NBER WORKING PAPER SERIES

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Working Paper 18802
http://www.nber.org/papers/w18802

NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH
1050 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02138
February 2013

We thank Rodney J. Andrews, Alan Barreca, William A. Darity, Robert W. Fogel, Claudia D. Goldin, Darrick Hamilton, Samuel Meyers, Paul W. Rhode, Richard H. Steckel, Franklin D. Wilson, seminar audiences at Harvard University, University of Minnesota, University of Wisconsin, participants in The Second Wave conference, NBER Summer Institute, Southern Economic Association and American Economic Association annual meetings for useful comments. Stanley L. Engerman provided particularly detailed comments and advice, for which we are grateful. The usual disclaimer applies. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Bureau of Economic Research.

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NBER Working Paper No. 18802
February 2013
JEL No. J1,N3

ABSTRACT

We document the existence of a distinctive national naming pattern for African Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We use census records to identify a set of high-frequency names among African Americans that were unlikely to be held by whites. We confirm the distinctiveness of the names using over five million death certificates from Alabama, Illinois and North Carolina from the early twentieth century. The names we identify in the census records are similarly distinctive in these three independent data sources. Surprisingly, approximately the same percentage of African Americans had "black names" historically as they do today. No name that we identify as a historical black name, however, is a contemporary black name. The literature has assumed that black names are a product of the Civil Rights Movement, yet our results suggest that they are a long-standing cultural norm among African Americans. This is the first evidence that distinctively racialized names existed long before the Civil Rights Era, establishing a new fact in the historical literature.

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"[Names] had been their sole identity during bondage, often the only remaining link to parents from whom they had been separated and who had initially named them. No matter how harsh a bondage they had endured, few freed slaves revealed any desire to obliterate their entire past or family heritage, and those whose given names or surnames reflected kinship ties tended to guard them zealously."

- Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery*, 1979

"As Negroes...we are apt...to be more than ordinarily concerned with the veiled and mysterious events, the fusions of blood, the furtive couplings, the business transactions, the violations of faith and loyalty, the assaults; yes, and the unrecognized and unrecognizable loves through which our names were handed down to us."

- Ralph Ellison, "Hidden Name and Complex Fate" in *Shadow and Act*, 1964

1 Introduction

Experimental, audit, and quasi-experimental studies have found that those with racialized first names are negatively affected. Busse and Seraydarian [1977] find that distinctively African American names are viewed negatively. Bertrand and Mullainathan [2004] find that those with distinctively African American names have lower call-back rates for employment interviews. Milkman et al. [2012] find that college professors are significantly less likely to meet with students with African American names to discuss graduate school. Figlio [2005] finds that teachers have lower *ex ante* expectations of children with distinctively African American names, even those that are not African American themselves, and that this is related to student outcomes and test scores. When recent analysis revealed racial disparities in NIH grant awards researchers surmised that grant reviewers, who do not know the race of grant applicants, used first names to infer race [Ginther et al. 2011].

Given the unique social history of African Americans, it is remarkable that the historical development of racialized names has received little scholarly attention. The existing literature on racialized names is surprisingly ahistorical. Black names are assumed to be a modern phenomenon that first appeared with the Civil Rights Movement [Fryer and Levitt 2004]. There have been no studies which investigate the existence or persistence of racialized names in the past. London and Morgan [1994], for example, use census data from Mississippi in 1910 and argue that racial naming conventions did not exist, but their analysis is restricted to the most popular names overall. Even today, the most popular names (John, Michael, James, etc.) are not racially distinctive. Other

than studies of the names of African American college students [Eagleson and Clifford 1945] and reviews of other smaller and non-representative samples [Puckett 1938, 1975; Gaither 1920], we know of no study that makes a systematic attempt to identify African American naming patterns before the 1960s.[1]

This paper documents the existence of distinctively African American first names long before the Civil Rights Era. Indeed, the pattern we uncover is a *national* naming pattern among African Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To our knowledge, this is the first study to find distinct racial naming conventions in the past. No historical narrative evidence we are aware of even *suggests* that such a robust, national naming pattern would exist.

Documenting the existence of a racial naming pattern in the past is a significant, first-order contribution to American history and historiography; it reorients the discussion of the historical, social, economic and political significance of naming patterns. It changes the nature of the discussion of the causes and consequences of black naming patterns. The historical pattern of African American names also gives scholars a new proxy for race which can be employed to analyze a range of outcomes, both short- and long-term. For example, the analysis of historical discrimination could include these names in the analysis to see if outcomes differed within the African American community due to the names [Cook, Logan and Parman 2012]. Even more, models of racial naming, such as those described in Fryer and Levitt [2004], must be revised to account for the new fact that African American names have a history which precedes the Civil Rights Movement.

The empirical identification of historical naming patterns is difficult. Given the lack of any source which records names that we can match to existing data sources, we innovate methodologically to uncover the naming pattern. Unlike contemporary naming studies, the search for historical naming patterns is further complicated by the paucity of available information. Contemporary studies by economists exploit birth records, but universal birth registration did not occur until the 20th century. With the scarcity of historical data, verifiability and falsifiability of any naming methodology are also important. Any naming pattern identified in a specific data source may or may not hold across the population. It is therefore important that any methodology used not only be able to reveal a similar pattern in independent data, but also has the potential to discover the

[1] Other historical naming studies are focused on name adoption immediately after the Civil War or with parent-child naming practices [Litwack 1979, Costa and Kahn 2006, Gutman 1976]. These studies do not attempt to identify a naming pattern among African Americans nor the racial distinctiveness of any naming pattern.

lack of a pattern in a separate data source. Key for our methodology is the fact that we identify names that are both high-frequency and racially distinctive. This is important insofar as idiosyncratic naming practices can give rise to spurious naming patterns (names that are not held by many individuals but which are held disproportionately), and our methodology guards against that possibility.[2]

