

THE AFRICAN AMERICAN “GREAT MIGRATION” AND BEYOND

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■ **Abstract** During the twentieth century, African Americans participated in one of the most significant demographic events in U.S. history. Their “Great Migration” from the South to the North contributed to profound social, economic, demographic, and cultural changes in northern cities. After the Great Migration, blacks continued to move in search of opportunity as some returned to the South, while others moved to suburbs or better neighborhoods within the North. My review focuses on the Great Migration by discussing research that has examined its causes, the characteristics of the participants, the adaptation of migrants to northern society, and their impact on northern cities. I also briefly review research on return migration to the South and residential mobility by African Americans. Finally, I identify key issues and discuss possible data sources for future research.

INTRODUCTION

Of the traditional trinity of demographic processes (fertility, mortality, and migration), migration is probably the least studied by sociologists. This is somewhat surprising, given that it is the demographic event experienced most frequently throughout an individual American’s lifetime. Furthermore, it is more “social” and less “biological” than either fertility or mortality.

During the twentieth century, African Americans participated in two geographic movements: internal migration and residential mobility.¹ These movements, which are fascinating from a sociological vantage point, had important short- and long-term consequences for individual blacks, the black community, and American society. Extensive social science literature tells the story of African American migration during the past century and investigates its diverse causes and impacts.

¹It is conventional to use internal migration to refer to a permanent or semipermanent change in residence that involves movement within a country’s borders but across a meaningful administrative boundary (e.g., between geographic regions or across a county line) and residential mobility to refer to a change of residence within a specified geographic area (e.g., metropolitan area or city).

Here, I review that dimension of the African American experience by summarizing what we know and what we have yet to learn.

The "Great Migration" of African Americans out of southern states and into northern cities was one of the most significant demographic events to occur in the United States during the twentieth century. Although numbers alone cannot do justice to the social, economic, political, and cultural importance of the Great Migration, they can at least provide some indication of the magnitude of this phenomenon. A good sense of the demographic impact of the Great Migration on the sending and receiving regions can be gained by considering trends in two measures (*a*) the number of southern-born African Americans residing outside of the South and (*b*) the size of the black population in nonsouthern states. As the Great Migration proceeded, the South suffered substantial losses of its native-born black population, with over 2.5 million southern-born blacks living outside of the region by 1950 and over 4 million by 1980 (see Figure 1). Equally impressive is the dramatic overall increase in the nonsouthern black population, fueled largely by the southern migrants and their northern-born offspring. Thus, in purely demographic terms, the Great Migration produced a dramatic geographic redistribution of the African American population. Furthermore, it had significant consequences for the southern region that lost so many of its native-born blacks, for the northern destinations that absorbed such a large group of newcomers, and for the migrants themselves.

The Great Migration began to wane during the 1960s and was virtually over by the mid-1970s. At that point, the interregional flow of black migrants reversed, with more moving to the South than were leaving it. During the last quarter of the twentieth century, the stream of migrants entering Dixie comprised a combination of former southerners returning to their birth region and northern-born "primary migrants" moving to the South for the first time. Economic decline and restructuring in northern cities combined with an expanding economy and improved racial climate in the South to lure African Americans below the Mason-Dixon Line in search of opportunity. However, during this new era of black migration, not all black movers crossed regional boundaries. Some sought safer and more-comfortable housing in the suburbs, or simply a better neighborhood in the central city. Common to all these mobile African Americans was a desire to achieve a better life in a new place—a new region, a new city, or a new neighborhood—and a willingness to uproot themselves in search of that opportunity.

In the following pages, I explore more thoroughly a variety of issues embedded within the preceding thumbnail sketch of internal migration and mobility by African Americans during the twentieth century. I begin with, and focus heavily on, the period of the Great Migration. However, to provide a more complete picture of African American migration and mobility, I also devote some attention to the return migration to the South and to residential mobility within regions. The discussion is organized around five general topics that have been the focus of previous research on black migration and mobility. For each topic, I consider the following three organizing questions: What do we know? What critical questions remain? What are the key challenges and opportunities for future research?

