year is represented by $\mathbf{X}_{iy}$. Controls include the individual’s gender, urban status, age, family size, and literacy status collected from the IPUMS historically linked individuals dataset (Ruggles et al., 2025). We control for the average travel cost of the individual’s county with t_{cy} . We calculate a county’s average travel cost by taking the travel costs between county dyads in a given census year from Donaldson and Hornbeck (2016) and averaging all dyads for each county in a census year. And the

most robust models account for county (κ_c) and year (δ_y) fixed effects. The constant α and error term μ_{icy} complete the right-hand side variables.

The general outcome m_{icy} refers to whether an individual moved between census year n and census year $n + 1$. For example, if an individual lived in County A in 1900 and County B in 1910, then $m_{icy} = 1$. Since we argue the decision to move and where to move happen simultaneously, migration to counties with specific characteristics **is not** conditioned on those moving. Thus, our migration outcome is simply: did an individual move to a county with a given characteristic or not move at all.

Due to the plausible exogeneity of the introduction of the boll weevil to counties across the American South after 1910, we are confident that the most robust findings for the impact of the boll weevil on black migration are relatively unbiased. After the main results, we provide a placebo test of the effect of the boll weevil introduction on migration in cotton belt and non-cotton belt counties. After the main results, we also provide a series of robustness tests to stress test our main findings of non-exogenous lynchings' effect on black migration.

Disruptions and Migration

Our first set of results in Figure 5 and Table 2 evaluates the impact of both lynching events and the introduction of the boll weevil on the probability that an individual migrates to any location. Black individuals who live in a county that experience a lynching are 1.33 percentage points more likely to migrate to a different county by the next census year than their counterparts who did not experience a lynching in their county. This result reflects sociological findings that counties that experience a black lynching see an increased exodus of black residents after the event (Tolnay and Beck, 1992; Tolnay, 2003). However, what is surprising is the size of the lynching coefficient relative to the coefficient for the impact of the boll weevil. The impact of the boll weevil on black migration is over twice the size of the impact of lynching: 2.82 percentage points. This suggests the economic shock of the

boll weevil was a greater migratory force than experiencing racial violence through lynching events.

Figure 5: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration Out of County

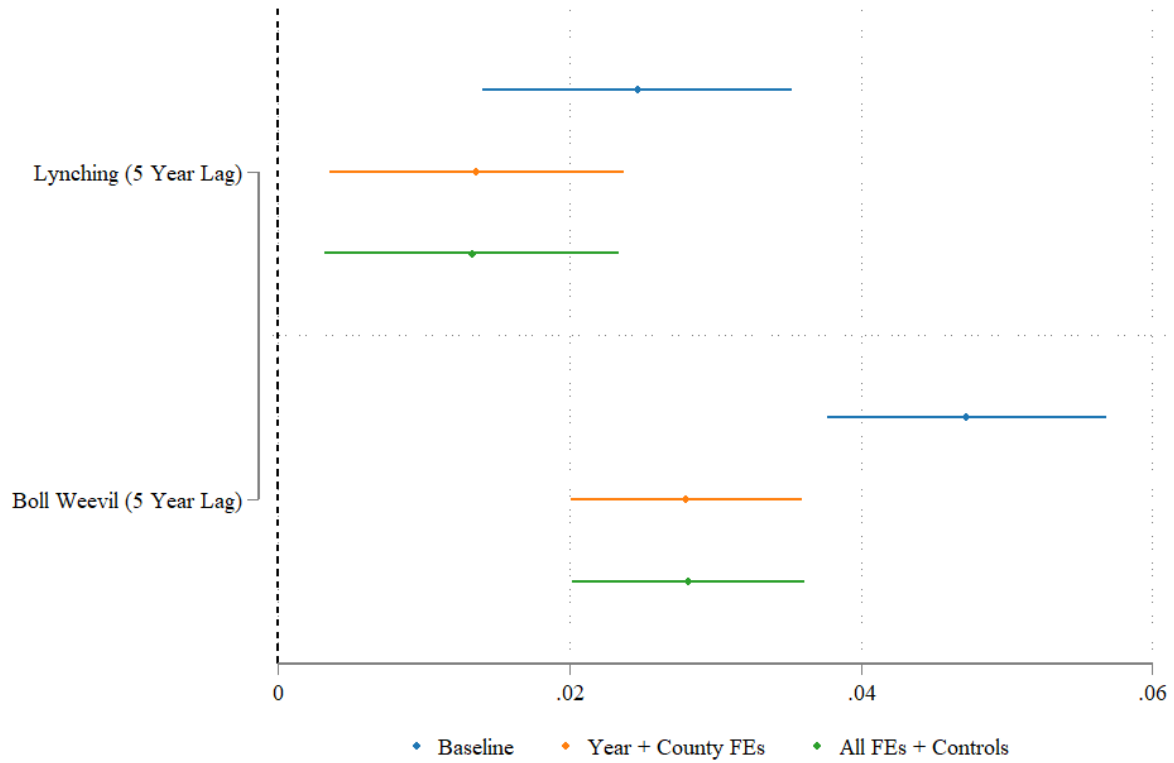


Table 2: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration Out of County

VARIABLES	(1) Moved	(2) Moved	(3) Moved
Lynching (5 Year Lag)	0.0247*** (0.00541)	0.0136*** (0.00515)	0.0133*** (0.00513)
Boll Weevil (5 Year Lag)	0.0472*** (0.00488)	0.0280*** (0.00405)	0.0282*** (0.00406)
Observations	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113
R-squared	0.003	0.030	0.037
Year + County FEs	No	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	No	Yes

Controls include the individual's gender, urban status, age, family size, and literacy status. Additionally, controls include the average travel cost to all other US counties from the individual's starting county. Clustered standard errors by county id are in parentheses where *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

Migration Geographical Destinations

Though establishing the general migratory impact of both racial violence and economic distress is important, our theory considers not just if black individuals leave, but where specifically they go. Figure 6 and Table 3 show the impact of both lynching and the introduction of the boll on the probability an individual migrates to another county within the state, out of state, or out of the South.

Figure 6 and Table 3 show three key takeaways. First, our findings are consistent with the expectations set in H_{1a} and H_{1b} . Lynching increases the likelihood of an individual moving to a new county within their state (H_{1a}). Experiencing a lynching does not increase the likelihood that an individual moved out of the South, supporting H_{1b} . Second, experiencing the boll weevil in a county increases the probability that an individual migrates out of their state and out of the South, but it does not increase the probability of moving within one's state. This supports H_{2a} and H_{2b} , meaning those experiencing the boll weevil were willing and able to move farther away. Taken together, these results are consistent with the expectation that black individuals experiencing racial violence moved to nearby counties or

states, in comparison to those migrating in the wake of economic distress.

Figure 6: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration to Various Geographies

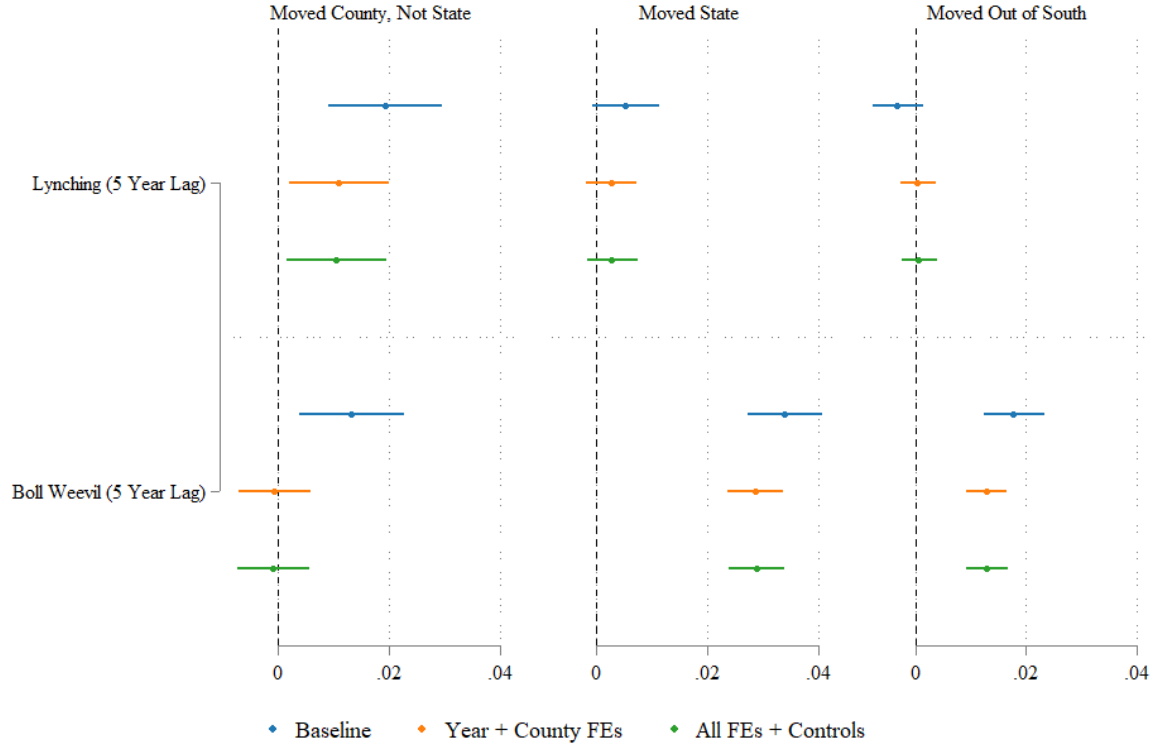


Table 3: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration to Various Geographies

