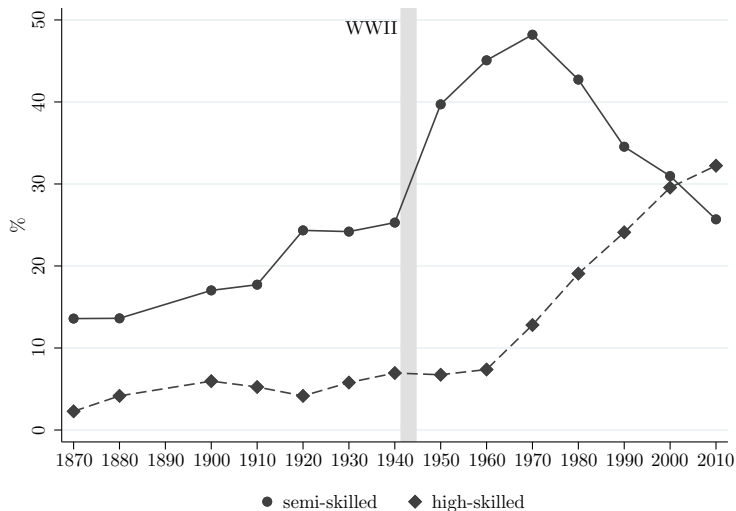# World War II and Black Economic Progress

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July 9, 2020
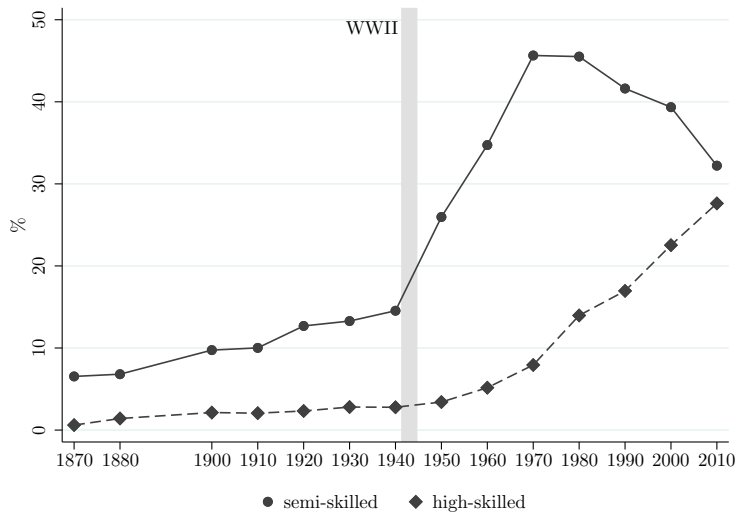
Motivation

Semi- and High-Skilled Employment among Black Men (Non-South)

Motivation

Semi- and High-Skilled Employment among Black Men (South)

Research Question

What contributed to black occupational upgrading in the South?

- Almost one million blacks upgraded (Wolfbein, 1947)
- Black-white wage convergence (Margo, 1995; Collins, 2000)

My proposed answer:

- counties with more WWII deaths among semi-skilled whites saw more blacks upgraded from low- to semi-skilled jobs
    - tight wartime labor market
    - blacks drafted and killed at lower rates
- broke down racial barriers to entry (Weaver, 1945; Wolfbein, 1947)

Data

I digitized 310,000 WWII casualty records for the Army and Air Force

- matched them with the WWII enlistment records (NARA)
- using soldiers' unique Army serial number
- used to produce race/skill-group specific casualty and draft rates

County level Census data for 1,388 Southern counties from 1920 to 1970

- information on employment by race and skill group
- other county level information (% black population, % rural population, WWII related spending, manufacturing and agricultural employment, Rosenwald schools, capital in agriculture, ...)

