

The Shifting Patterns of Black Migration Into and From the Nonmetropolitan South, 1965-95

Glenn V. Fuguitt, John A. Fulton, and Calvin L. Beale

Introduction

Since 1970, there has been a reversal of the long-standing trend of Black migration loss from the South. Following a net loss of almost 300,000 Blacks in the second half of the 1960s, the South had a small net gain in 1970-75, which increased to over 100,000 in 1975-80 and almost 200,000 in 1985-90. Then during 1990-95, the South had an unprecedented net inmovement of over 300,000 Blacks into the region (Frey, 1998).

The gains followed over a half century of losses, from the time of World War I when Blacks began moving north in greater numbers, with the war-time cut-off of immigrant workers from Europe, to about 1970. The departure of Blacks from the South was particularly strong during 1940-70. One study estimates the total net Black outmigration for this 30-year period at over 4 million, or about one in four of the average U.S. Black population over the period (Long, 1988). (Other studies of this period's heavy Black movement from the South include Beale, 1971; Farley and Allen, 1987; Fligstein, 1983; Hamilton, 1964; Johnson and Campbell, 1981; and Lemann, 1991.)

The subsequent reversal of this trend, beginning in the 1970s and continuing to the present, has resulted in much research on the volume and character of the flows between southern and nonsouthern regions, States, and metropolitan (metro) areas (e.g., Frey, 1998; McHugh, 1987; Robinson, 1986, 1990; Farley and Allen, 1987). One study contends that the trend of net immigration since 1970 has contributed to the redistribution of Blacks down the metro hierarchy in the South to favor smaller metro areas (Johnson and Grant, 1997). Yet relatively few studies have focused on the nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) aspects of this migration, even though a fourth of all southern Blacks still lived in nonmetro areas in 1990. Studies touching on the nonmetro aspects of Black migration for post-

1970 periods are Cromartie and Stack (1989), Pfeffer (1992), and Aratame and Singelmann (1998). Each study shows that although much of the historic South-to-North migration stream came from the rural South, the new trend of reverse immigration has been primarily directed to southern metro areas.

Regional migration patterns have been connected to changes in economic development. That is, the South—and especially its rural areas—historically lagged behind the Northeast and Midwest in industrialization and income, but recent decades have seen increased southern economic growth. As this growth improved personal prospects, fewer people may have felt it necessary to leave the region, seeking instead newly prosperous metro destinations within the South. The same economic development also made the South more attractive to potential migrants from other regions. This was a major factor leading to the region's transition in net migration from loss to gain, first for the White population in the 1960s and then for the Black population in the 1970s.

A major noneconomic factor often cited as a reason for the Black migration turnaround is the decline of overt racial discrimination in the South, following the extension of voting rights to Blacks and the ending of legally sanctioned segregation. But little research has been done to examine the importance of reduced discrimination as an explanation for Black migration trends, and we would expect the effect of less discrimination to be on the South as a whole, rather than just the rural portions. More attention has been given to the significance of family ties, especially in return migration. Several studies have incorporated the state-of-birth variable from the Census into migration analysis (e.g., Long and Hansen, 1977, and Newbold, 1997). Another study demonstrated that in addition to return migrants themselves, many newcomers were children or spouses of return migrants (Cromartie and Stack, 1989). As is true for other groups, linked migration

through family ties and other associations is an important part of the contemporary Black migration process (Lee and Roseman, 1997). Data limitations in this study, however, prevent a direct consideration of these factors, although they need to be kept in mind in considering our findings. Family ties, for example, may induce migration to nonmetro areas, despite the lower typical level of nonmetro economic opportunities.

When Aratame and Singelmann compared the 1975-90 migration of Blacks and Whites for metro and nonmetro areas of the South, their general finding was that areas with a high proportion of Black population attracted more Blacks than Whites. Thus, migration trends of that period within the South and between the South and other regions resulted in an increased concentration of Blacks within certain metro and nonmetro areas. A consideration of migration for individual areas is beyond the scope of this paper, but we did examine post-1990 population trends in nonmetro areas with high Black concentration and compared the more rapidly growing South Atlantic States with the rest of the South.

This report examines trends in Black migration between the South and the remainder of the Nation from the period just before the Black migration reversal (1965-70) through 1990-95. We distinguish between nonmetro and metro areas within the South for these interregional moves and also consider migration between the metro and nonmetro South. For comparison, we examine migration trends for the non-Black population, more than 90 percent of which is White.

To gauge the consequences of Black migration for areas of origin and destination, we identify differences by poverty status and level of education among migrants and nonmigrants. We also present results separately for the South Atlantic States and the rest of the South. We do so because we viewed Black-inhabited

areas of the western half of the South to be generally less prosperous than those in the South Atlantic region and thus possibly subject to different demographic trends. Finally, we report on 1990-2000 Black population trends for nonmetro counties with a high concentration of Blacks.

What findings might we expect? First, given the strong economic development in the South, particularly in activities that are urban and metro based, we would expect that the majority of the increased Black migration to the South—both absolutely and proportionally—would go to metro areas. Similarly, we would expect that the destination of outmigrant nonmetro Blacks would shift somewhat away from the North and West to southern metro areas. More exact trends over time, however, are less obvious and worth noting. Economic growth has not been constant. The early to mid-1980s was a time of recession and restructuring, particularly in the North, with heavy loss of manufacturing jobs. Trends in nonmetro population growth and migration went through transitions of turnaround (the 1970s), followed by reversal (the 1980s) and rebound (1990s). These shifts, however, primarily affected the White population and were not characteristic of Blacks (Lichter et al., 1985; Cromartie and Beale, 1996).

In regard to the character of the flows, Nord contends that, despite the expectation that disadvantaged populations do not move as much as others, there is an active migration interchange of both advantaged and disadvantaged groups, which supports the concentration of the disadvantaged in certain areas (Nord, 1998a, 1998b). Applying this finding for the general population to our research, we would expect that the movements of Blacks—both those with low education and in poverty, and those having higher education and income—would support the continued concentration of people of low education or poverty-level income in southern nonmetro areas.