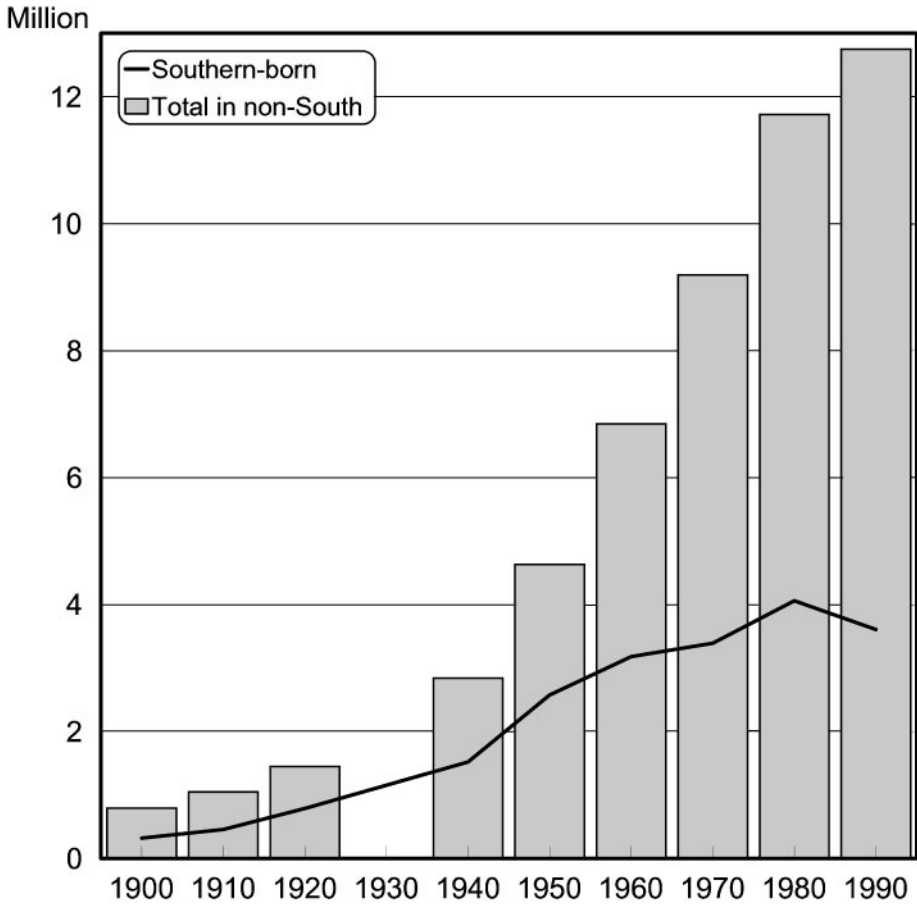


Figure 1 Number of African Americans (total and Southern-born) living in nonsouthern areas from 1900 to 1990. Data estimated from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Files available from the Minnesota Population Center (Ruggles & Sobek 2001).

LEAVING DIXIE: WHO WERE THE MIGRANTS AND WHY DID THEY LEAVE THE SOUTH?

Social scientists have invested much energy in their efforts to establish a profile of the “typical” participant in the Great Migration. The original and most enduring image of the migrants is that of an illiterate sharecropper, displaced from the rural South because of agricultural distress or reorganization (e.g., Chicago Commission on Race Relations 1922; Drake & Cayton 1962; Epstein 1918; Frazier 1932, 1939; Mossell 1921; Woofter 1920). This image dominates the many ethnographic studies of black migrants living in northern cities during the early stages

of the Great Migration. Given the general characteristics of the southern African American population at that time, there can be little doubt that many migrants did match such a bucolic profile (Grossman 1989). However, researchers are increasingly recognizing that the stream of black migrants was probably more diverse than earlier portraits suggested. Marks (1989) has argued that many migrants headed north from southern towns and cities, rather than directly from the rural countryside and, furthermore, that they had more-extensive experience with non-agricultural employment than was typically assumed. These are important revisions to the traditional migrant profile because they have implications for the forces that were driving blacks from the South as well as for the human capital that they took with them. Marks' inferences about the origins of the migrants, which were based on rather weak empirical evidence, have received additional support from Alexander's (1998) innovative use of marriage registrations for Pittsburgh and Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, during the 1930s. Because applicants for marriage licenses were required to report their birthplace, often including their town of birth, Alexander was able to show that a substantial proportion of black migrants to Allegheny County moved there from towns and cities, rather than directly from rural areas. Although a very important contribution, the evidence presented by Alexander pertains to only one northern destination, for only a narrow window of time. Thus, questions remain about whether his conclusions may be generalized to other settings, and other times, during the Great Migration.