We adopt a novel, straightforward methodology to identify black names and exploit a large body of historical data to confirm the naming pattern. Our measure of name distinctiveness is name disproportionality, the fraction of all people holding a particular name that are of a given race. Our approach is a simple two-step procedure— we first use census records to find names that are high-frequency among blacks and then, among the high frequency names, those that are highly likely to be held by blacks as opposed to whites. Identifying historical names cannot and should not begin and end with census records, however. There are well-known deficiencies in census data with respect to coverage of the African American population [Coale and Rives 1973, Eblen 1974, Ewbank 1987, Preston at al. 1998, Elo 2001]— African Americans are seriously underrepresented. This obviously brings into question the veracity of any naming pattern found in census sources. We overcome the problem by verifying the names using novel independent sources that offer similar coverage (in terms of covering a very large number of individuals in the population) to the census but which are not subject to the potential biases of census data. We confirm the distinctiveness of the names we identify in census records in three sources: the given names in Alabama death records (1908-1959), Illinois death records (1916-1947), and North Carolina death certificates (1910-1970). The correlation between the name-specific measure of disproportionality for the death records and the 1900 and 1920 census, by name, data is over 0.60. The fact that we confirm the racial distinctiveness of these high-frequency names in three independent data sources is strong confirmatory evidence of the generalizability of the names and the national naming pattern they represent.

The pattern we uncover is strikingly similar to naming patterns today. Indeed, the share of all

[2]In related work [Cook, Logan and Parman 2012] we show that the conventional wisdom that African Americans were likely to adopt the names of famous individuals (as in George Washington Carver) is not consistent with the data. We find no evidence that first and middle names for presidents and other famous individuals was more likely to occur among African Americans. For example, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and other presidential names were not disproportionately used as first and middle names by African Americans. Indeed, we find that they were more likely to be used by whites. We view this finding as evidence for the falsifiability of our approach.

black men who had a black name is roughly similar to the share of black men who have a black name today. The names we identify, however, are not related to black names today. None of the names we identify is a contemporary black name. In short, we uncover a naming pattern previously unknown in the historical record and show that racially distinctive names for African Americans are not a product of the Civil Rights Movement. Rather than being the product of cultural changes in the middle of the twentieth century, the names have *changed over time*.

In what follows we review the existing literature and describe the conceptual framework underlying our approach. We then describe the methodology used to identify African American names in census records. A particular innovation of our research is that while we use census records to identify historical African American names, we use the death certificates as an independent check of the names we identify in the census records. We describe how these results complicate simple explanations for racial naming practices based on increasing social consciousness during the Civil Rights Era. At some point the historical names we identify gave way to a completely different set of names, and it is likely that the motivations behind such names changed as well. The racial distinctiveness of the names, however, did not change— these historical names are just as black as "black names" today. How and why "black names" themselves (and possibly their effects) *changed over time* is a new question which must be addressed. We conclude with a discussion of how this line of research can be extended beyond the identification of the names to include the determinants and potential causes of the names, intergenerational transmission of the names, and long-term consequences of the names.

2 Racialized Names in History and Theory

2.1 Racialized Names in History

Historians and anthropologists have long acknowledged that names contain valuable information. While surnames link individuals to a family line, first, middle and nicknames can do the same. Given the unique history of African Americans, it is somewhat surprising that the literature on African American naming conventions is so thin since surnames convey little about their familial or ethnic origins. Gutman [1976] notes that besides the studies of Puckett [1938] and Wood [1974] little has been written about African American naming systems in the American past. Engerman [1978] notes

that names play an important role in our understanding of African American social development, and yet they remain under-analyzed, a missing piece of the historical scholarship. Histories of the African American family and social experience, and histories of the South in general, such as the seminal works of Brawley [1921], Blassingame [1972], Jones [1985], Frazier [1930, 1939], Litwack [1979, 1998], Foner [1988], Levine [1978], Woodward [1951], Tindall [1952, 1967], and Franklin [1980], make little mention of African American naming patterns.

The literature that does exist looks primarily at two issues. The first pertains to contemporary naming patterns. Sociological theories about African American naming conventions are rooted in the belief that the contemporary naming practices are an attempt to construct a distinct racial identity in the absence of surnames which can convey that information [Lieberson and Mikelson 1995, Fryer and Levitt 2004]. This desire reached a critical head during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, which encouraged African Americans to adopt names which prominently featured links to an amorphous African heritage.

While such arguments seem plausible, they are surprisingly ahistorical. The limited information we do have on African American naming conventions suggest that names were always important and that they were used to convey some amount of familial bonding in the past [Gutman 1976].[3] An additional problem for the current conceptions of African American naming conventions is the fact that few of the most popular names today have any African origin. For example, common African American names such as Tyrone, Shemar, LaKeisha and LaTonya do not have any explicit African links, and some are of European origin.

The historical literature focused on whether naming conventions defy the conventional wisdom that the institution of slavery destroyed African American kinship patterns. Gutman [1976] spends considerable time documenting how naming patterns are consistent with strong kinship bonds among African Americans. One common practice was to name the eldest son after the father. Analysis of the 1880 census revealed that nearly a quarter of African American households had a son named for his father. Gutman also notes that superstitious beliefs, some rooted in African traditions, may have played a role in naming practices, especially the naming of a child after a deceased sibling earlier in the birth order. In general, Gutman's analysis suggests that a significant

[3]Costa and Kahn [2006] note that former slaves in more diverse companies, where they interacted with greater numbers of free blacks, were more likely to change their names following emancipation. In general, first name changes were rare [Litwack 1979].

portion of African American families named sons after elder men in the family such that given names would have persistent effects.