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
VARIABLES	Moved County Not State	Moved County Not State	Moved County Not State	Moved State	Moved State	Moved State	Moved Out of South	Moved Out of South	Moved Out of South
Lynching (5 Year Lag)	0.0194*** (0.00523)	0.0110** (0.00460)	0.0105** (0.00455)	0.00532* (0.00309)	0.00268 (0.00230)	0.00277 (0.00232)	-0.00311 (0.00231)	0.000552 (0.00166)	0.000763 (0.00166)
Boll Weevil (5 Year Lag)	0.0133*** (0.00480)	-0.000697 (0.00332)	-0.000763 (0.00330)	0.0340*** (0.00342)	0.0287*** (0.00253)	0.0289*** (0.00256)	0.0179*** (0.00276)	0.0129*** (0.00190)	0.0130*** (0.00189)
Observations	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113
R-squared	0.001	0.034	0.039	0.003	0.027	0.033	0.001	0.027	0.033
Year + County FEs	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

Controls include the individual's gender, urban status, age, family size, and literacy status. Additionally, controls include the average travel cost to all other US counties from the individual's starting county. Clustered standard errors by county id are in parentheses where *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

Migration and Community Characteristics

Our previous results shed some empirical light on where black migrants go, but our last set of main results answer the question: what characterizes these places of relocation? Figure 7 and Table 4 show the impact of both lynching events and the introduction of the boll weevil on the probability that an individual moves to a racially coercive county, a county that has high state capacity, or a county that has robust black civil society. For all migration outcomes, at all robustness levels, lynching episodes have no statistical impact on an individual's probability of moving to a county with the given characteristics compared to an individual who does not experience a lynching event in their county. We do not find support for our third set of hypotheses: that black individuals might seek out counties with higher state capacity to protect them from racial violence or that black individuals might avoid counties with higher state capacity to avoid racialized persecution from the state. Nor do black individuals migrate away from racial violence to seek out counties with high levels of black civil society. Our null results regarding migration to counties with high levels of black civil society or to counties with high state capacity suggest that escaping the immediate threat of racial violence takes precedence over protection from the possibility of future violence and increased economic opportunities.

Turning to the migratory impacts of the introduction of the boll weevil, exposure to the boll weevil increases individuals' probability of moving to a county with high state capacity and strong black civil society. These findings offer support for our theoretical assertion that economic shocks create a pressing situation for black individuals, but the increased pressure is such that black individuals can still consider the long-run benefits of migrating to counties with high state capacity and strong black civil society.

Figure 7: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration to Community Types

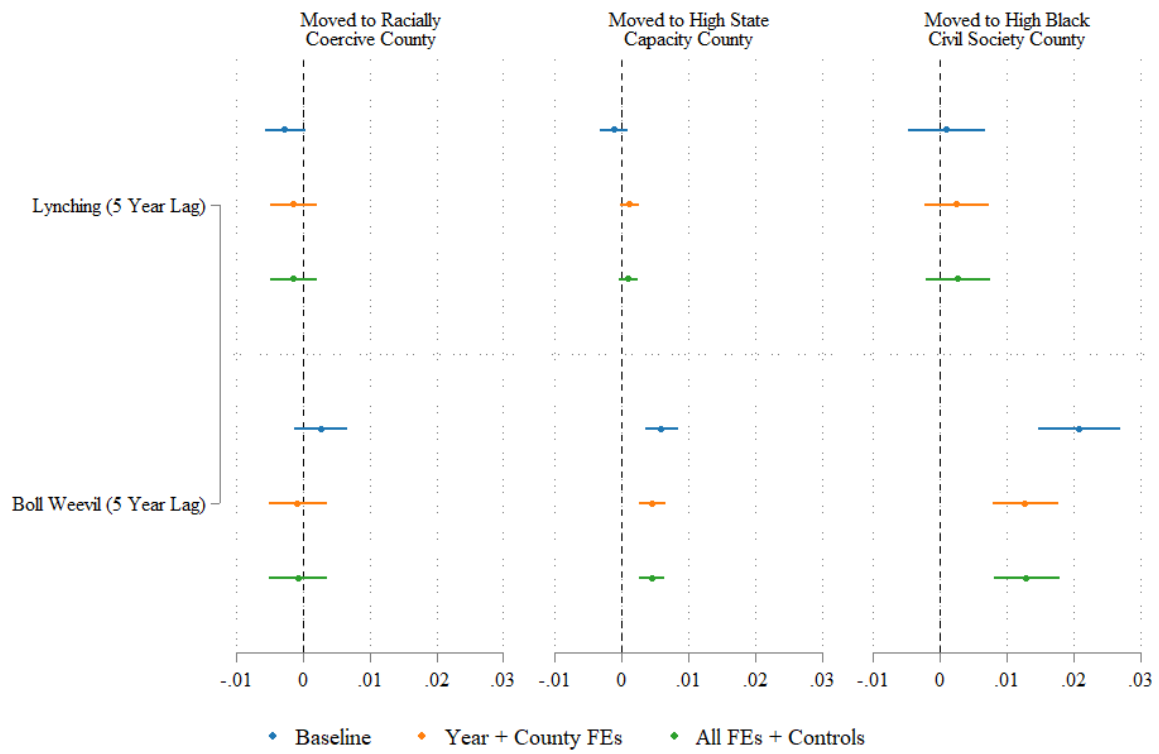


Table 4: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration to Community Types

VARIABLES	(1) High Racial Coercion	(2) High Racial Coercion	(3) High Racial Coercion	(4) High State Capacity	(5) High State Capacity	(6) High State Capacity	(7) High Black Civil Society	(8) High Black Civil Society	(9) High Black Civil Society
Lynching (5 Year Lag)	-0.00264* (0.00154)	-0.00132 (0.00178)	-0.00134 (0.00180)	-0.00105 (0.00105)	0.00121* (0.000721)	0.00113 (0.000732)	0.000982 (0.000294)	0.00254 (0.00244)	0.00269 (0.00247)
Boll Weevil (5 Year Lag)	0.00274 (0.00200)	-0.000726 (0.00223)	-0.000677 (0.00223)	0.00603*** (0.00126)	0.00462*** (0.000992)	0.00461*** (0.000983)	0.0209*** (0.00314)	0.0128*** (0.00251)	0.0130*** (0.00251)
Observations	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113
R-squared	0.000	0.019	0.020	0.001	0.034	0.034	0.001	0.022	0.028
Year + County FEs	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

Controls include the individual's gender, urban status, age, family size, and literacy status. Additionally, controls include the average travel cost to all other US counties from the individual's starting county. Clustered standard errors by county id are in parentheses where ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.10.

Placebo Tests

White-on-White and Black-on-Black Lynchings

Lynchings, as a measure of racial threat and violence, might not capture the racial violence we are interested in. Justifications for lynchings often rely on the claims, though dubious (Tolnay and Beck, 1995), of an individual committing a crime. If that is the case, then the migration after lynchings we observe might not be black individuals fleeing racially targeted violence, but rather violence generally. We would expect black individuals fleeing general violence, rather than racially targeted violence, to mimic our migration hypotheses for exposure to the boll weevil. Thus, our main results are unable to separate these two pathways. To disentangle them, we run two placebo tests on black individuals' county-level exposure to black-on-black lynching events and white-on-white lynching events (i.e., the race of the perpetrator and victim is the same). Should our main results capture general levels of violence, rather than racially targeted violence, then we should see similar directional effects for our migration outcomes of interest for lynching events that are less likely to be racially charged.

The results in Figure 8 and Table 5 below add reassurance that our measure of racial violence, lynchings, does capture racial threat. All of the coefficients for the impact of black-on-black lynchings and migration decisions are null with extremely small coefficients. The same is true for white-on-white lynchings. Directionally, but not in terms of significance, the impact of white-on-white lynchings mimics our results for the impact of the boll weevil on migration decisions. Though the outcome of moving to a racially coercive county is opposite from our main results. These null results in directions not consistent with our main findings regarding lynchings, increase our confidence that our main explanatory variable does capture our measure of racially targeted violence towards black individuals.