The work by Marks and Alexander cautions against oversimplifying the description of those African Americans who left the South between 1910 and 1970. In all likelihood, it was a heterogeneous group, motivated by a plethora of reasons. It is also likely that the characteristics of the migrant population varied over time, as the social and economic forces driving the migration shifted. However, our ability to obtain a better, statistical sense of the average migrant is handicapped by a lack of information about the migrants before they left the South. Using postmigration information to describe the characteristics of migrants runs the risk of confounding cause and effect because the migration experience may have affected postmigration characteristics. The most useful data source for studying the Great Migration has been a series of Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS) derived from the decennial U.S. censuses.² Southern migrants can be identified from these PUMS files by comparing their state of residence with their state of birth. Some PUMS files (e.g., 1940–1970) also include information that gives researchers a better idea of the recency of migration (i.e., state of residence one year or five years before the census). Once identified, the migrants can be described by any characteristic that is included in the PUMS file for a particular decade. This approach has yielded valuable information about the postmigration status of migrants and has enabled important comparisons with nonmigrants in the North (discussed further

²The Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) project at the Minnesota Population Center provides access to all currently available PUMS files (Ruggles & Sobek 2001). The IPUMS archive is available at the following website: <http://www.ipums.umn.edu/>.

below). However, the PUMS files contain limited information that describes southern migrants before they moved north, for example, their premigration place of residence, employment status, family characteristics, type of work, etc.³

The PUMS files have proven to be most useful for studying the educational selection of migrants from the South because the education level of an individual changes relatively little after a certain age. That evidence shows that early black southern migrants (in 1910 and 1920) were significantly more likely to be literate than blacks who remained in the South. In later years (from 1940 to 1970) the migrants had significantly higher levels of educational attainment (years of schooling) than the sedentary southern black population (Tolnay 1998a; see also, Hamilton 1959, Lieberman 1978b). In contrast, the migrants were less likely to be literate, or had lower levels of educational attainment, than the black population that they joined in the North (Tolnay 1998a).

Researchers have thoroughly mined existing data sources in their efforts to better understand which black southerners were more likely to pack up and head north during the Great Migration. Future progress on this issue will likely come from the innovative use of unanticipated data sources, such as Alexander's (1998) analysis of marriage records for Pittsburgh or Maloney's (2001) use of records from World War I selective service registration. Alternatively, existing census records could be used to create new data sources designed specifically for the study of selective migration. For example, because they are no longer subject to the 72-year confidentiality period, the original census enumerators' manuscripts for 1910, 1920, and 1930 could be used to construct linked census files for 1910–1920 and 1920–1930. That is, southern migrants who moved North between 1910 and 1920, or between 1920 and 1930, could be located in their southern residences at the beginning of the period in which they moved.⁴ This would provide a richer source of premigration characteristics (e.g., place of residence, occupation, family status) than is available from a single, cross-sectional PUMS file. When combined with a sample of nonmigrants who remained in the South during these decades, the linked migrant file could advance considerably our understanding of the selection processes operating during the Great Migration. Most importantly, the premigration characteristics of migrants could be compared with those of sedentary southerners. A linked file could also support contextual analyses that would permit researchers to identify the characteristics of local areas (e.g., counties) that were most strongly related to the out migration of residents.

³The 1940 and 1950 PUMS files include information about farm status and metropolitan area of residence five years and one year before the census, respectively. However, the information is missing for many persons. The 1970 PUMS file includes information about employment status and occupation five years before the census but has no information about farm or metropolitan residence.

⁴This tracking can be done using Soundex files that help researchers locate individuals in the original census enumerators' manuscripts by using their names and other limited characteristics.

There are other types of migration selection that are probably destined to remain largely the sources of informed speculation. For example, some have suggested that the participants in the Great Migration may have been positively selected from the larger, black southern population based on their greater ambition, stronger work ethic, and willingness to defer gratification (Lieberson 1978a; Lieberson & Wilkinson 1976; Long 1988, pp. 157–58; Long & Heltman 1975; Rose 1975). These are traits often associated with migrant populations and have been included in explanations for the frequently observed success of migrants in their new places of residence. However, I am aware of no data source that would allow a systematic comparison of the psychosocial characteristics of southern migrants and nonmigrants.