These naming practices may have roots before emancipation. Gutman argues that African Americans exhibited a great deal of control over the naming of their offspring in slavery, which in general is consistent with Blassingame's [1972], Wood's [1974] and Genovese's [1974] histories of plantation life. Cody [1982] argues that the naming of slave children by their parents was an important way of establishing their place in the slave community. First names could refer to parents, grandparents, and other elder members as a way of establishing familial links. There is no evidence that names were related to slave occupations, however. Children immediately after emancipation were also likely to be named for other family members, although both Puckett [1938] and Gutman note that children were sometimes not named until they were at least a month old.[4] In general, the historical record shows that the first names of children conveyed some element of social meaning both before and after emancipation. In the absence of surname salience, first names of male children appear to be prominent carriers of family history. While historical scholarship has not paid a great deal of attention to black names with the exception of a few studies [such as Cassidy 1966, DeCamp 1967, and Price and Price 1972], the humanities are rich with names as descriptive carriers of historical legacies and also as exercises in power [Benston 1982, Cooke 1977, King 1990, Green 2002]. What is not known is whether this practice resulted in a set of names that were disproportionately held by blacks.

Theorizing about the historical causes and consequences of that meaning is difficult. Part of this lies in the general lack of consensus about the nature of the slave family and the adaptations made after the end of chattel bondage and the decisions parents made when naming their children. While it is unclear how much naming practices during slavery reflected individual slave intent to form familial bonds, the naming practices thereafter would certainly be in the control of parents. The open questions are whether the names can be systematically identified and what the names themselves conveyed *about* the family and its history.

Names have been viewed as the product of a complex network of social, political, and familial influences. Litwack [1979], for example, analyzes name changes immediately after emancipation.

[4]The death certificate data that we have does show a larger number of deaths to "infants" among blacks than whites, but how much of this can be attributable to naming practices versus poor reporting remains unclear.

Although he does not identify any naming patterns among African Americans, he does show that the period after chattel bondage offered African Americans a unique opportunity to construct a new identity. The ability to choose a surname was a political act— many chose names not of their most recent owner, but of those further back in family lineage. Others adopted first names as well [see Costa and Kahn 2006]. In general, however, Litwack notes that names which conveyed kinship were especially salient to African Americans, and the oral histories of former slaves reveal that names were a key ingredient in the remaking of the social order.[5] To the extent that names conveyed family links, they were guarded and, according to Gutman [1976], passed on from one generation to the next.

Hahn [2003] sees kinship links as a potential source of political power for African Americans before the Great Migration. Given that the African American population remained largely rural until the middle of the twentieth century, the labor arrangements at the time included agreements not only with specific families, but in a non-negligible number of cases kinship networks of several interrelated families. Such arrangements "not only tried to provide loved ones with protection and subsistence but also acknowledged the fundamental threads of economic and political solidarity that they had woven and learned to rely on as slaves" [pp. 168-169]. Just as names themselves conveyed familial links, it is likely that they may have been more prominent in protective kinship networks.

This is not to say that these conclusions are uncontroversial. While scholars have added greater nuance to the destructive nature of the slave economy on African American family bonds laid out by Frazier [1939], the actual stability of the family is an open question. Fogel [2003] questions the reliability of Gutman's evidence since it comes from large plantations where familial structure would be more likely to be intact and where slaveholders would be least likely to be involved in the task of naming newborn slaves. Additional factors such as the age and timing of marriage, age at menarche, fertility patterns and infant mortality have not yet been fully resolved. Similarly, the role of sexual assault in slave fertility remains controversial [Fogel and Engerman 1974, Fogel 2003, Gutman 1975], and its influence on slave naming practices is unknown. These obviously interact with naming practices and the degree to which we should draw instruction from them.

[5]Litwack describes how whites lamented the fact that freedmen could choose the surnames of prominent white families. Other whites noted that the presence of surnames for freedmen would alter the social order— while whites were usually referred to with proper titles, having official surnames would entitle freedmen to similar designations.

Blassingame [1972] and Elkins [1959] differ on the weight that one should attach to naming patterns, especially those from the antebellum era. Cassidy [1966] and DeCamp [1967] show that African naming conventions were perverted in the New World. For example, *Sambo*, a name which became associated with a shiftless individual, is actually a Hausa name for the second son [Wood 1974]. While one could view names as the product of a means of resistance as in Stampp [1956] it could also be viewed as being part of an implicit contract as in Genovese [1974], or a product of a combination of social factors that would be idiosyncratic in nature, defying attempts at generalization. Engerman [1978] notes that who named slave children, and whether slave owners retained veto power over names, is unknown. Therefore, the study of slave names is more complicated than racial naming patterns alone, since it is unclear who named whom.

In sum, the scant history on African American naming conventions establishes few facts but several informed guesses. First, the literature suggests that names were used to convey a degree of familial attachment in the past. Second, names appear to be persistent, male children were commonly named for parents and other elders. Third, there has been no attempt to identify a racial naming pattern in the past and no corresponding systematic quantitative evidence underlying the historical literature. We do not know if the names themselves were distinct, if the practices resulted in a distinct naming pattern, and what those names would be.

2.2 Theorizing Racialized Names

The issue for racialized names is that not all people in any group adopt the naming convention, and those with distinctively racialized names might fare better or worse than those of their own racial group. While X may be a white name it is certainly not true that all whites are named X. In other words, it could be that the effects of racialized names are a concentrated source of advantage or disadvantage. Fryer and Levitt [2004], for example, find that distinctively African American names are not well-correlated with other outcomes once they control for socioeconomic factors. The size and direction of such effects would naturally depend on what the naming convention signals. Since a racialized name gives outsiders a low-variance signal of race, it may also affect the outcomes of those with racialized names differently from those without racialized names in the same racial group.

While many view the accumulating evidence of negative effects of holding a racialized name as

the persistence of racial bias, open questions remain. The literature described above seeks to link names to racial groups, but it can be difficult to ascribe the effects to group membership. Naming patterns evolve over time. Lieberson and Bell [1992] find that name uniqueness is increasing, and more recent research using all first names in the United States has found that the commonality of first names has been declining since the 1950s [Twenge et al. 2010]. Lieberson and Mikelson [1995] find that the prevalence of unique names for African Americans has increased faster than the general population. It can be difficult, therefore, to ascribe the name effect to race as opposed to a combination of race and socioeconomic factors that could be exacerbated by increasing name uniqueness [Fryer and Levitt 2004].