Figure 8: Effect of Non-Racial Lynchings on Probability of Migration

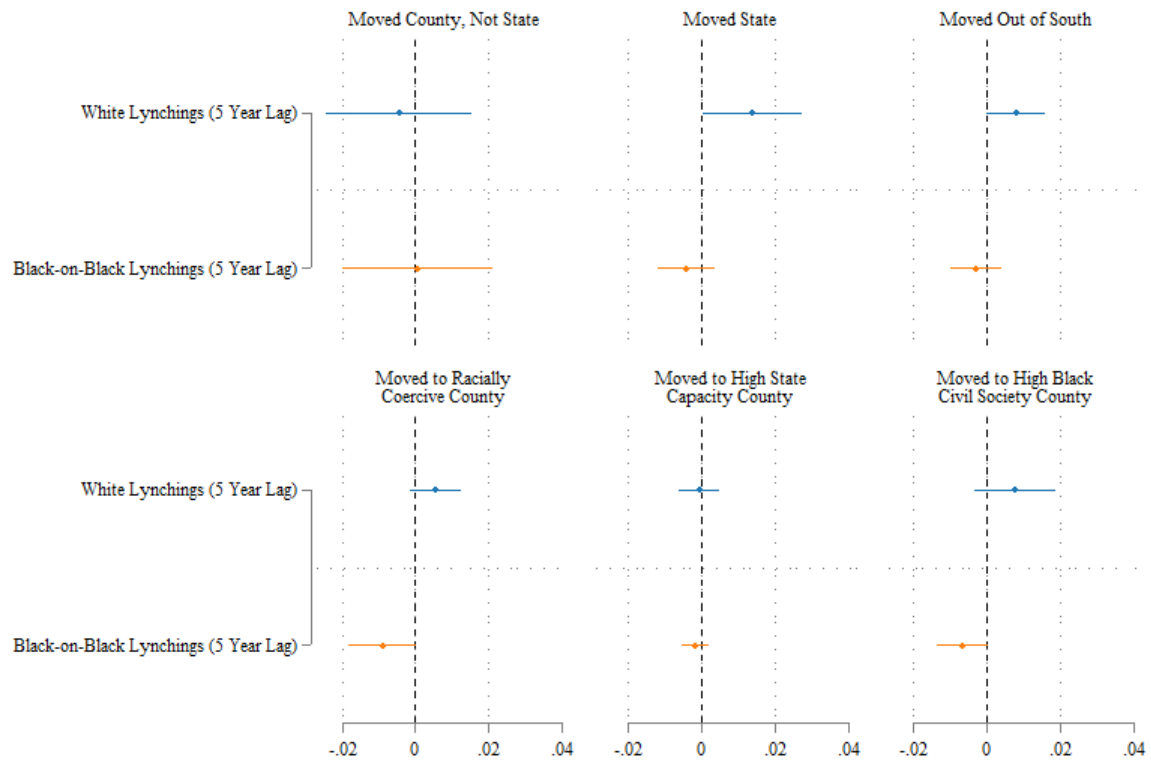


Table 5: Effect of Within Racial Group Lynchings on Probability of Migration

Black-on-Black						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
VARIABLES	Moved County Not State	Moved State	Moved Out of South	High Racial Coercion	High State Capacity	High Black Civil Society
Black-on-Black Lynchings (5 Year Lag)	0.000583 (0.0105)	-0.00412 (0.00396)	-0.00296 (0.00351)	-0.00897* (0.00473)	-0.00176 (0.00189)	-0.00674* (0.00358)
Observations	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128
R-squared	0.039	0.032	0.033	0.020	0.034	0.028
Year + County FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
White-on-White						
VARIABLES	Moved County Not State	Moved State	Moved Out of South	High Racial Coercion	High State Capacity	High Black Civil Society
White Lynchings (5 Year Lag)	-0.00447 (0.0102)	0.0139** (0.00691)	0.00786* (0.00404)	0.00541 (0.00357)	-0.000420 (0.00282)	0.00750 (0.00559)
Observations	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128
R-squared	0.039	0.032	0.033	0.020	0.034	0.028
Year + County FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Controls include the individual's gender, urban status, age, family size, and literacy status. Additionally, controls include the average travel cost to all other US counties from the individual's starting county. Clustered standard errors by county id are in parentheses where ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.10.

The Boll Weevil in Cotton Belt Counties

One concern with our estimates for the effect of boll weevil introduction to an individual's county is the specificity of the economic shock. Unlike larger macroeconomic shocks (i.e., natural disasters, conflict, or droughts), the boll weevil and its damage to cotton crops will only impact economies that rely on cotton crops, rather than other southern agricultural commodities like sugar or food staples. We would expect the migratory effects of the boll weevil introduction to only appear, or appear strongest, for individuals living in counties in the cotton belt (i.e., Southern counties that grow and export cotton) and not in counties not in the cotton belt. If we find effects of the boll weevil on migration in both cotton belt and non-cotton belt counties, then our treatment of boll weevil introduction is not capturing the concentrated economic shock we argue it captures.

Figure 9 and Table 6 below show the results of this placebo test, bifurcating our sample to individuals living in the cotton belt and those living outside cotton belt. Supporting our main results, the effect of the boll weevil does not significantly impact an individual's

decision to migrate within their state, out of their state, or out of the South – *if they do not live within the cotton belt*. However, for those living in cotton belt counties, reinforcing our main findings, experiencing the introduction of the boll weevil to one’s county increases the probability of moving out of state by 2.9 percentage points compared to those who did not experience the introduction of the boll weevil. The same holds for moving out of the South (1.3 percentage points). And importantly, the introduction of the boll weevil did not impact an individual’s probability of moving within their own state.

In terms of the characteristics of the counties that black individuals can move to, we see our placebo test mimic our main results, with one notable deviation. We see null results for the boll weevil’s impact on migration to racially coercive counties. In terms of state capacity, we observe a positive impact of the boll weevil for cotton belt counties and even a negative impact of the boll weevil in non-cotton belt counties. Finally, for the impact of the boll weevil on the probability of moving to a county with high black civil society, we find positive effects for both cotton belt and non-cotton belt counties. While five out of six results match our placebo test expectation, this one deviates. Our best explanation for this is that some counties in our non-cotton belt designation might have grown some cotton, but it was not the main agricultural output.¹² If this is the case, then the introduction of the boll weevil might have muted effects, rather than no effect.

¹²Since the standard errors for non-cotton belt residents greatly exceeds that for cotton belt residents, some of the non-cotton belt residents face economic distress from the boll weevil.

Figure 9: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration Based on Cotton Belt Status

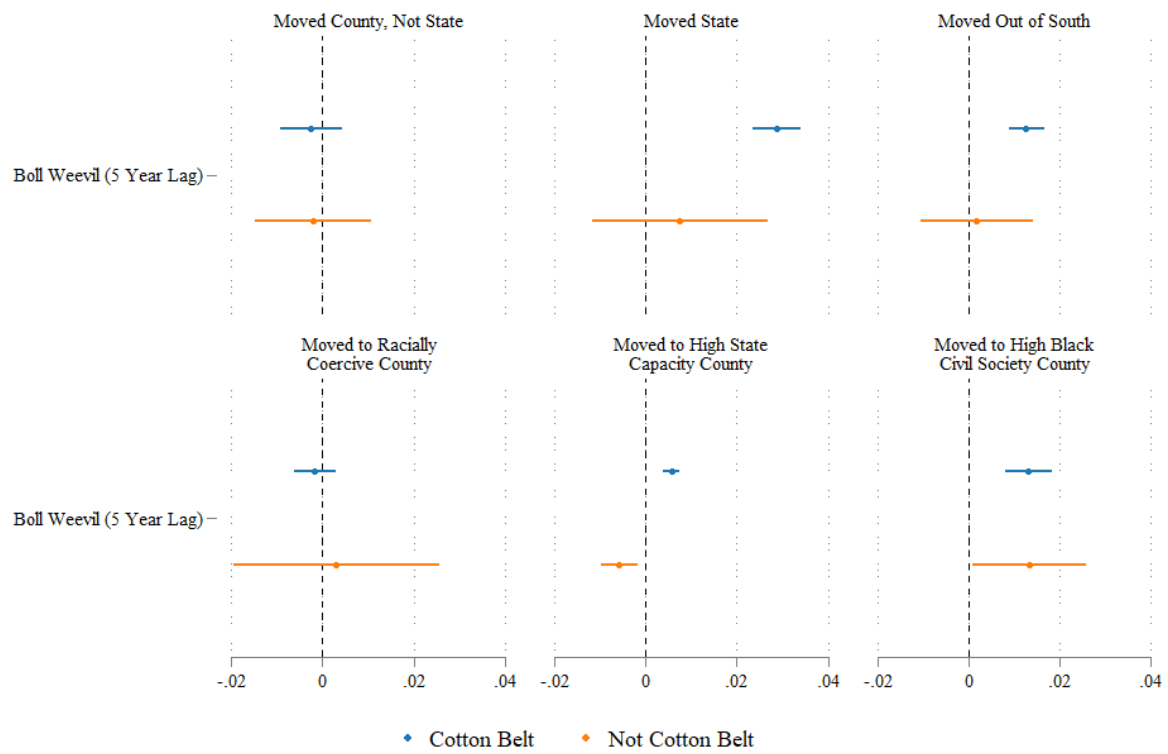


Table 6: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration Based on Cotton Belt Status

Cotton Belt						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
VARIABLES	Moved County Not State	Moved State	Moved Out of South	High Racial Coercion	High State Capacity	High Black Civil Society
Boll Weevil (5 Year Lag)	-0.00255 (0.00347)	0.0288*** (0.00266)	0.0126*** (0.00197)	-0.00166 (0.00230)	0.00573*** (0.000918)	0.0132*** (0.00257)
Observations	4,539,822	4,539,822	4,539,822	4,539,822	4,539,822	4,539,822
R-squared	0.035	0.033	0.033	0.019	0.024	0.025
Year + County FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Not Cotton Belt						
VARIABLES	Moved County Not State	Moved State	Moved Out of South	High Racial Coercion	High State Capacity	High Black Civil Society
Boll Weevil (5 Year Lag)	-0.00209 (0.00642)	0.00756 (0.00983)	0.00175 (0.00627)	0.00304 (0.0115)	-0.00563*** (0.00203)	0.0133** (0.00630)
Observations	1,376,291	1,376,291	1,376,291	1,376,291	1,376,291	1,376,291
R-squared	0.038	0.030	0.032	0.024	0.051	0.036
Year + County FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Controls include the individual's gender, urban status, age, family size, and literacy status. Additionally, controls include the average travel cost to all other US counties from the individual's starting county. Clustered standard errors by county id are in parentheses where ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.10.

