



The economic geography and race of the land, property & wealth owners in the United States, 1850-70

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Abstract

The debate over market/individual regulation and freedom is not a new discussion. However, a clear understanding of the freedoms (or the lack of freedoms) and their economic consequences on early black Americans provides an informative understanding to the freedoms (or the lack of freedoms), and their economic consequences on other, modern ethnic groups. Leon Litwick (1961) and Ira Berlin (1974) provide the most comprehensive historical accounts of free blacks in the north and south, respectively. This study attempts to build upon their successes by presenting one of the first national studies that combines the legal, demographic and economic experiences of free blacks, with an extended analysis of antebellum wealth inequality. In doing so, I investigate the link between the social asymmetry and economic asymmetry among early blacks and whites in the United States of America. For the empirical study, I used cross-sectional variables from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample (IPUMS), I developed informative conditional ratios, and I employ least squares statistical analyses. This study finds that economic differences among ethnic groups, as measured by differences between early blacks and whites, are intertwined with asymmetrical freedoms.

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Introduction

The Mid 19th Century Economic Geography of Whites and Blacks in the United States of America

Johann Heinrich Von Thünen (1966, Wikimedia 2004) was the first to describe the reasoning behind local residency decisions in the book entitled, "The Isolated State". Ultimately, the location of residence depended on the return from the trade of the head of household, conditional on the cost of transportation. Hypothetically, those enslaved, or once enslaved, received the lowest concurrent return from their trade and sought the best opportunity [and earliest opportunity] to enhance their returns. Among those that were not able to secure immediate, sustainable property and wealth, this likely required long distance travel and residence to more socially receptive, locally dense communities, away from the

physically, psychologically and economic suppressive spatial areas. This produces the likelihood of group-specific expectations if groups had different mean professions and different ranges in professional opportunities. This analysis likely applies for slave state-free state residency decisions, regional residency decisions, and migration decisions described below.

The Mid 19th century state slavery laws and wealth of whites and blacks in the United States of America

Free blacks in free states had nominal real estate wealth and property advantages relative to free blacks in slave states. Table 1 shows that free blacks, living in slave states, possessed \$380 in nominal total wealth in 1860 prior to emancipation.

Table 1: Mid19th Century State Slave Laws and Mean Wealth of Whites and Blacks

Slave States	Overall			Free Blacks			All Blacks			Whites		
	1850	1860	1870	1850	1860	1870	1850	1860	1870	1850	1860	1870
Real Estate Wealth	839	1,373	651	83	189	33	870	1,456	1,282			
Other Wealth		1,784	317		191	42		1,895	598			
Total Wealth		3,157	967		380	75		3,351	1,880			
<u>Price-Adjusted (1860=100)</u>												
Real Estate Wealth	973	1,545	406	95	206	20	1,010	1,639	800			
Other Wealth		2,011	198		205	26		2,137	374			
Total Wealth		3,556	604		411	47		3,776	1,173			
Sample	10,174	13,732	33,991	408	893	17,188	9,766	12,834	16,798			
Free States												
Real Estate Wealth	994	1,482	1,902	150	312	288	1,007	1,511	1,963			
Other Wealth		633	738		146	121		645	761			
Total Wealth		2,115	2,640		458	408		2,156	2,725			
<u>Price-Adjusted (1860=100)</u>												
Real Estate Wealth	1,085	1,483	1,307	165	313	197	1,099	1,512	1,349			
Other Wealth		631	503		146	83		643	519			
Total Wealth		2,114	1,810		458	280		2,155	1,868			
Sample	24,928	39,327	52,366	363	809	1,748	24,565	38,408	50,458			

Source: Information collected, calculated and compiled by James Curtis Jr (2002); IPUMS

This was lower than the \$458 possessed by free black in free states. Using wealth means in Table 1, free blacks in slave states had 11.3 percent (380/3351) of white total wealth in slave states in 1860 while free blacks had 21.2 percent (458/2156) of white total wealth in free states. Even when ignoring differences in total wealth levels among blacks and whites, blacks earned a higher premium for living in free states than whites. Note that free blacks in Louisiana, which engaged in philanthropic slave-owning activities in order to by free slaves, caused other measures of average wealth in slave states to exceed average other wealth in free states in 1860. Overall, these results confirm that reduced legal barriers, greater social receptiveness and enhanced economic opportunities contributed to the wealth advantages of free blacks in free states.