A problem for the contemporary study of names is the lack of a clear distinction between unique, exclusive, and racially-assignable names. A standard definition of a unique name is one that is held by only one individual in a given birth cohort. Fryer and Levit [2004] and Lieberson and Mikelson [1995] show that significant shares of the African American population have unique names today. By design, unique names are raced— they belong to the race of the unique-named by default.[6]

Exclusive names are not unique names (many individuals born in a given year will have them), but they are only given to members of a particular racial group. For example, if Kenyatta is a name only given to African Americans, it is exclusive, but not unique. Assignable names are ones which are disproportionately assigned to members of one race. For example, today Tyrone is a name assigned disproportionately to African American males, but there are members of other races with that given name. It is, after all, a name of Irish origin.

The issue is that unique, exclusive and assignable names may have different functional consequences that may run in different directions and present different methodological issues. Fryer and Levitt [2004], for example, construct an index of names using the probability that an individual is black given a particular name. In such an index both exclusive and unique names have extreme values. Only assignable names will display any variation in index values. Audit and experimental studies, however, use names which are assignable. A key for audit studies is that the general population be able to infer race from the name, and an implicit precondition is that such a name is not unique nor infrequent in the population of interest.

[6] A particular issue with unique names is distinct spelling of a name with the same pronunciation. For example, each unique spelling of "unique" (Yuniqe, Uni'que, Euniqe and Eunique) would be unique names to the extent that they would only be held by one individual in any given birth cohort.

Unique names may be stigmatized for reasons unrelated to race. For example, unique names may be difficult to pronounce, which may carry a unique stigma [Laham et al. 2012]. The ability to infer race from a name is, in part, due to its frequency. Although research has shown that some unique names by race have particular attributes [Lieberson and Mikelson 1995], how much of this effect can be due to race as opposed to uniqueness is unknown. Since our goal is to identify a national naming pattern among blacks we do not attempt to identify unique names in the data. Another problem for historical investigation is that unique names may be due to misspellings or other errors.[7] Also, by design it will be difficult to identify unique names in independent data sources as they may appear in one source and not in another. Instead, we focus on a historical pattern of assignable and exclusive racial names, names that were held by relatively large numbers of African Americans but few, if any whites.

3 Identifying African American Names

Documenting a distinctive naming pattern among African Americans in the past is difficult for a number of reasons. First, the history of African Americans leaves us with few linguistic cues that would identify such names. While ethnic names are the product of historical, linguistic, religious and political events, such methods cannot be used for African Americans. There is no list of historical African American names which we can take to the data. Indeed, our task is to identify such names. Second, while census records would seem to offer a straightforward method to identify and verify naming patterns, the relatively poor coverage of the African American population in historical census records would leave any patterns identified solely through census records subject to numerous criticisms [Coale and Rives 1973, Eblen 1974, Ewbank 1987, Preston at al. 1998, Elo and Preston 1994, Elo at al. 1996, Elo 2001]. For example, the names identified in census records may be related to proximate determinants of the names themselves, leaving us with a spurious list of names that reflect other factors. Third, other sources of historical data which could be used to verify names are not broadly representative of the black population. Tax records, military records, rolls from churches and fraternal organizations and school records are neither representative of the black population nor do they provide similar coverage of other races in the same data source— key

[7] Given the manual recording of the sources we use this could lead to spurious identification of unique names.

for identifying the distinctive nature of a name.

Apart the data itself, identifying and verifying a historical naming pattern within any group presents methodological problems as well. Any historical method must not rely on potential determinants of the names. The literature on contemporary black names uses birth certificate information which contains name and race to identify high frequency names which are disproportionately held by a particular group. Birth registrations for our historical period of interest (1880-1940) were not standardized nor universal. In the absence of lists of historical names, information on historical naming patterns, and historical birth registrations, we adopt a novel and transparent approach to identify black names that begins with a geographically stratified sample of black households in census data and then seeks to (1) internally validate the distinctive nature of the names in census records and (2) use a wealth of new, broadly representative data from a *different* set of locations to verify the distinctiveness of the names in the census records. In this regard, our approach is falsifiable, because the tests of external and/or internal validity can fail to support the distinctiveness of the names we identify.

Our methodological approach builds on the conjecture that *if* black naming patterns existed in the past they would be found in independent samples of the black population, and the relative distinctiveness of the names would be well correlated in those independent samples. Additionally, finding similar estimates of disproportionality for the same name from different regions would be consistent with a national pattern of names for African Americans and not the conflation of a regional pattern with differences in racial population density.

But how will we know which names to look for? The small literature in the historical scholarship is not particularly useful methodologically. The record gives us no names to investigate, and reliance on such a source would not identify new names that may be highly distinctive. As such, we adopt a novel approach to identify and, more importantly, verify black names. Specifically, we choose a set of states in the census that are broadly representative of black location patterns in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We search for names among household heads that were high frequency and disproportionately held by African Americans among all household heads. We then *internally* verify the racial distinctiveness of those names using all males in the census records.

Our approach, particularly our desire to internally validate the names in census records, causes us to restrict our attention to naming patterns for men. Since we use household heads to identify

the names we capture few women. While African American women were more likely to be household heads than white women in the past [Ruggles 1994], we capture very few white women as household heads in historical census data. As such, we have poor (and potentially biased) measures of distinctiveness for women. Another problem is that naming conventions at the time, especially in the South, often used first and middle names for women. This results in a smaller set of high-frequency first names among women, and we need reliable sources for middle names to identify and verify a naming pattern for females. Middle names are not recorded consistently in the historical data.

One would like to begin and end with the census records, but they cannot be used to verify black names. As noted earlier, census records have significant gaps for the African American population. For example, if father-son patterns are more likely to be held among black households and those households are more likely to be enumerated, we will overestimate the frequency and disproportionality of those names. The resulting black names will be spurious, a function of household selection in the census data. In general, if census enumeration is correlated with proximate determinants of the names any further analysis using the names will be biased.

