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Living standards in Black and White: Evidence from the heights of Ohio Prison inmates, 1829â€“1913

Thomas N. Maloney ^a ... Scott Alan Carson ^{b, 1}

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Abstract

The use of height data to measure living standards is now a well-established method in the economic history literature. Moreover, a number of core findings are widely agreed upon. There are still some populations, places, and times, however, for which anthropometric evidence remains limited. One such example is 19th century African-Americans in the Northern US. Here, we use new data from the Ohio state prison to track heights of Black and White men incarcerated between 1829 and 1913. We corroborate the well-known mid-century height decline among White men. We find that Black men were shorter than White men, throughout the century controlling for a number of characteristics. We also find a pattern of height decline among Black men in mid-century similar to that found for White men.



JEL classification

I31; J15; N31

Keywords

Stature; Inequality; Nineteenth century US race relations

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¹ Tel.: +1 432 552 2195; fax: +1 432 552 2174.

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