The Mid19th Century state slave laws and real estate wealth in the United States of America: A comparison among black Americans over time

First consider real estate wealth differences of blacks living in

free states versus blacks living in slave states before and after emancipation. Table shows that free blacks living in slave states possessed nominal real estate wealth amounts of \$83 in 1850 and \$189 in 1860. This was substantially lower than the \$150 (1850) and \$312 (1860) possessed by free blacks in free states. Additionally, the ratio of free state-slave state wealth among free blacks did not change much prior to emancipation: Table 2 also shows that the free state-slave state ratio of average real estate wealth among free blacks remained relatively constant at 1.7 in 1850 and 1.5 in 1860. When adjusted for regional prices, the differences here are not significant. Free blacks in slave states held \$95 and \$206 in 1850 and 1860, respectively, while free blacks in free states held \$165 and \$313 in price-adjusted real estate wealth. Free blacks in free states were also more likely to hold real estate than free blacks in slave states. Table 2 shows that 22 percent of free blacks in 1850 and 29 percent of free blacks in 1860, who lived in free states, owned positive amounts of real estate wealth.

Table 2: Mid19th Century Skill and Mean Property Ownership of Whites and Blacks

Slave	Overall			Free Blacks			All Blacks			Whites		
	1850	1860	1870	1850	1860	1870	1850	1860	1870	1850	1860	1870
Real Property Holders	0.51	0.53	0.28	0.17	0.21	0.05	0.52	0.55	0.51			
Other Property Holders		0.84	0.44		0.56	0.20		0.86	0.69			
Real or Other Property Holders		0.86	0.47		0.59	0.21		0.88	0.73			
Sample	10,174	13,732	33,991	408	893	17,188	9,766	12,834	16,798			
Free												
Real Property Holders	0.52	0.55	0.54	0.22	0.29	0.24	0.53	0.55	0.55			
Other Property Holders		0.79	0.69		0.54	0.36		0.79	0.70			
Real or Other Property Holders		0.82	0.75		0.58	0.45		0.82	0.76			
Sample	24,928	39,327	52,366	363	809	1,748	24,565	38,408	50,458			

Source: Information collected, calculated and compiled by James Curtis Jr (2002); IPUMS

This was greater than the 17 percent of free blacks in 1850 and 21 percent of free blacks in 1860 that lived in slave states and possessed positive amounts of real estate wealth. Table 11b shows that the ratio of free black real estate holders (per hundred free blacks in free states) to the number of real estate holders (per hundred free blacks in slave states) also remained

relatively constant at 1.3 in 1850 and 1.4 in 1860. By 1870, the return to living in free states grew dramatically. Table 10c shows that the ratio of free state to slave state average real estate wealth for all blacks—which includes ex-slaves who held little or no real estate property—grew to 9.6.

Table 3: Mid19th Century Comparative Wealth Ratios and Comparative Property Ownership Ratios of Whites and Blacks, Based on State Slave Laws

	All Blacks			Whites			Black-White Ratio		
	1850	1860	1870	1850	1860	1870	1850	1860	1870
i) Free/Slave Mean Wealth Ratio									
Real Estate	1.7	1.5	9.6	1.1	0.9	1.7	1.6	1.6	5.7
Other		0.7	3.1		0.3	1.4		2.4	2.3
Total		1.1	6.0		0.6	1.6		2.0	3.8
ii) Free/Slave Mean Property-Holding Ratio									
Real Estate	1.3	1.4	4.9	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.3	1.4	4.5
Other		1.0	1.9		0.9	1.0		1.1	1.8
Total		1.0	2.1		0.9	1.0		1.1	2.0

Source: Information collected, calculated and compiled by James Curtis Jr (2002); IPUMS

This implies that, on average, ex-slaves living in free states possessed ten dollars for every dollar of real estate wealth owned by an ex-slave living in a slave state. Yet the relative sample sizes suggest that approximately one in ten (1748/17188) blacks took advantage of the large free state premium in 1870. Similarly, Table 10c shows that the ratio of black property holders per hundred in free states to property holders per hundred in slave states was 4.9—for every free black real estate holder (per hundred free blacks) in a slave state, there were five (per hundred free blacks) who owned real estate in free states.

The Mid19th century state slavery laws and real estate wealth in the United States of America: A comparison of white and black Americans over time

The real estate wealth advantage of blacks in free states was observed when comparing the average real estate wealth of blacks to average real estate wealth of whites before and after emancipation. Using wealth means in Table 10a, free blacks in slave states had 9.5 percent (83/870) of white real estate wealth in 1850 and 13.0 percent (189/1456) of white real estate wealth in 1860. The situation was better for free blacks living in free states: Free blacks had 9.8 percent (150/1007) of white real estate wealth in 1850 and 20.6 percent (312/1511) of white real estate wealth in 1860. White nominal real estate wealth was larger in free states than slave states in 1850 and 1860. However, 1860 whites in slave states (\$1639) had slightly more price-adjusted real estate wealth whites in free states (\$1512). Unpaid labor in the south began to provide macroeconomic advantages in 1860 to southern real estate holders due to the lower price environment.