For verification we need sources that would give similar population coverage but which would be independent of census enumeration. It is important to stress that such a source requires coverage of the *non-black* population to measure racial distinctiveness. Historical sources that give similar population coverage as the census and which contain names and race are rare. We use death certificate records to independently verify the names identified in the census records. Death certificates contain information on race and name for a large number of individuals. Also, the establishment of universal death registration early in the twentieth century gives us confidence that population coverage will be comparable to the census, but independent of it. Most important is that fact that death records are not selected on households— as such, we avoid the problem of intergenerational naming biasing the death records.[8] Our basic argument is that whatever biases exist in census enumeration would not be the same in death registration, nor would they hold across several different states with idiosyncratic death registration histories. In this way, we are confident that the pattern we find is truly a national, historical naming pattern and not a figment of the data. Similar patterns of racial disproportionality in independent data sources covering large percentages of the

[8]Deaths in this time period did not require the presence of a doctor. As such, the death records include deaths that occurred in and especially outside of medical facilities.

population are at the heart of our method to verify black names.

3.1 Identifying African American Names in Census Data

A two-pronged strategy was used to identify historical patterns of racialized names, following Cook [2004, 2011]. We begin by constructing an index of African American names for the period 1900 to 1920. We used two methods to construct the index. The first strategy answered the question: conditional on being African American, which names are most likely to be observed? This is the frequency measure. Random samples of black (Negro), mulatto, and colored heads of households from the 1900 and 1920 censuses were drawn from the District of Columbia and three states: Georgia, Michigan and New York. One location was selected from each major region: the Upper South, the Deep South, the Mid-Atlantic region, and the Midwest. Washington, D.C. was selected to represent the Upper South because of its history during and following slavery as a destination for migrants from nearby (former) slave states (Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia). The West was not included in index construction due to the relatively lower numbers of black residents across these census years.

Specifically, every tenth head of household was selected among black heads of households who were residents of the given states in 1900 and 1920. From these samples, frequencies were calculated for first names. This resulted in first names that appeared more frequently than the median frequency across states and more frequently than the median frequency across census years. Names were then validated using a first-name search in the 1900 and 1920 census years [IPUMS]. Names that were not common to results were considered matching if the exact first name appeared in the first-name field. A random sample (every 10th record) was drawn from the resulting records. Search results were not constrained geographically nor with respect to relation to head of household. A match was successful if the person in the name field of the search result was indeed a black (Negro, mulatto, or colored) person. The match rate for singletons was between 10 (Ambrose) and 88 percent (Prince). To be clear, we begin with a stratified sample of states and then verify the pattern among all household heads. The disproportionate share of successful matches in the national sample suggests that the resulting names are in fact national black names rather than simply regional black names.

The second strategy answered the question: conditional on having a name widely adopted by

African Americans following the end of slavery, what is the probability that the person is African American?[9] This is the disproportionality measure. The entire 1900 and 1920 census was used and the names were not restricted to heads of households. This is our method of internally validating the census names and our key measure of name distinctiveness since it is conditional on the name being high-frequency.

Among African Americans, there were twenty-one first names that appeared more frequently than the median frequency for whites or were a larger share of the total names than the African American share of the total population. To our knowledge, this is the first time such a national, internally-valid list of historical black names has been identified. In what follows we use the twenty-one names identified in these two strategies as the distinctively African American names. We restrict our attention to the first names that occur with some non-negligible frequency since we are concerned with matching the names we identify in the census records to the death certificates. These names are listed in Table 1. (Note, we combine names such as "Abraham" and "Abe" as a single name, given that one is a nickname for the other in most instances and for other sets of names spellings could vary by small degree. This yields a set of seventeen "name sets" that we use in further analysis due to the combinations.)

The names in Table 1 merit their own discussion. First, they bear little relation to "black names" today. Indeed, of the names used in the Bertrand and Mullainathan's [2004] and Milkman, et al. [2012] audit studies, none of them appears as our names and vice versa. The most popular names in that study, which used birth certificate data were names such as Leroy, Tyrone, Jamal, Hakim, Darnell and Rasheed. The notion that black names are a contemporary cultural construction is inconsistent with the names identified in Table 1. These names contain no explicit links to African heritage yet, as we show later, were racially distinctive.

Second, the general features of the names we identify (that most of the first names are biblical) are consistent with the observations of other scholars. The appearance of biblical names suggests that Genovese's [1974] narrative that religion gave slaves a sense of humanity has some support.

[9] In related work we test the proposition that African Americans of adopted the first and last names of presidents, e.g., George Washington, or famous people in the black community, e.g., Booker T. Washington, as first and middle names. We find that later, this "well-known" practice may have been common among blacks, but it was *not* unique or more likely among black households. Whites were just as likely to name males after presidents or other famous individuals. For example, we find that names such as "George Washington" and Thomas Jefferson were not disproportionately held by African Americans.

Given the role of religion in slave life, names with biblical attachment may have conveyed special meaning to slaves and could have been names for elders that were being passed on. We caution that without additional evidence this is only a conjecture but is consistent with the general pattern of names we identify.[10] Other names may reflect political or social intentions. For example, honorific names such as Master, King and Prince could reflect a desire to imbue pride. Names such as Freeman could certainly reflect political ideals and the emancipation of former bondsmen (one's child was born free). We caution, however, that drawing meaning from the names in Table 1 is preliminary. Additional historical scholarship is needed before economic, social and political intentions can be verified. To be sure, now that the names are known the social significance of the names merits further investigation.

4 Data for Verifying Black Names

The novelty of our approach derives not only from the identification of historical black names, but also from the external validation of these names. As we noted earlier, we use census records to identify a set of high-frequency names among African Americans that are not widely held by whites. The problem with such an approach is that it is not inherently falsifiable— the names we identify may be driven by biases in sampling or other errors. While this is unlikely to explain the results for a majority of the names, it could still be the case that many of the names we identify would be unique to the census records themselves. Without external validation from independent data sources the pattern we uncover may not be general. As our goal is to identify a national pattern of naming among African Americans in the past, it is critical that the pattern we find is also observed in other sources.