Robustness Checks

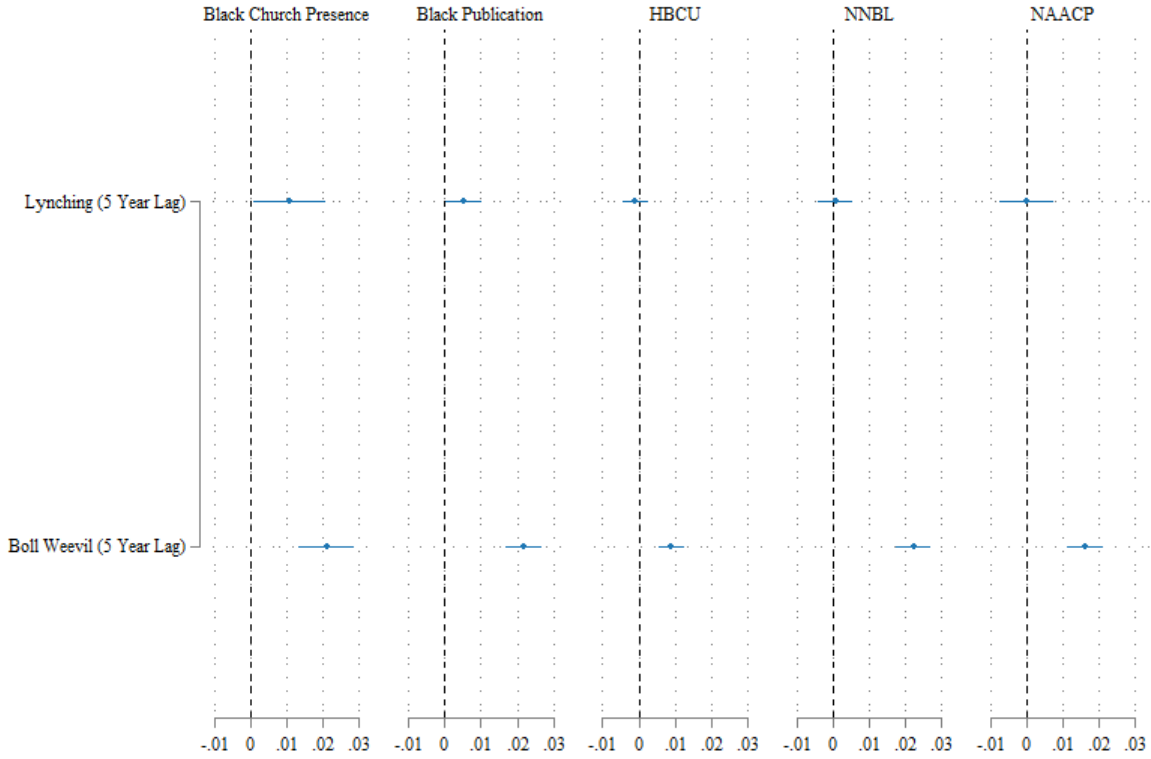
To complement the above placebo tests, we performed a series of additional robustness tests.

The results of our robustness tests buttress our main results.

Sub-Setting Black Civil Society. Our aggregated measure of black civil society could obscure differential patterns between economic migrants or racial violence migrants seeking out specific civil society institutions. We subset out our black civil society institutions into their sub-components in Figure 10 and Appendix Table A10. We find, in harmony with our general claim that economic migrants face less existential pressure when making moving decisions, that the boll weevil increases the probability that individuals move to counties with each black civil society institution. Experiencing a lynching event in one's county only increases the probability that an individual moves to a county with a black newspaper publication or a large black church presence, the two most common black civil

society institutions across the United States.

Figure 10: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration to High Black Civil Society County (Sub-components)



Controls include the individual's gender, urban status, age, family size, and literacy status. Additionally, controls include the average travel cost to all other US counties from the individual's starting county. Clustered standard errors by county id are in parentheses where *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

Alternative Black Civil Society Threshold. An additional concern with our results on black individuals' probability of migrating to counties with high levels of black civil society is our threshold for a county to have high black civil society. Our main results consider a county as having high levels of black civil society if, in a given census year, the county has at least half the institutions we measure in that year.¹³ We constrict our high threshold

¹³For 1900 that is: black church presence, a black newspaper publication, an HBCU, and NNBL presence. For 1910 - 1930 it is all those institutions, plus an NAACP chapter.

to counties that have all black civil society institutions in a given year. Our results are still positive and statistically significant, though with smaller coefficients compared to our main results (see Appendix Figure A8 and Table A9).

Excluding Children. Our main results contain children. Including children in the analysis could bias the results, as children typically do not have the agency or means to move on their own. To address this, we exclude individuals younger than 18. This drops our number of observations from 5,916,106 to 2,754,653. Our results do not substantially change after excluding children (see Appendix Figures A12 and A13 and Tables A7 and A8).

Alternative Treatment Specifications. Since census records appear every decade, we can determine if individuals moved from one census to another, but not when they moved within that ten-year period, thus it is possible that individuals move out and then return to the same county. This is a limitation of working with census-linked data. However, if the phenomenon happens, it would bias against our theory, and any significant results of moving after lynching or the boll weevil should be conservative estimates.

We replicate our main analysis with smaller treatment windows (e.g., for the 1900 census year, we consider lynchings in 1900, 1899, and 1898). Appendix Figures A4 and A5 and Tables A5 and A6 present these results. Our smaller treatment window results for the boll weevil mimic our main results in effect size (fairly similar), direction, and statistical significance. The results for our smaller lynching treatment window align with our main results. We find that the smaller treatment window yields positive and statistically significant results for moving out of state after experiencing a lynching. And though relatively the same in magnitude and positive, we do not find significant results for moving to a county within one's state after experiencing a lynching.

Additionally, we also rerun our main analyses with a continuous measurement of lynching in Appendix Figures A8 and A9 and Tables A3 and A4. Directionally, these estimates match our main results, but are statistically insignificant.

Conclusion

The Great Migration saw the exodus of millions of African Americans from the South to other regions of the United States. However, our findings suggest that broadly-construed narratives of cross-continental flight in the aftermath of racial violence may overstate migration and displacement under these conditions. Moreover, our findings demonstrate the importance of considering *why* migration occurs for a more nuanced study of where individuals migrate and the implications of those outcomes. Our individual-level results point to lynching being associated with black migration across county borders but not outside of the South. We do not find evidence that individuals moving in the aftermath of lynching seek out communities with high levels of black civil society nor counties with high levels of state capacity. For those migrating from counties experiencing the economic impacts of the boll weevil pestilence, relocation outside of the South and relocation to counties with strong black civil society and high state capacity are more likely.

Internal migration and displacement are important to consider, particularly when they are of the scale of the Great Migration. Furthermore, migration is an often-overlooked element of the growing literature on the political legacies of violence, particularly among those studies which seek to understand the persistence and transmission of lynching into the present-day. While past lynching in a location is associated with a number of outcomes in that same location today – lower black voter registration (Williams et al., 2021); less stringent enforcement of hate crime law (King et al., 2009) – the mechanisms of transmission for these outcomes remain unclear. Frequently, research suggests that these contemporary outcomes are the result of cultural norms passed along among white Americans (e.g., King et al. 2009; Acharya et al., 2018). Our findings point to the need for richer consideration and measurement of displacement patterns which might otherwise be obscured by broader trends. For example, community-based behaviors and collective memories of violence may

persist in some places, but not others. As these norms and memories persist in new places, they may be responsible for outcomes of interest.

The ability to trace individuals across census iterations has improved inference about the life trajectories of those individuals across time and place and the legacies that they may perpetuate. We suggest that our work has broader implications for understanding the legacies of racial violence and internal migration. By impacting where individuals moved, the forces of racial violence may have transcended immediate concerns for safety. For those who did not have the means to go North or West, their life trajectories were affected beyond their physical well-being. For example, several studies (Baker, 2015; Baker et al., 2020) have noted that with the spread of the boll weevil pest and decline of cotton production, educational attainment for Black children in the South increased during our time period of interest. Our work also aligns with a growing literature in economics that explores the impact of the Great Migration on the prospects of those who undertook those long journeys. While many sought better opportunities for themselves and their children, relocation outside of the South did not necessarily spur upward economic mobility (Derenoncourt, 2022).

Finally, our findings center the agency of African Americans and move away from a racial threat centered study of the Great Migration. In this vein, we believe it is also important to note that not all farmers who encountered the boll weevil relocated. There is a sizable archival record describing inventions and solutions on the part of black farmers to combat the boll weevil or adapt to growing cotton under new conditions. Many black farmers and inventors problem-solved and fought against the pest, “In direct refutation of the claim of the southern white men that most Negroes are leaving the South because they haven’t the intelligence as farmers to combat the ravages of the boll weevil...”¹⁴ Not everyone who farmed in boll weevil impacted areas grew cotton and nor did all of those who grew cotton make the decision to leave.

¹⁴“Race Farmers Make Money on Cotton,” *New Journal and Guide*. November 17, 1923.