The proportion of free black property holders, living in free states, relative to white property holders, living in free states exceeded the same proportion for slave states. Using results in Table 10b the ratio of free black property holders (per hundred free blacks) to white property holders (per hundred whites) in

slave states was approximately 1:3 (0.17:0.52) in 1850 and 2:5 (0.21: 0.55) in 1860. In free states, the ratios rose to approximately 2:5 (0.22: 0.53) in 1850 and 1:2 (0.29: 0.55) in 1860.

By 1870, the ratio of black to white average real estate wealth and property holders fell significantly with the inclusion of ex-slaves in the sample but the advantage of free states remained. Using wealth means from Table 10a, 1870 blacks living in slave states held 2.6 percent (33/1282) of the real estate wealth of whites while blacks living in free states held 14.7 percent (288/1963) of the real estate wealth of whites. Similarly, using the percentage of property holders, the ratio of black real estate property holders (per hundred free blacks) to white property holders (per hundred whites) was approximately 1:10 (0.05:0.51) in slave states and approximately 2:5 (0.24:0.55) in free states in 1870.

Using the *comparative wealth ratio* for real estate wealth, we can ignore the absolute differences in black and white real estate wealth and ascertain the advantages to living in free states in the presence of wealth constraints. Since the ratio in Table 10b exceeds one in 1850 (1.6) and 1860 (1.6), free blacks obtained higher return to living in free states versus living in slave states than whites living in free states. The ratio in Table 10c grew to 5.7 in 1870 suggesting a dramatic growth in the premium to living in free states after emancipation. This interesting result may suggest that federal-level emancipation guidelines were not fully executed in the former slave states causing higher returns to living in free states, which were already complying with state-level emancipation guidelines. Similar results were obtained using the *comparative property ownership ratio* for real estate property in Table 10c. Since the ratio exceeds one in 1850 (1.3) and 1860 (1.4), free blacks obtained higher return to living in free states vs. slave states than whites living in free states. The ratio grew to 4.5 in 1870, again, suggesting a dramatic growth in the premium to living in free states after emancipation.

The Mid19th century state slave laws and other wealth in the United States of America: A comparison among black Americans over time

A surprising empirical result was that blacks in slave states had advantages in other measures of wealth before emancipation. However, these advantages were reversed after emancipation. Table 10a shows that free blacks, living in slave states, possessed \$189 in nominal other wealth in 1860 prior to emancipation. This was slightly higher than the \$146 possessed by free blacks in free states. Thus, free blacks in free states possessed 70 percent of the wealth of free blacks in slave states in 1860. When adjusted for regional prices, the differences here are not significant. Free blacks in slave states held \$191 in 1860 while free blacks in free states held \$146 in price-adjusted real estate wealth.

Free blacks in slave states were also more likely to hold other property than free blacks in free states. Table 10b shows that 56 percent of free blacks, living in slave states, possessed positive amounts of other wealth in 1860. This was slightly greater than 54 percent of free blacks who lived in slave states in 1860 and possessed positive amounts of other wealth.

These surprising results were driven by large free black wealth in the southwest. A majority of blacks resided in the south in 1860 and 1870 and a large number of 1860 free blacks in the southwestern sample were mulatto ‘owners’ of slaves. Free black ‘ownership’ of slaves was not uncommon. “The census records show that the majority of the Negro slaves were such from the point of view of philanthropy. In many instances, the husband purchased the wife or vice versa.... Most of such Negro proprietors lived in Louisiana, South Carolina, Maryland and Virginia” (Woodson 1924, pp.v-viii).

However, by 1870, the return to living in free states grew dramatically. Table 10c shows that the ratio of free state to slave state real estate wealth for all blacks—which includes ex-slaves who held little or no real estate property—grew to 3.1. This implies that ex-slaves, living in free states, possessed three dollars for every dollar of wealth owned by an ex-slave living in a slave state. Similarly, Table 11b shows that the ratio of black property holders (per hundred free blacks) in free states to property holders (per hundred free blacks) in slave states was 1.9—for every free black real estate holder (per hundred free blacks) in a slave state, there were two free black real estate holders (per hundred free blacks) in free states.