4.1 Death Records

Death registrations are unique records which give the names and races of large numbers of individuals. Unfortunately, not all states listed race in historical death registrations. We use the death records from three states *not* used in the census identification of names: Alabama, Illinois, and

[10] This is consistent with the scant literature on names among African Americans, which found that daughters were not likely to be named for family members [Gutman 1976]. Our strategy to indentify names used household heads as part of the strategy, and as such women are under represented.

North Carolina. Each state had different death registration histories, had different racial makeup, and comes from different regions of the country. Below we describe each state's death registration data.

4.1.1 Alabama

The Alabama records are drawn from the Alabama Deaths and Burials Index created by the Genealogical Society of Utah for the years 1881 to 1974 (N= 1,186,076). For the early years, the index is drawn from multiple sources including church, civil and family records of Alabama deaths and burials. Beginning with 1908, state law required that all deaths within the state be registered with death certificates being filed with the Alabama Center for Health Statistics. The index for 1908 through 1974 is based on these death certificates. The transcribed information available for the Alabama records can includes first, middle and last name in addition to race and other measures. Not all records contain complete information for all fields.

4.1.2 Illinois

The Illinois names are drawn from all of the available records in the Illinois deaths and stillbirths index for 1916 to 1947 (N=1,539,849). This index includes information transcribed from one-page pre-printed death certificate forms (images of the original forms are not available in the online database). The 1916 start date for the records is the result of a 1915 statute that required the State Board of Health (succeeded by the Illinois Department of Public Health) and county clerks to record deaths and stillbirths. Statewide compliance with this statue was at 95 percent by 1919. The transcribed information available for the Illinois records can includes first, middle and last name in addition to race and other measures. As with the Alabama records, not all records contain complete information for all fields.

4.1.3 North Carolina

The North Carolina data is constructed from the universe of death certificates for individuals who died between the years of 1910 and 1975 (N= 1,787,826).[11] A key difference between the Alabama and Illinois data is that the North Carolina data can be linked to the actual death certificate. The

[11] This process is more fully described in Logan and Parman [2011].

data includes full name, gender, race, age at death, birth date, birth place (city, state, country), death date, death location (city, county), spouse's name, father's name and mother's name. A unique feature of this data is the presence of mother and father's names on the death record, which will be used in future work to explore intergenerational naming patterns.

4.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Death Records

The advantages of death certificates for name pattern verification are numerous. First, death certificates are person-specific records while census enumeration is household-based. While one can compare names over all persons in the census the construction of the data itself gives an inherent independence between the two sources. A household count may miss specific members of the household but a death record could only possibly misrecord (or fail to record) an individual death. Second, for each set of death records that we use death certification was required early in the twentieth century, so those born in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are most likely to appear in both sets of records. A key advantage for name verification is that each state had different baseline levels of black population shares, and different ethnic mixes of the white population. Since the goal is to see if name disproportionality is similar in different locations the comparison of the census results with the *within* state distributions from a state not used to derive the names is strong evidence of a general pattern.

There are disadvantages to death certificates data as well. While we can capture intrastate migration (the dominant migratory pattern early in the century), we cannot capture the effects of selective migration. This would be particularly pressing for the study of names *by* race if black (white) migrants were more (less) likely to have a black name. This is exacerbated by the large migratory flows from the South during the Great Migration [Eichenlaub et al. 2010]. We view this as highly unlikely. Unless one could successfully argue that a distinctly black name was strongly related to the probability of migration (which itself could be investigated in subsequent work) our results would not be influenced by migration itself. It is also important to note that both our identification and validation includes states that were destinations during the Great Migration.

5 External Validity of the African American Names

The first task is to show that the names we have identified in the census data have similar properties in the death certificates. Table 2 shows the 17 name-sets identified as African American names in the census records. For each name we compute the share of all males with the same first name who are African American for the 1900 Census, 1920 Census and the death certificates, respectively. For a name to be perceived as belonging to one race, it would have to be the case that the name was shared by a disproportionate number of African Americans. Although the names we identified came from frequency counts of household heads, the shares that we estimate are for all males. For each sample of death certificates, the proportional shares are within sample.

Table 2 shows that there were distinctively African American names in the early twentieth century in the census data. These names are also distinctive in the death records. Not only are the names identified as distinctive in the census records confirmed in the death certificate data, but the relative distinctiveness is remarkably similar. Since the identification of the names was based on their frequency and not their disproportionate share, we view the fact that so many of the names are disproportionately held by African Americans as confirmation of their racial distinctiveness.

Disproportionality of the names varies over space, however. For example, Abraham is much more distinctive in Alabama and North Carolina than in Illinois, the land of Lincoln. Booker was universally distinctive. In Alabama every name identified in the census was disproportionately black, and overall more than 75 percent of the names identified in the census are disproportionate in each state. One important departure is the name Master. Although Master appears to be disproportionate in the census data, we could find no African American with that name in the Alabama records and the name was not disproportionately held by African Americans in Illinois and North Carolina. While the general pattern holds for nearly all of the names identified in the census, it is not the case that every name identified in the census records is disproportionate in the death records. We view this as justification not only for confirming the names identified in census data, but also the general falsifiability of our methodological approach.

Most important, Table 2 shows that the names identified in the census data from records in Georgia, Michigan, New York, and Washington, D.C. are also African American names in the death certificate data. This external validation is important in that it shows that the naming patterns

were indeed racial and not driven by regional or other factors that would leave names that would appear to be African American when they are not. This robust pattern of name disproportionality suggest that the names identified in the census records were indeed more likely to be held by African Americans.