We differentiate our work by its emphasis on the pragmatism and agency of those who took part in the Great Migration. Political science scholarship predominantly focuses on white Americans and white racial attitudes after migration has occurred. Our paper represents a significant and distinct contribution to this literature because of its focus on explaining the migration calculus of African Americans. By taking on this perspective, we heed the advice of notable scholars of racial violence and the Great Migration to seek a clearer grasp of under what conditions migration occurs (Tolnay and Beck, 1990).

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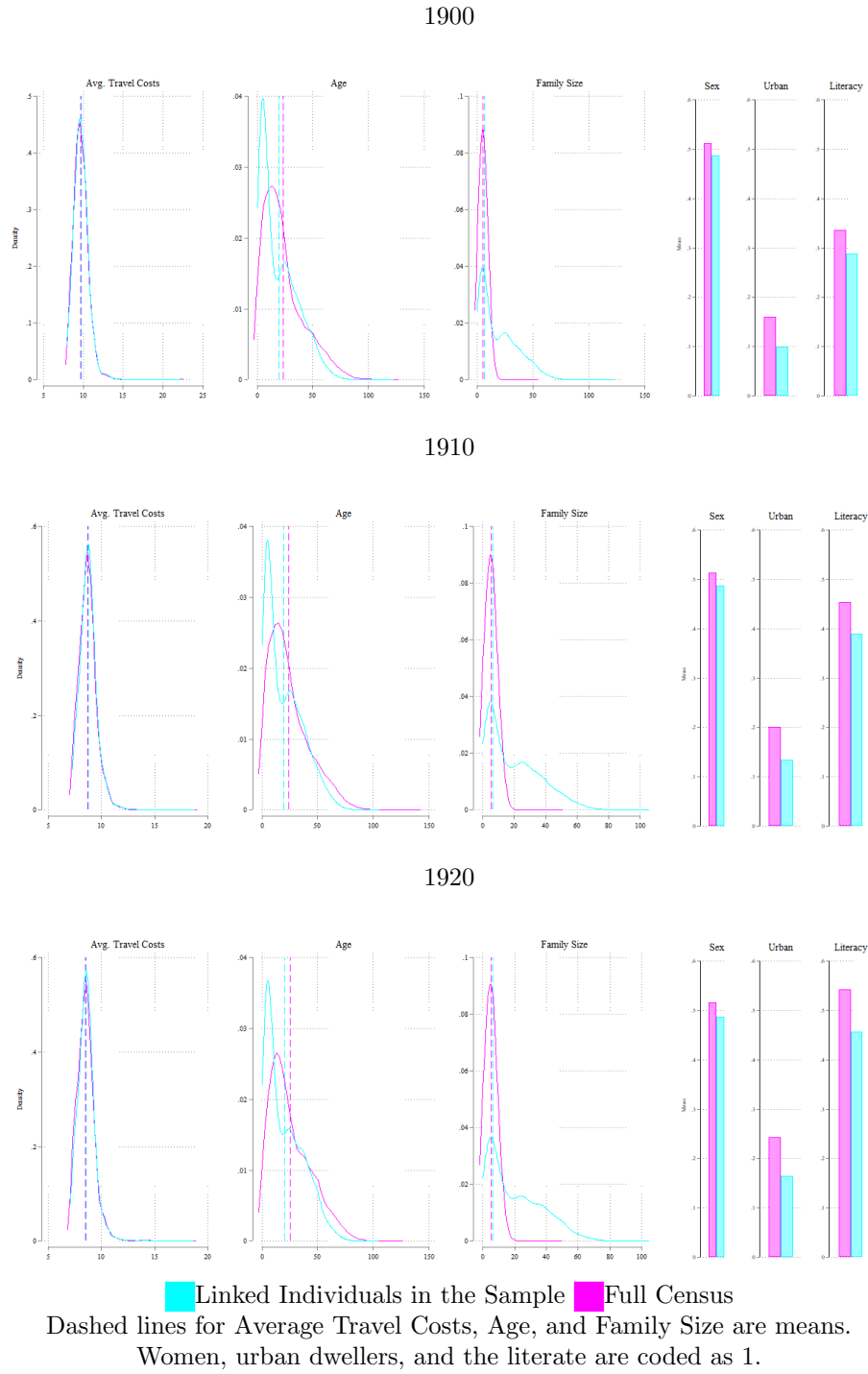
Appendix for “Strategic Migration under Duress: Evidence from the Great Migration, 1900-1930”

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Full Census to Sample Comparisons

Figure A1: Comparison between Full Census and Linked Census Sample



Summary Statistics

Table A1: Summary of Statistics for Full Linked Sample

Variable	Observations	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Lynching (5 Year Lag)	5,916,100	.2550802	.4359063	0	1
Boll Weevil (5 Year Lag)	5,916,100	.1821842	.3859963	0	1
Moved County	5,916,100	.1963231	.3972158	0	1
Moved County, Not State	5,916,100	.1301601	.3364795	0	1
Moved State	5,916,100	.066163	.2485669	0	1
Moved Out of South	5,916,100	.0366375	.1878701	0	1
Avg. Travel Cost	5,916,100	9.012344	1.022108	7.086247	22.3329
Age	5,916,100	19.70477	16.68684	0	123
Sex	5,916,100	.4868285	.4998265	0	1
Urban Environment	5,916,100	.134327	.3410033	0	1
Literacy	5,916,100	.3827586	.4860602	0	1
Family Size	5,916,128	6.39703	2.85153	1	52

Table A2: Summary of Statistics for Full Linked Sample by Year

Variable	Observations	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
1900					
Lynching (5 Year Lag)	1,753,124	.3083056	.4617937	0	1
Boll Weevil (5 Year Lag)	1,753,124	0	0	0	0
Moved County, Not State	1,753,124	.1263362	.332228	0	1
Moved State	1,753,124	.0416856	.1998698	0	1
Moved Out of South	1,753,124	.0161985	.1262384	0	1
Avg. Travel Cost	1,753,124	9.767812	.9948481	8.00815	22.3329
Age	1,753,124	19.25982	16.68453	0	123
Sex	1,753,124	.486973	.4998304	0	1
Urban Environment	1,753,124	.098916	.2985493	0	1
Literacy	1,753,124	.2873339	.4525188	0	1
Family Size	1,753,124	6.615167	2.867711	1	52
1910					
Lynching (5 Year Lag)	2,060,549	.2575852	.4373044	0	1
Boll Weevil (5 Year Lag)	2,060,549	.2070065	.4051603	0	1
Moved County, Not State	2,060,549	.1386078	.3455369	0	1
Moved State	2,060,549	.0624855	.2420354	0	1
Moved Out of South	2,060,549	.0322051	.1765446	0	1
Avg. Travel Cost	2,060,549	8.792024	.8599053	7.26843	18.81203
Age	2,060,549	19.60977	16.54652	0	106
Sex	2,060,549	.4863597	.499814	0	1
Urban Environment	2,060,549	.1336406	.3402659	0	1
Literacy	2,060,549	.3889692	.4875164	0	1
Family Size	2,060,549	6.337981	2.837948	1	38
1920					
Lynching (5 Year Lag)	2,102,455	.2082432	.4060518	0	1
Boll Weevil (5 Year Lag)	2,102,555	.3097702	.4623989	0	1
Moved County, Not State	2,102,455	.1250693	.3307975	0	1
Moved State	2,102,455	.0901778	.2864364	0	1
Moved Out of South	2,102,455	.0580246	.2337901	0	1
Avg. Travel Cost	2,102,455	8.598324	.8335733	7.086247	18.68111
Age	2,102,455	20.16889	16.81359	0	105
Sex	2,102,455	.4871675	.4998354	0	1
Urban Environment	2,102,455	.1645273	.3707535	0	1
Literacy	2,102,455	.4562419	.4980817	0	1
Family Size	2,102,455	6.273009	2.841007	1	46

Alternative Treatment Specifications

Continuous Treatment Variables

Figure A2: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration to Various Geographies with Continuous Lynching Measure