Closely related to the question of who the migrants were is the question of what induced them to leave the South. Research into the latter question has been guided strongly by theories of human migration that emphasize a rational decision-making process in which potential migrants carefully weigh the advantages and disadvantages of their current residence versus those of potential destinations (e.g., Greenwood 1985, Lee 1966, Ritchey 1976). It is common to refer to those characteristics that motivate people to leave a place of origin as push factors, whereas the attractive characteristics of potential destinations are considered pull factors. Economic factors figure prominently in such migration theories and have received the most emphasis in explanations of the Great Migration. That black southern migrants were strongly motivated by economic concerns receives considerable support from both quantitative and qualitative evidence.

The economic deprivations suffered by southern blacks prior to the Great Migration have been well documented. Plantation agriculture, and the sharecropping system on which it was built, relegated most rural blacks to a landless status, with little opportunity to climb the “agricultural ladder” (Mandle 1978, Ransom & Sutch 1977, Tolnay 1999). Occupational segregation in southern towns and cities concentrated male workers into unskilled jobs and female workers into domestic service (Bose 2001, Jones 1992). These conditions, which persisted with little change from emancipation through the early decades of the twentieth century, represented a powerful incentive for southern blacks to look for opportunity elsewhere. Indeed, letters that southern blacks wrote to the *Chicago Defender* and potential northern employers at the outset of the Great Migration offer valuable insights into the strong influence that economic disadvantage and discrimination had on their desire to leave the South (Scott 1919). Many writers mentioned the difficulties they faced in trying to earn a living to support their families in the South and noted their keen interest in relocating to the North to improve their economic fortunes. Oral histories recorded from elderly blacks after the Great Migration reinforce the conclusion that economic motivations were instrumental in their migration decisions (Faulkner et al. 1982).

If the economic conditions for southern blacks were so stultifying for so long, then why did the Great Migration not begin much earlier? The simple answer to that question is that southern blacks did not have a feasible alternative. As Collins

(1997) has demonstrated, this situation changed dramatically when World War I and the U.S. adoption of more-restrictive immigration policies forced northern employers to finally consider southern blacks (and whites) as a source of inexpensive labor to replace the southern and eastern Europeans. It was this newly created economic opportunity in the North that empowered southern blacks with the ability to make the kind of rational economic decision that is so fundamental to most migration theories. However, although these altered circumstances help to explain the timing of the Great Migration, the pace of exodus from the South varied cross-sectionally. From perhaps the most extensive aggregate analysis of factors related to migration from southern counties, Fligstein (1981) concluded that those areas affected most strongly by the reorganization of southern agriculture, and by the increase of farm mechanization, experienced the heaviest out migration. As a result of those changes, large numbers of black tenant farmers were displaced and forced to migrate in search of an alternative economic opportunity—often to southern towns and cities and sometimes outside of the region entirely.

Migration theories also recognize that individuals consider noneconomic, or social, forces in their decisions to stay or move.⁵ Southern blacks had a number of noneconomic grievances that likely encouraged them to consider migration as a possible remedy. Among the most frequently mentioned are inferior educational opportunities, behavioral restrictions imposed by Jim Crow laws, political disenfranchisement, and racial violence (Henri 1975, Tolnay & Beck 1995, Woofter 1920). These social forces are often included in scholarly treatments of the Great Migration (Ballard 1984, Grossman 1989, Henri 1975, Lemann 1991, Marks 1989, McMillen 1989), and they were mentioned regularly in letters written by potential migrants in the South (Scott 1919), as well as in oral histories of those who migrated (Bunch-Lyons 1997, Faulkner et al. 1982). Compared with economic explanations, however, the social forces related to the Great Migration have less frequently been the focus of quantitative scrutiny. In one exception, Tolnay & Beck (1992) examined the effect of racial violence on the migration from counties in 10 southern states between 1910–1920 and 1920–1930. Their results showed that, net of economic controls, black out migration was significantly higher in counties that had experienced more black lynchings.