In Table 3 we show further statistical measures of the distinctive nature of the names identified. First, we estimate the correlation of the disproportionality in the death records with the measure from census records. The results show the overall correlation is quite strong. While the Alabama correlations are not as strong, this is partly due to the fact that the names are particularly disproportionate in the Alabama data. Second, we address the frequency and relative likelihood of having one of these names. One question would be related to the fraction of the overall black population that had these names. These names may be distinctive but apply to a very small fraction of blacks and therefore unlike naming patterns today. Interestingly, the overall shares are similar. While 3.1 percent of all African American male births in the state of Massachusetts between 1974 and 1979 were assigned one of the nine names in resume audit studies, 2 percent of all males in the death certificate data were named one of the names we identified in census records.

We also find that whites were significantly less likely to have one of these names. Fewer than 1 percent of whites had one of these names in any state. An African American male in North Carolina is nearly four times more likely than a white male to have one of the names we identified in the census data. In Alabama, a black man was sixteen times more likely to have one of the names as a white man, and in Illinois black men were more than twice as likely to have one of the black names identified in the Census data.

We note that Table 2 shows that caution should be extended when constructing names indices from various sources. Any source of names could contain a sizeable fraction of names that could be distinct in one data source but not in another. This is one reason the external validation we emphasize is key. Not only does reducing the sample size increase the likelihood of generating a distinctive name by construction, but also regional name patterns must be distinguished from racial patterns. Given the geographic segregation of the African American community at the time, Southern names in general will be spuriously African American. In fact, some names that are not as predominant as African American names in the census data are more strongly racial in the death certificate data. For example, Isaac is less likely to be held by African Americans in the census

data, where less than twenty percent of men holding the name are African American, but more than eight-five percent of the men named Isaac in the North Carolina death certificate data are African American. The same pattern holds for Moses, Elijah, and Isaiah. The reverse is also true. Master represented a larger share in the census data than in the death certificate data.[12]

One issue with the measure of name shares is the fact that death certificates will include a large number of infant deaths. Many infants in the past were not named at death. In keeping with conservative (underestimates) of name shares we include every death record in our denominators for name proportions. In the bottom panel of Table 3 we report the shares correcting for infant deaths. We stress that this percentage includes infant births where the child was unnamed on the death certificate. Correcting for infant mortality revises the historical percentage to well above two percent. In other words, when we restrict ourselves to those surviving infancy our naming pattern is even more similar to the contemporary naming pattern. In addition, the relative likelihood of a white man having a black name decreases, largely due to the fact that infant mortality was higher among whites than blacks. Tables 2 and 3 establish that the names we identified were indeed held by blacks disproportionality and exhibited a very similar pattern in independent data sources.

6 Discussion and Future Directions

6.1 Considering Possible Mechanisms

It would be cavalier of us to offer specific mechanisms for the African American names. When one considers that the very *existence* of racial first names in the past was unknown it would be a daunting task to propose specific channels through which such a heretofore unknown regularity would arise. Our goal is to establish the naming pattern as a fact which merits further theorizing and investigation. Only after the naming pattern has been established and confirmed can we begin to think seriously about its influence on any potential outcome. Finding any racial patterns in first names in the American past is in and of itself a significant contribution to the historiography of the American family. Considering any implications must be done with great care.

While we do not propose to offer what the mechanisms may be, it is instructive to cast doubt

[12]These patterns suggest that external validation of names may be important in seeking to analyze the consequences of distinctive names.

on some potential explanations. This helps to narrow the focus of future research to uncover the mechanisms that could explain this result. We consider one potential explanation most pressing– that of name selection.

It could be the case that the names are a figment of selection. In particular, assuming a new name in adulthood as opposed to using ones name assigned at birth. If those with distinctive names who experienced positive outcomes chose to retain their names while others discarded them the result could be endogenous. This would be an interesting fact as the current literature discusses the ways that African Americans attempt to avoid the racial stigma of black names. If African Americans in the past chose to use names due to outcomes, that would be worthy of note. The historical record, however, does not provide any evidence of African Americans adopting different first names after the Reconstruction era. In fact, the very lack of any literature documenting this practice suggests that it was rare. While Litwack [1979] describes the power of names and the ability to choose names after emancipation, the later history of African American life in the South provides no discussion of this issue [Litwack 1982, Hahn 2003, Ritterhouse 2006, Hale 1998]. To the extent that the races separated after the Reconstruction era [Woodward 1955], fewer interracial interactions would have given African American less incentives to change names, and it is unclear why those with the most distinctive African American names would retain them.

Overall, unlike the literature on European immigrants, whose name changes during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are well documented, there is no evidence that African Americans did the same. While the lack of a literature on this subject does not mean it did not occur, the lack of a discussion stands in stark contrast to the literature on name changes after the Civil War and the literature on racial passing. Similarly, the literature on name changes consistently shows that name changes were made by those seeking to avoid the stigma of an ethnic name. African Americans did not have such an opportunity. As Wilkerson [2011] describes, name changes among African Americans would have little effect on their outcomes and could not obscure their racial identity in the past. Unlike today, anonymous means of screening (such as the review of resumes) did not occur in most occupations. We do not believe that names identified here are the product of later-life name selection.

6.2 Future Directions

Given these striking results, we believe that further research on this topic should take two directions. First, to consider the effect of distinctive names on a range of outcomes. This would include information that can be gathered from the death certificate itself as well as information that can be linked to the deceased's death record. This information includes birthplaces, occupation, parental names and other measures. Naturally, the relationship between the names and mortality is also an interesting outcome [Cook, Logan and Parman 2012]. A larger project matching the death certificates to census files would reveal even more about the names and their origins. In doing so we can correct for age-misreporting on death certificates among African Americans. Additional measures such as family size, number of siblings, birth order, and parental occupation. For example, those with distinctive names may come from larger or smaller families, have higher birth orders and the like. These and other household characteristics would give us a better idea of factors that predict whether one would have a distinctive name or not.

The second project is to uncover causal consequences of the names. This will include differences in mortality due to the names, which can be ascertained from the death certificates. Measures such as literacy, occupation, fertility, employment, religious affiliation and other measures that are available in historical data can be estimated. Also, tax records could be used to investigate whether those with the names identified here are more likely to hold property. Also, since census records allow for the identification of siblings, linking to the census would also allow us use household-specific effects where one sibling would have an African American name and the other would not. This would provide a strong test of the potential social explanations for the effects of distinctive names, as in Parman [2010, 2012].