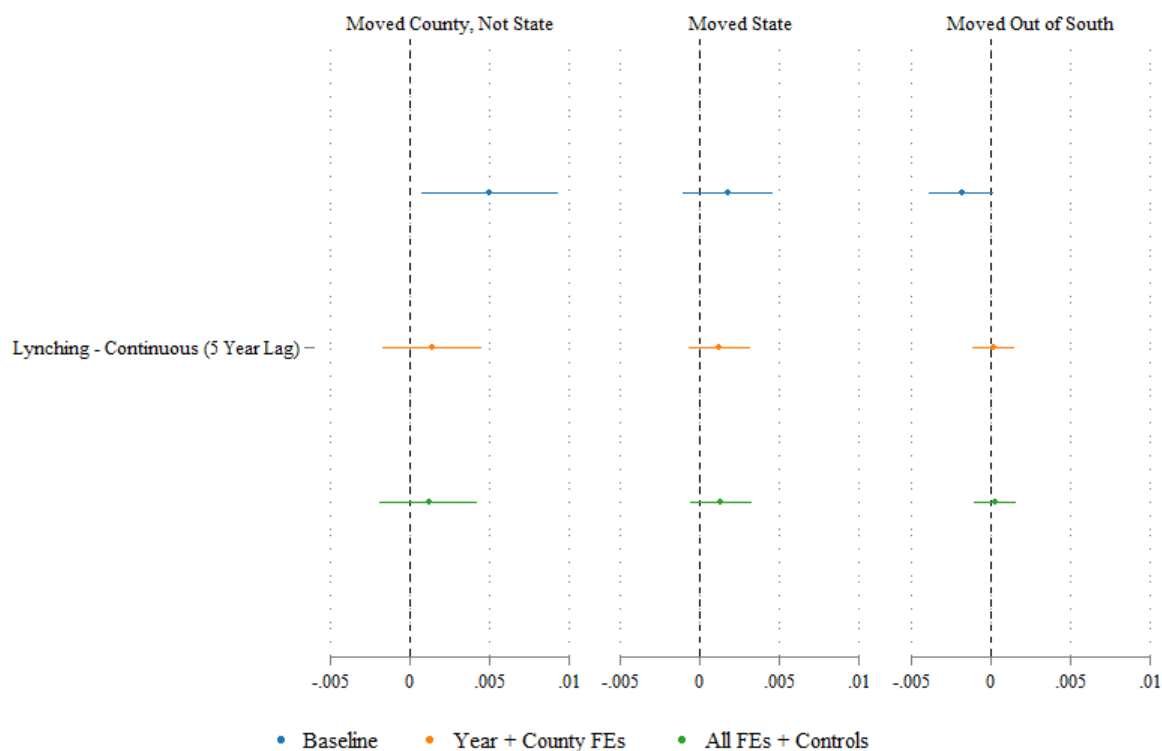


Table A3: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration to Various Geographies with Continuous Lynching Measure

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
VARIABLES	Moved County Not State	Moved County Not State	Moved County Not State	Moved County Not State	Moved State	Moved State	Moved Out of South	Moved Out of South	Moved Out of South
Lynching - Continuous (5 Year Lag)	0.00498** (0.00219)	0.00137 (0.00158)	0.00115 (0.00157)	0.00175 (0.00145)	0.00123 (0.000984)	0.00130 (0.000987)	-0.00178* (0.00103)	0.000220 (0.000678)	0.000338 (0.000673)
Observations	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128
R-squared	0.000	0.034	0.039	0.003	0.027	0.032	0.001	0.027	0.033
Year + County FEs	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

Controls include the individual's gender, urban status, age, literacy status, family size, and boll weevil introduction. Additionally, controls include the average travel cost to all other US counties from the individual's starting county. Clustered standard errors by county id are in parentheses where ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.10.

Figure A3: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration to Community Types with Continuous Lynching Measure

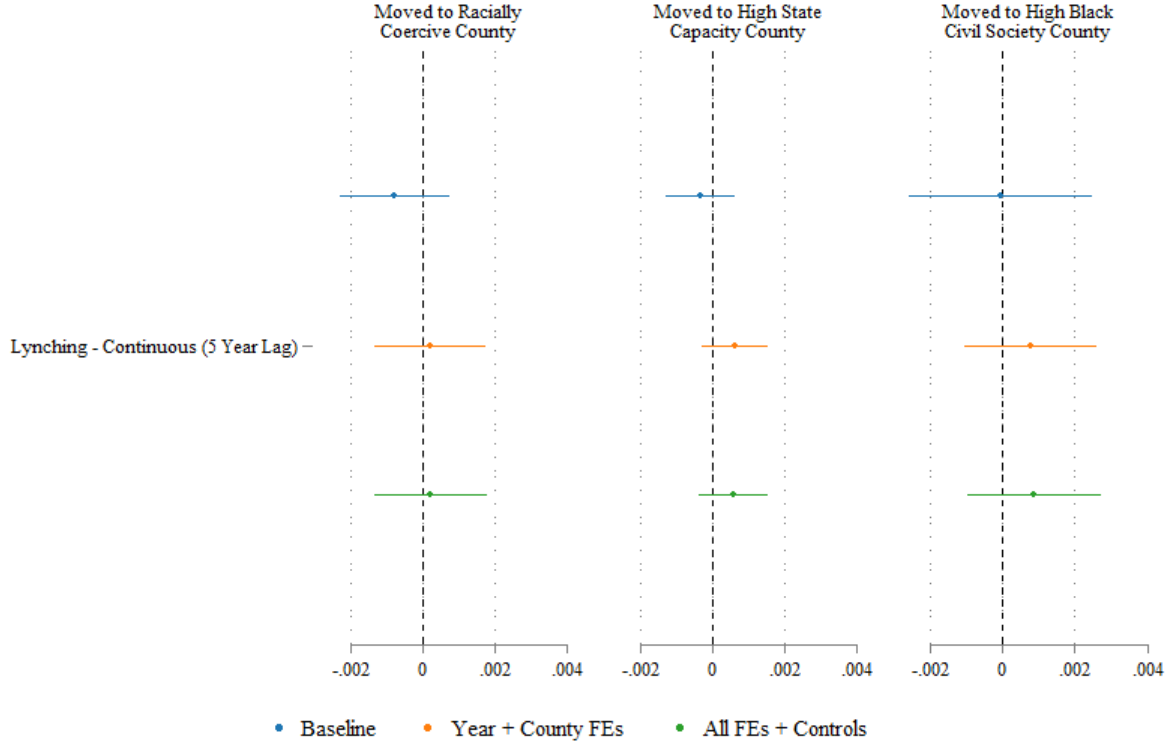


Table A4: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration to Community Types with Continuous Lynching Measure

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
	High Racial Coercion	High Racial Coercion	High Racial Coercion	High State Capacity	High State Capacity	High State Capacity	High Black Civil Society	High Black Civil Society	High Black Civil Society
Lynching - Continuous (5 Year Lag)	-0.000759 (0.000771)	0.000226 (0.000779)	0.000229 (0.000787)	-0.000322 (0.000479)	0.000623 (0.000468)	0.000585 (0.000478)	-5.12e-05 (0.00129)	0.000799 (0.000929)	0.000892 (0.000946)
Observations	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128
R-squared	0.000	0.019	0.020	0.001	0.033	0.034	0.001	0.022	0.028
Year + County FEs	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

Controls include the individual's gender, urban status, age, literacy status, family size, and boll weevil introduction. Additionally, controls include the average travel cost to all other US counties from the individual's starting county. Clustered standard errors by county id are in parentheses where ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.10.

Three Year Lynching Treatment Variable Lag

Figure A4: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration to Various Geographies with Lynching and Boll Weevil 3-Year Treatment Lag

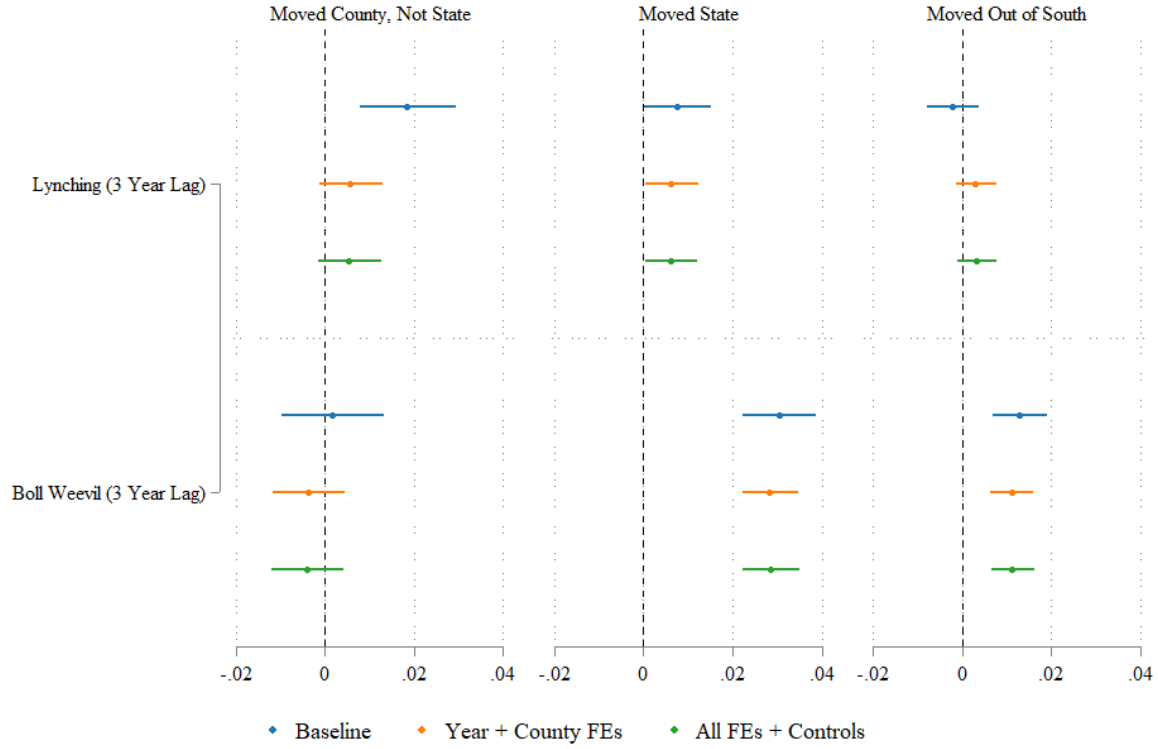


Table A5: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration to Various Geographies with Lynching and Boll Weevil 3-Year Treatment Lag