Like the effort to construct a profile of the average migrant, the search for explanations for why the migrants left the South faces significant data challenges. Additionally, this research is conceptually different in that it attempts to understand the motivations for individual behavior. This task can be approached indirectly by examining aggregate relationships between the rate of out migration and the social and economic characteristics of local areas. Alternatively, it can be approached more directly by asking the migrants. Comparative approaches have yielded important information about the contextual factors that were associated with higher

⁵Of course, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish economic from noneconomic motives for migration because these are not necessarily distinct dimensions of the lives of individuals.

levels of black migration from some southern areas (e.g., Fligstein 1981, Tolnay & Beck 1992). Existing data sources, especially census-based data from southern subregions, offer the potential for further aggregate studies of the environmental factors promoting migration from the South. The connection of noneconomic areal characteristics to levels of out migration is especially understudied, but there is considerable potential to examine more thoroughly the role of social forces such as political disenfranchisement and social inequality in the Great Migration. However, such aggregate approaches will face a variety of challenges including (a) adequate measurement of key concepts using existing data (i.e., different noneconomic factors) and (b) the avoidance of the ecological fallacy of drawing conclusions about the motivations for individual-level behaviors from aggregate relationships.

An alternative approach is to gather information about migration decisions directly from the migrants. Although not used widely, oral histories recorded from southern migrants have provided valuable insights into their motivations and experiences (e.g., Bunch-Lyons 1997, Faulkner et al. 1982, Lemke-Santangelo 1996). Time is quickly running out on our opportunity to gather information from the participants in the Great Migration. Before this valuable repository of information disappears, researchers should consider the potential of well-designed approaches to record the life histories of migrants. Such qualitative evidence may not be generalizable to the entire population of southern migrants, but this limitation is counterbalanced by the richness of the first-hand information that can be obtained from the migrants. Whatever methodological approach is used to study the motivations of southern migrants, it is not especially productive to approach the topic as an effort to determine whether economic or noneconomic forces were more important. Such either/or approaches tend to deflect attention away from the more interesting, bigger picture that phenomena like the Great Migration are complex processes driven by a large and diverse set of forces.

INTO THE "PROMISED LAND": WHERE DID THE MIGRANTS GO AND HOW DID THEY FARE?

Southern black migrants settled in virtually all areas of the North and West. However, definite migration streams developed as the Great Migration proceeded, and those streams resulted in a much heavier concentration of migrants in certain places. Throughout the Great Migration, large metropolitan areas in the Northeast and Midwest were especially popular destinations, with the influx of southern migrants causing massive growth in the black populations of cities like Chicago, Detroit, New York, and Philadelphia. In contrast, western states did not become a common destination for black migrants until after 1940, when the entry of the United States into World War II produced a rapid expansion in the defense industry on the West Coast (Johnson & Campbell 1981). Once in the North or West, black southern migrants were overwhelmingly an "urban" population because the industrial employment opportunities that had attracted them were concentrated in larger cities.

An important factor in the development of specific interregional migration streams was the availability and ease of transportation, especially the routes of interstate highways and railroad lines connecting southern states to different parts of the North and West. Many migrants traveled by train, so the existence of convenient rail connections influenced their choice of destinations. For example, the Illinois Central Railroad provided potential migrants in Louisiana and Mississippi with relatively direct access to Chicago (Lemann 1991). For those in Georgia and South Carolina, the existing rail and highway connections made Philadelphia, New York, and Boston more-common destinations (Ballard 1994, Kiser 1932). When migration to the West intensified, Highway 66 and the Southern Pacific Railroad were avenues by which migrants from Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas reached California (Gregory 1989).

However, the selection of destinations was influenced by more than simple logistical convenience. In perhaps the most comprehensive effort to incorporate the characteristics of potential destinations into the quantitative study of the Great Migration, Price-Spratlen (1998; 1999a,b) showed that black migrants were more attracted to areas that offered stronger "ethnogenic" support for the African American community and eased the adjustment for newcomers. As examples of ethnogenesis, Price-Spratlen (1998; 1999a,b) includes the presence in the community of an NAACP chapter, a mature National Urban League, African American churches, and African American newspapers. He concludes that the impact of ethnogenesis on the selection of destinations weakened over time as migration streams acquired a momentum of their own. This phenomenon has been observed by many others (e.g., Ballard 1984, Lemann 1991) who have described the tendency for later Great Migration participants to follow family members and friends who had migrated previously. Once developed, these patterns of "chain migration" funneled migrants from common points of origin to common points of destination and reinforced existing migration streams. The presence of family or friends in the North improved the flow of information about specific destinations to potential migrants, especially the availability of jobs, and eased their transition upon arrival.