The Mid19th century state slavery laws and other wealth in the United States of America: A comparison of white and black Americans over time

The free state advantage was observed when comparing other wealth of blacks to other wealth of whites before and after emancipation. Using wealth means in Table 10a, free blacks in slave states had 10.1 percent (191/1895) of white real estate wealth in 1860 and 7.0 percent (42/598) of white real estate wealth in 1870. The situation was better for free blacks living in free states: Free blacks had 22.6 percent (146/645) of white real estate wealth in 1860 and 15.9 percent (121/761) of white real estate wealth in 1870.

The proportion of free blacks holding other forms of property and living in free states relative to whites holding other forms of property and living in free states exceeded the same proportion for slave states. The ratio of free blacks (per

hundred free blacks) to whites (per hundred whites) with other forms of property in slave states was approximately 2:3 (0.56: 0.86) in 1860 and 1:3 (0.20: 0.69) and 1870. In Free states, the ratio rose to approximately 2:3 (0.54: 0.79) in 1860 and 1:2 (0.36: 0.70) in 1870.

Using the *comparative wealth ratio* for other forms of wealth, we can ignore the absolute differences in black and white wealth and ascertain the advantages to living in Free states in the presence of wealth constraints. Since the ratio in Table 10c exceeds one in 1860 (2.4) and 1870 (2.3), free blacks obtained higher returns to living in free states versus living slave states than whites living in free states. Similar results were obtained using the *comparative property ownership ratio* for other forms of property. Since the ratio reported in Table 10c exceeds one in 1860 (1.1) and 1870 (1.8), free blacks obtained higher returns to living in free states versus living in slave states than whites living in free states.

The Mid19th century state slave laws and total wealth in the United States of America: A comparison among black Americans over time

When summing up real estate and other forms of wealth, empirical results show that blacks in free states were better off before and after emancipation. Table 10a shows that free blacks, living in slave states, possessed \$380 in nominal total wealth in 1860 prior to emancipation. This was lower than the \$458 possessed by free black in free states. This produces 1.1 to 1.0 ratio of free black wealth in free states to free black wealth in slave states in 1860. Note that free blacks in free states were equally likely to hold total property as free blacks in slave states. Table 10b shows that 59 percent of free blacks, living in slave states, possessed positive amounts of total wealth in 1860. This was approximately the same as the 58 percent of free blacks that lived in slave states in 1860 and possessed positive amounts of total wealth. Again, the results were driven by large free black wealth in the southwest where a large number of 1860 free blacks in the southwestern sample were mulatto ‘owners’ of slaves.

By 1870, the return to living in free states grew dramatically. Table 10c shows that the ratio of free state to slave state real estate wealth for all blacks—which includes ex-slaves who held little or no real estate property—grew to 6.0. This implies that ex-slaves, living in free states, possessed six dollars for every dollar of total wealth owned by an ex-slave living in a slave state. Similarly, Table 10c shows that the ratio of black total property holders (per hundred blacks) in free states to total property holders (per hundred blacks) in slave states was 2.1—for every free black real estate holder in a slave state, there were two free black real estate holders in free states.

The Mid19th century state slavery laws and total wealth in the United States of America: A comparison of white and black Americans over time

The free state advantage was observed when comparing total wealth of blacks to total wealth of whites before and after emancipation. Using wealth means in Table 10a, free blacks in slave states had 11.3 percent (380/3351) of white total wealth in 1860 and 4.0 percent (75/1880) of white total wealth in 1870. The situation was better for free blacks living in free states: Free blacks had 21.2 percent (458/2156) of white total

wealth in 1860 and 15.0 percent (408/2725) of white real estate wealth in 1870.

The proportion of free black total property holders, living in free states, relative to white total property holders, living in free states exceeded the same proportion for slave states. The ratio of free black total property holders (per hundred free blacks) to white total property holders (per hundred whites) in slave states was approximately 2:3 (0.59: 0.88) in 1860 and 1:4 (0.21: 0.73) in 1870. In Free states, the ratio rose to approximately 7:10 (0.58 0.82) in 1860 and 6:10 (0.45: 0.76) in 1870.

Using the *comparative wealth ratio* for total wealth, we can ignore the absolute differences in black and white wealth and ascertain the advantages to living in Free states in the presence of wealth constraints. Since the ratio in Table 10a exceeds one in 1860 (2.0) and 1870 (3.8), free blacks obtained higher returns to living in free states versus living in slave states than whites living in free states. Similar results were obtained using the *comparative property ownership ratio* for total property. Since the ratio reported in Table 10c exceeds one in 1860 (1.1) and 1870 (2.0), free blacks obtained higher return to living in free states versus living in slave states than whites living in free states.

Conclusion

This is initial evidence of symmetry between the socio-economic environment and socio-economic outcomes.

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