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
VARIABLES	Moved County Not State	Moved County Not State	Moved County Not State	Moved State	Moved State	Moved State	Moved Out of South	Moved Out of South	Moved Out of South
Lynching (3 Year Lag)	0.0186*** (0.00551)	0.00584 (0.00363)	0.00549 (0.00362)	0.00768** (0.00379)	0.00632** (0.00305)	0.00624** (0.00299)	-0.00202 (0.00301)	0.00320 (0.00231)	0.00326 (0.00224)
Boll Weevil (3 Year Lag)	0.00169 (0.00581)	-0.00368 (0.00414)	-0.00389 (0.00412)	0.0305*** (0.00421)	0.0284*** (0.00316)	0.0286*** (0.00318)	0.0130*** (0.00306)	0.0112*** (0.00244)	0.0114*** (0.00242)
Observations	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113
R-squared	0.000	0.034	0.039	0.002	0.026	0.032	0.001	0.027	0.033
Year + County FEs	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

Controls include the individual's gender, urban status, age, family size, and literacy status. Additionally, controls include the average travel cost to all other US counties from the individual's starting county. Clustered standard errors by county id are in parentheses where *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

Figure A5: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration to Community Types with Broader Lynching and Boll Weevil 3-Year Treatment Lag

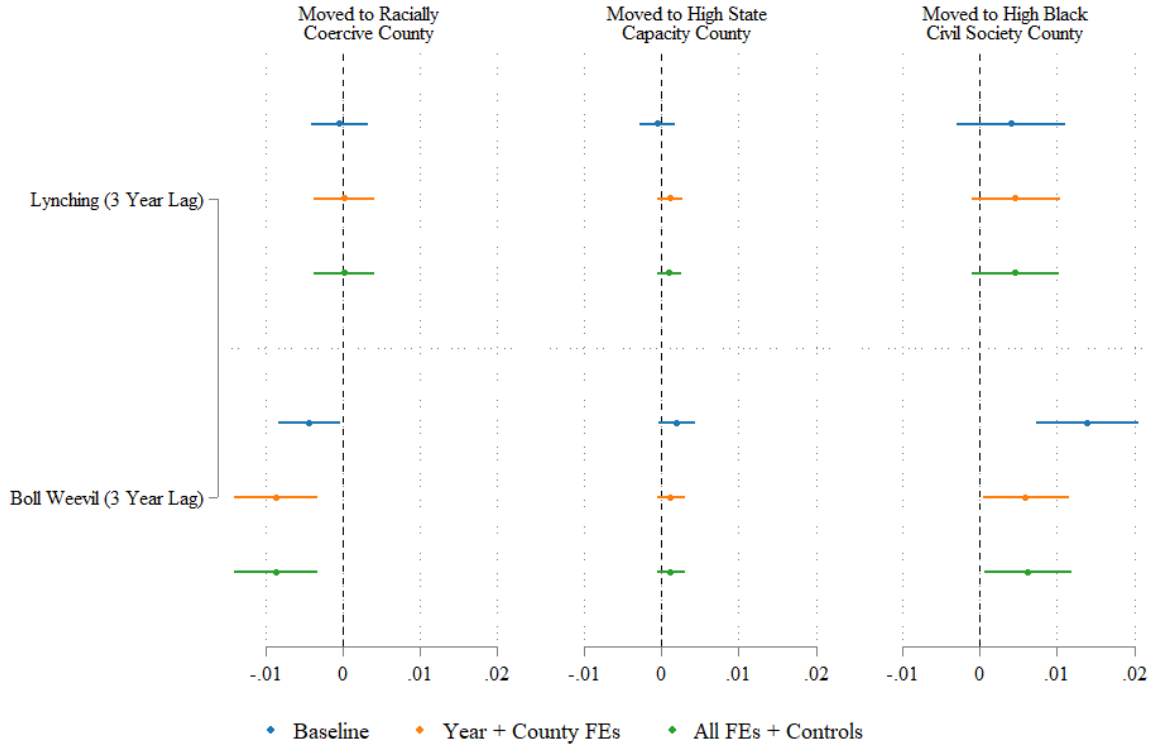


Table A6: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration to Community Types with Lynching and Boll Weevil 3-Year Treatment Lag

VARIABLES	(1) High Racial Coercion	(2) High Racial Coercion	(3) High Racial Coercion	(4) High State Capacity	(5) High State Capacity	(6) High State Capacity	(7) High Black Civil Society	(8) High Black Civil Society	(9) High Black Civil Society
Lynching (3 Year Lag)	-0.000377 (0.00189)	0.000239 (0.00198)	0.000189 (0.00198)	-0.000452 (0.00114)	0.00115 (0.000803)	0.00106 (0.000826)	0.00407 (0.00355)	0.00468 (0.00293)	0.00465 (0.00288)
Boll Weevil (3 Year Lag)	-0.00428** (0.00204)	-0.00861*** (0.00277)	-0.00856*** (0.00276)	0.00203* (0.00122)	0.00129 (0.000940)	0.00125 (0.000915)	0.0139*** (0.00336)	0.00601** (0.00285)	0.00624** (0.00284)
Observations	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113	5,916,113
R-squared	0.000	0.019	0.020	0.000	0.033	0.034	0.000	0.021	0.027
Year + County FEs	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

Controls include the individual's gender, urban status, age, family size, and literacy status. Additionally, controls include the average travel cost to all other US counties from the individual's starting county. Clustered standard errors by county id are in parentheses where *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

No Children Results

Figure A6: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration to Various Geographies Excluding Children

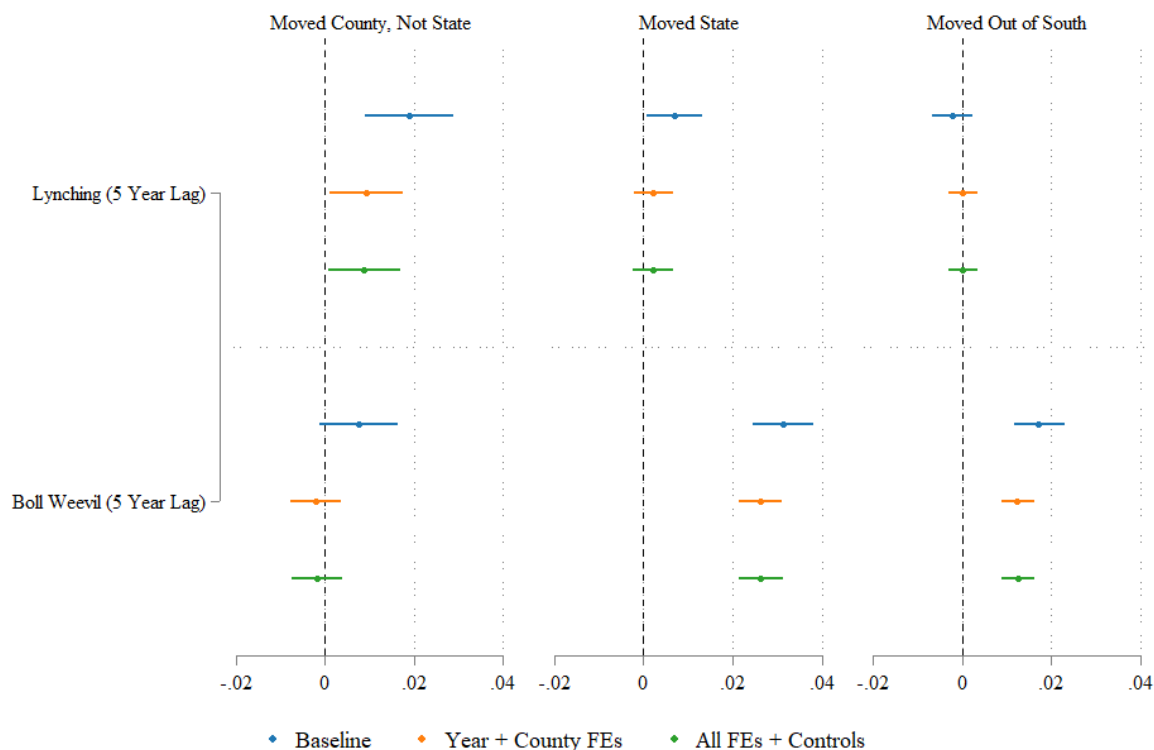


Table A7: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration to Various Geographies Excluding Children

VARIABLES	(1) Moved County Not State	(2) Moved County Not State	(3) Moved County Not State	(4) Moved State	(5) Moved State	(6) Moved State	(7) Moved North	(8) Moved North	(9) Moved North
Lynching (5 Year Lag)	0.0190*** (0.00507)	0.00933** (0.00418)	0.00893** (0.00413)	0.00700** (0.00315)	0.00233 (0.00228)	0.00226 (0.00231)	-0.00210 (0.00234)	0.000225 (0.00167)	0.000287 (0.00168)
Boll Weevil (5 Year Lag)	0.00757* (0.00448)	-0.00199 (0.00291)	-0.00175 (0.00290)	0.0314*** (0.00345)	0.0262*** (0.00246)	0.0264*** (0.00248)	0.0174*** (0.00286)	0.0125*** (0.00193)	0.0126*** (0.00192)
Observations	2,754,661	2,754,661	2,754,661	2,754,661	2,754,661	2,754,661	2,754,661	2,754,661	2,754,661
R-squared	0.001	0.032	0.039	0.003	0.025	0.035	0.001	0.024	0.033
Year + County FEs	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

Controls include the individual's gender, urban status, age, family size, and literacy status. Additionally, controls include the average travel cost to all other US counties from the individual's starting county. Clustered standard errors by county id are in parentheses where *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