7 Conclusion

This paper presented the first evidence of racially distinctive naming patterns among African Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The literature has never supposed that such a naming pattern existed, yet we found robust evidence of names common among black men that were rarely used by whites. We use a straightforward methodology and novel data sources to uncover this naming pattern. We used census records to identify high-frequency names among

household heads in selected states that were disproportionately held by African Americans. This disproportionality held among all men in census records. We then confirmed the racial disproportionality of those names using the death records of three states. We found that the names were similarly disproportionately black in those independent data sources.

Our method and results harken back to an earlier style of quantitative historical scholarship which produced new facts that altered our understanding of the past. Fogel [1975: 337] notes that such methods form the backbone of rigorous quantitative historical work: "The most common method of direct measurement in history is counting. My reference to counting as a rigorous method of measurement is not to be taken derisively. I use portentous language for what appears to be an elementary operation partly because I want to emphasize the dramatic change in interpretation that may result merely by moving from an impression to an actual count." This paper provides such a dramatic interpretation. The existence of these names changes the very definition of black names. Indeed, the most profound implication of this work is that "black names" have a history which deserves further investigation.

The history of black names opens up a large number of new questions. What meaning did these names have for the parents who chose them for their children? Were whites and blacks aware of the stark disproportionality of these names? Did they have socioeconomic effects similar to black names today? Were certain types of black families more or less likely to have these names in their families? Even more, the evolution of black names raises even more interesting questions. Why did these names fall out of use? Given the disproportionality found here, it is unlikely that these names were viewed as "white" names that blacks would need to abandon. Also, if these names were linked to elders, why would names linked to elders cease to be used? Could changes in family structure explain the decline in the frequency of these names?

At a minimum, our results show that racial naming patterns existed is the past, long before the Civil Rights Era. This hitherto unknown fact suggest that there are likely several pieces of the African American experience which remain hidden from contemporary scholarship and which require serious and sustained investigation. The discovery of the specific causes of this relationship will go hand in hand with the development of the nascent literature on the political and social histories of African Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

If naming patterns among African Americans represent cultural and social development and

family linkages [Engerman 1978], changes in those names would represent changes in those same measures. Finding these historical racially identifiable names, which bear little relation to their contemporary counterparts, necessitates a discussion of black cultural and social development after the Civil War and before the Great Migration. This period marks the beginnings of a truly self-governing African American community— the foundations of African American society and culture outside the shadow of chattel bondage. While we have evidence of community development, the establishment of institutions, new economic arrangements, and black political participation, many open questions remain. This period has been relatively neglected in quantitative historical scholarship, and findings such as the names presented here should stimulate further research into this period of American history.

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Table 1

Historical African American First Names

Abe
Abraham
Alonzo
Ambrose
Booker
Elijah
Freeman
Isaac
Isaiah
Israel
King
Master
Moses
Pearlie
Percy
Perlie
Purlie
Presley
Presly
Prince
Titus

Table 2

Black Name Disproportionality in Census and Death Records

Share of All Males with Same First Name who are African American

First Name	1900 Census	1920 Census	Alabama 1908-1959	Illinois 1916-1947	North Carolina 1910-1970
Abe/Abraham	37.50%	34.62%	**79.17%**	5.15%	**55.75%**
Alonzo	14.64%		**50.00%**	**13.88%**	**54.05%**
Ambrose	10.70%	8.44%	**47.06%**	**6.60%**	20.48%
Booker	85.19%	99.51%	**98.25%**	**94.20%**	**94.34%**
Elijah	28.81%	36.05%	**56.78%**	**16.51%**	**49.01%**
Freeman	37.50%	25.00%	**39.19%**	**86.16%**	**40.59%**
Isaac	19.68%	19.55%	**56.71%**	**8.45%**	**87.54%**
Isaiah	46.56%	49.23%	**94.70%**	**51.61%**	**71.49%**
Israel	15.35%	9.29%	**89.66%**	4.93%	11.61%
King	57.08%	48.91%	**75.51%**	**35.04%**	**66.76%**
Master	25.00%	31.28%	---	3.17%	19.09%
Moses	36.85%	38.98%	**69.92%**	**21.52%**	**68.11%**
Percy	30.20%	23.40%	**33.66%**	**73.57%**	**56.86%**
Perlie/Purlie/Pearlie	51.10%	80.00%	**25.93%**	**90.00%**	**46.11%**
Presley/Presly		53.90%	**33.33%**	**82.14%**	**32.50%**
Prince	78.05%	69.18%	**94.78%**	**62.12%**	**82.46%**
Titus	32.93%	28.94%	**90.48%**	**16.67%**	30.48%
Share of all men who are African American					
	11.60%	9.90%	11.64%	5.52%	30.83%

Notes: 1900 and 1920 Census measures are from all male names from 5% IPUMS samples from Georgia, Michigan, New York, and Washington, DC.

Percentages in bold are those where the name share exceeds the share of men who are African American.

Table 3

Descriptive Measures of Name Distinctiveness

Correlation of Name-Specific Death Record Disproportionality with Census Disproportionali

Census Year	Alabama 1908-1959	Illinois 1916-1947	North Carolina 1910-1970
1900	0.449	0.665	0.685
1920	0.216	0.627	0.553
Share of all African American men with an African American name	1.92%	1.66%	2.04%
Share of all white men with an African American name	0.12%	0.70%	0.55%
Relative (black/white) likelihood of having an African American name	16.27	2.37	3.69
Proportions Excluding Infants (deaths before one year of age)			
Share of all African American men with an African American name	2.17%	2.11%	2.68%
Share of all white men with an African American name	0.12%	0.79%	0.73%
Relative (black/white) likelihood of having an African American name	18.38	2.67	3.65

Notes: 1900 and 1920 Census measures are from all male names from 5% IPUMS samples from Georgia, Michigan, New York, and Washington, DC.