“For Democracy and a Caste System?”: World War II, Race, and Democratic Inclusion in the United States

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War and American Politics

- Growing calls to examine the relationship between international factors and domestic American politics (Katznelson and Shefter 2002; Mayhew 2005; Kier and Krebs 2010)
- Gourevitch 1978; Tilly 1995
Contemporaneous Accounts
Contemporary Perspectives: Positive Relationship

- Sneaks in as “common sense” (e.g., Kelly 1987)
- Certain wartime factors necessary for greater racial equality (Klinkner and Smith 2002)
Contemporary Perspectives: Negative Relationship

- War coincides with racial crowd violence (Kryder 2000)
- “Many thought they had fought to defend, not overturn, racial customs” (Sokol 2006)
Schickler et al.

- Northern Democratic parties liberalized because of constituent pressure and “ideological logic of the New Deal itself” (Feinstein and Schickler 2008)
- No central, causal role for war in public opinion research (Caughey and Schickler 2011; Schickler 2013)
**H1:** World War II led to broad shifts in white attitudes toward race and civil rights
Data and Methodology

- Public opinion surveys from the 1930s and 1940s
- Weighting to correct for known biases
Analytical Perspectives

- Variation over time: attitudes toward federal antilynching legislation; measures of racial prejudice
- Cross-sectional snapshots: measures of racial prejudice
Results: temporal variation in racial prejudice

Hypothesis supported? Weakly yes
Results: temporal variation in attitudes toward federal antilynching legislation

Hypothesis supported? No
Results: snapshots of subgroup variation

- Consistent effects: Southern Region, Jewish Religious Identification, Education
- Less consistent effects: Partisanship, Urban Residence, Catholic Religious Identification, Gender
- No identifiable effect: Age
Conclusion

- The war did not coincide with broad shifts in white racial attitudes
- Some evidence of slight liberalization on racial prejudice
- If anything, evidence of hardening opposition towards antilynching legislation
Future Work

- Effect on white veterans relative to civilian counterparts
- Archival research to assess effect of war on elite behavior
- Assessing the direction of change: top down or bottom up?
- Empirically grounded assessment of ways the war did – and did not – alter the limits of American democracy