Figure A7: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration to Community Types Excluding Children

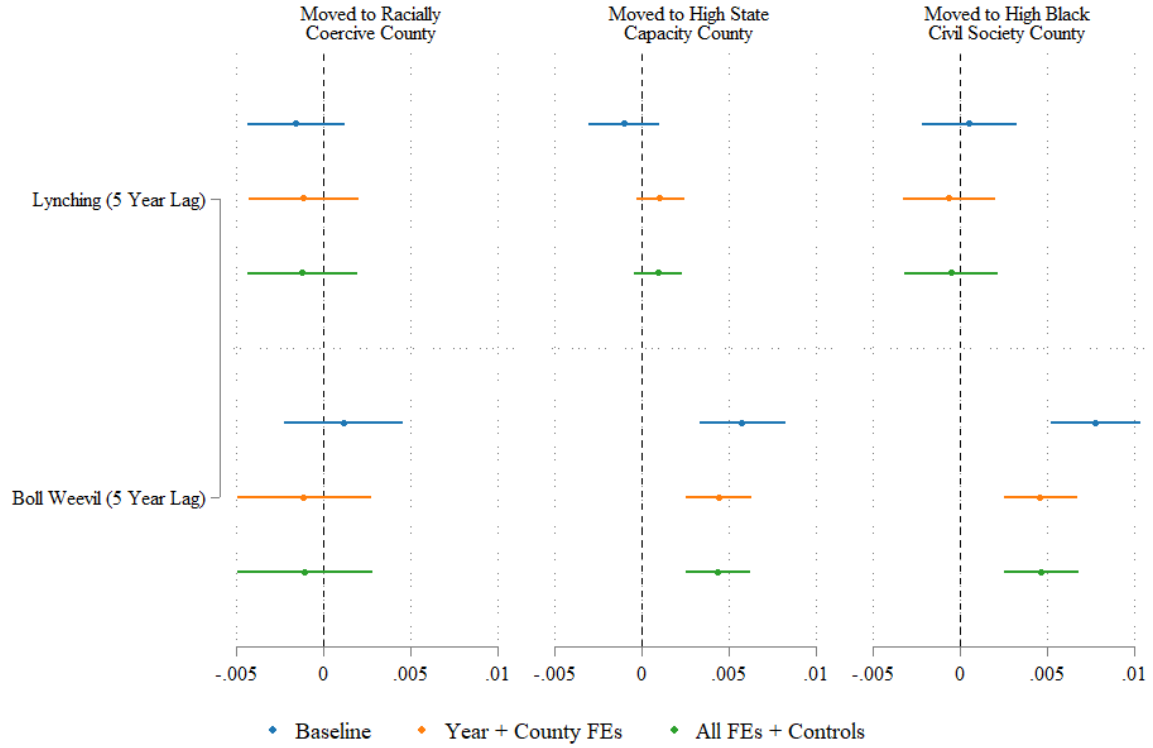


Table A8: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration to Community Types Excluding Children

VARIABLES	(1) High Racial Coercion	(2) High Racial Coercion	(3) High Racial Coercion	(4) High State Capacity	(5) High State Capacity	(6) High State Capacity	(7) High Black Civil Society	(8) High Black Civil Society	(9) High Black Civil Society
Lynching (5 Year Lag)	-0.00153 (0.00143)	-0.00109 (0.00160)	-0.00118 (0.00162)	-0.000974 (0.00194)	0.00109 (0.000694)	0.000987 (0.000703)	0.000547 (0.00139)	-0.000601 (0.00135)	-0.000502 (0.00135)
Boll Weevil (5 Year Lag)	0.00122 (0.00174)	-0.00108 (0.00197)	-0.00103 (0.00196)	0.00580*** (0.00126)	0.00444*** (0.000955)	0.00443*** (0.000945)	0.00779*** (0.00131)	0.00463*** (0.00108)	0.00470*** (0.00108)
Observations	2,754,661	2,754,661	2,754,661	2,754,661	2,754,661	2,754,661	2,754,661	2,754,661	2,754,661
R-squared	0.000	0.016	0.019	0.001	0.032	0.033	0.001	0.017	0.020
Year + County FEs	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

Controls include the individual's gender, urban status, age, family size, and literacy status. Additionally, controls include the average travel cost to all other US counties from the individual's starting county. Clustered standard errors by county id are in parentheses where *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

Alternative Black Civil Society Threshold

Figure A8: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration to High Black Civil Society County

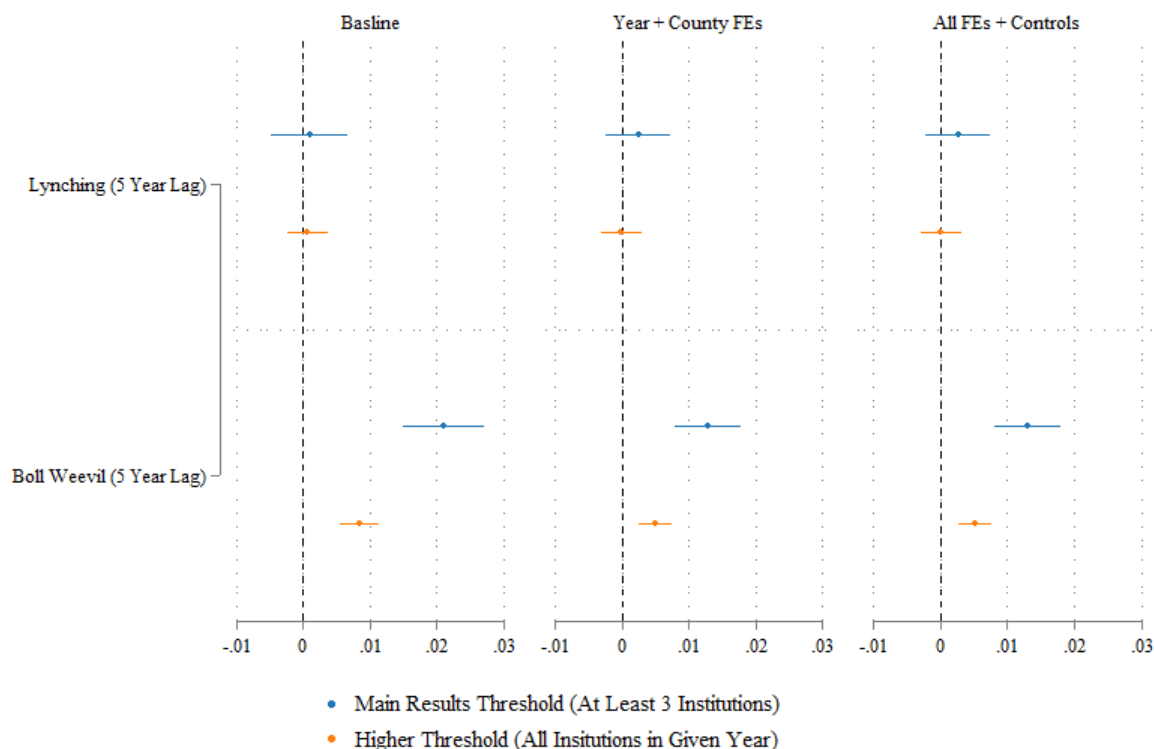


Table A9: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration to High Black Civil Society County

VARIABLES	(1) Black Civil Society (Low Threshold)	(2) Black Civil Society (Low Threshold)	(3) Black Civil Society (Low Threshold)	(4) Black Civil Society (High Threshold)	(5) Black Civil Society (High Threshold)	(6) Black Civil Society (High Threshold)
Lynching (5 Year Lag)	0.000968 (0.00294)	0.00248 (0.00245)	0.00263 (0.00248)	0.000625 (0.00153)	-5.02e-05 (0.00152)	0.000110 (0.00153)
Boll Weevil (5 Year Lag)	0.0210*** (0.00314)	0.0129*** (0.00252)	0.0131*** (0.00252)	0.00840*** (0.00147)	0.00502*** (0.00125)	0.00510*** (0.00124)
Observations	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128
R-squared	0.001	0.022	0.028	0.001	0.020	0.021
Year + County FEs	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

Controls include the individual's gender, urban status, age, family size, and literacy status. Additionally, controls include the average travel cost to all other US counties from the individual's starting county. Clustered standard errors by county id are in parentheses where ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.10.

Sub-Setting Black Civil Society

Table A10: Effect of Lynching and Boll Weevil on Probability of Migration to High Black Civil Society County (Sub-components)

VARIABLES	(1) Black Church Presence	(2) Black Publication	(3) HBCU	(4) NNBL	(5) NAACP
Lynching (5 Year Lag)	0.0109** (0.00508)	0.00534** (0.00257)	-0.000849 (0.00182)	0.000793 (0.00246)	-1.07e-05 (0.00382)
Boll Weevil (5 Year Lag)	0.0210*** (0.00386)	0.0220*** (0.00253)	0.00903*** (0.00182)	0.0224*** (0.00244)	0.0164*** (0.00254)
Observations	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	5,916,128	4,163,004
R-squared	0.044	0.023	0.026	0.029	0.033
Year + County FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Controls include the individual's gender, urban status, age, family size, and literacy status. Additionally, controls include the average travel cost to all other US counties from the individual's starting county. Clustered standard errors by county id are in parentheses where ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.10.