Geographic Distribution of WWII Casualties

WWII Casualty Rates Among Semi-Skilled Whites in Percent

4.10 - 22.22
3.16 - 4.10
2.38 - 3.16
1.16 - 2.38
0.00 - 1.16
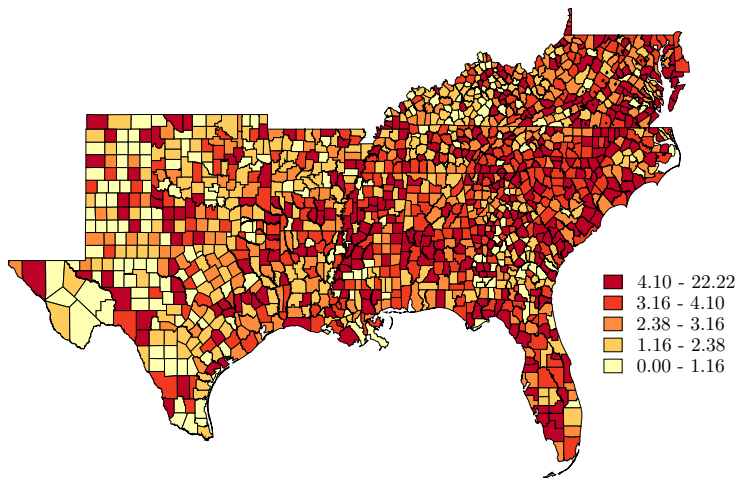
Empirical Strategy

I estimate the following difference-in-differences model,

% semi-skilled blacks$_{ct} = \alpha_c + \lambda_t + \beta$ Casualty rate$_c \times$ Post-war$_t + X'_{ct}\phi + \eta_{ct}$

- α_c county fixed effects
- λ_t time fixed effects
- X_{ct} vector of controls
- η_{ct} error terms
- standard errors clustered at the county level

Assume: parallel trends, no time-varying confounders

Main Result

County-Level Difference-in-Differences Results, 1920-1970

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Outcome: % blacks in semi-skilled jobs (pre-war mean = 12.433)					
Casualty rate$_c \times$ Post-war$_t$	0.515***	0.546***	0.508***	0.548***	0.587***	0.636***
	(0.119)	(0.141)	(0.144)	(0.148)	(0.214)	(0.122)
Controls		Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
1940 controls $\times$ time			Yes			
State $\times$ year FE				Yes		
Linear county time trends					Yes	
Doubly-robust selection						Yes
Observations	7,737	5,713	5,692	5,713	5,713	6,429
Counties	1,388	1,320	994	1,320	1,320	1,375
Adj. R^2	0.855	0.877	0.873	0.883	0.915	0.869
Oster's δ	1.273	1.291	1.112	1.486	0.614	1.494

Main Result

Dynamic Coefficient Plot
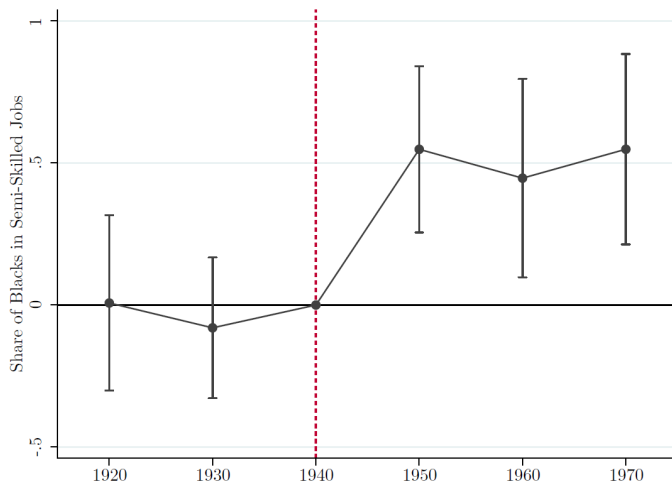
Additional Points

This effect exists for semi-skilled white casualties but not for casualties in other occupational and racial groups.

The effect is stronger

- in counties that had more farm capital and manufacturing in 1940
- outside the South (1.5x bigger, using individual data)
- in manufacturing
    - no effect in placebo industries: telecom, retail, public administration

No evidence that the effects are driven by education of blacks, migration, WWII related spending, quality of soldiers or volunteering, anti-black sentiment, prior New Deal spending.