With few exceptions, such as basic descriptions of the dominant migration streams (e.g., Florant 1942, Johnson & Campbell 1981, Long 1988) and Price-Spratlen's work on the linkage between ethnogenesis and the rate of migration to local areas, the general subject of how black southern migrants selected their destinations has not been explored thoroughly. However, investigators have conducted a number of interesting case studies on the social, economic, and cultural conditions that prevailed in selected northern and western destinations such as Chicago, (Chicago Commission on Race Relations 1922, Drake & Cayton 1962, Duncan & Duncan 1957, Frazier 1932, Freedman 1950, Lemann 1991); Pittsburgh (Bodnar et al. 1982, Gottlieb 1987); Evansville, Indiana (Bigham 1987); Philadelphia (Ballard 1984); San Francisco (Broussard 1993); Oakland (Lemke-Santangelo 1996, McBroome 1993); and Milwaukee (Trotter 1985). Although informative, such case studies tell us relatively little about (a) how the characteristics of southern migrants to different regions/cities within the North and West varied or (b) why the

migrants residing in a specific city moved there rather than elsewhere. There is limited evidence that black southern migrants chose somewhat different destinations than their white counterparts. For example, it appears that whites were more likely than blacks to move to the West and to smaller towns or cities within the Northeast and Midwest (Berry 2000, Tolnay et al. 2002). Furthermore, the selected destinations of both black and white southern migrants determined the opportunity structures available and influenced, for example, their economic potential (Lieberson 1978b) and the characteristics of the neighborhoods in which they lived (Tolnay et al. 2002).

There is much more that we need to learn about the processes that led migrants to select particular destinations in the North and about the wide-ranging consequences of their choices. To be sure, economic potential and family ties were important influences in the selection of destinations, and both deserve further study. As Price-Spratlen (1998; 1999a,b) demonstrated, noneconomic factors also played an important part in the migrants' selection of destinations. How did these factors interact to determine where migrants went and the opportunities that were available to them after they arrived? All these issues could be studied more thoroughly with existing sources (e.g., PUMS files, other census data, and noncensus information about northern cities). These issues also represent another reason to systematically expand the availability of oral histories collected from the migrants.

In virtually all destinations, the southern migrants were greeted with suspicion and hostility by black and white northerners alike. With generally minuscule black populations before the Great Migration, northern and western cities had achieved a relatively stable state of race relations, albeit one characterized by distinct racial inequality. That situation began to change, however, as waves of migrants from the South produced extraordinary growth in local black populations (see Figure 1). Many whites grew increasingly uncomfortable with the shifting racial balance in their cities, and some blacks resented the unfavorable consequences that they attributed to the rapid influx of migrants (Colbert 1946, Drake & Cayton 1962, Frazier 1932, Mossell 1921, Trotter 1993). Regional cultural differences aggravated the numerical concerns of native northerners, as the migrants' southern ways were often interpreted as signs of laziness, ignorance, and dangerousness. Partially on the basis of these stereotypes, southern migrants were blamed for a variety of social problems that afflicted urban communities, including crime, alcoholism, venereal disease, and illegitimacy.

Against this challenging backdrop, migrants attempted to find a place in the northern economy that would provide the financial security and opportunity that they had not enjoyed in the South. As is true of so many migrant groups, these southerners generally entered the northern labor market at its lower strata. They also faced unique restrictions on their economic potential that did not necessarily apply to other migrant groups. Like northern blacks in general, the migrants' employment prospects throughout the Great Migration were restricted by a racially and ethnically defined occupational queue that channeled them into the lowest-status, least-remunerative positions (Lieberson 1980). However, within this racially

stratified economy, the southern migrants fared quite well compared to the northern-born black population. Despite their lower levels of educational attainment, southern migrants were actually more likely to be employed, had higher incomes, and were less likely to be on public assistance (Gregory 1995, Lieberman 1978b, Long 1974, Long & Heltman 1975). Even so, they did hold somewhat lower status jobs than their northern-born counterparts (Lieberman & Wilkinson 1976, Long & Heltman 1975, Tolnay 2001).

Even before locating a job, southern migrants had to find a place to live. Many new arrivals moved in with kin or friends who had migrated previously. Others rented rooms or small kitchenette apartments that were usually overcrowded with residents (Drake & Cayton 1962, Epstein 1918, Grossman 1989, Spear 1968). Whatever their specific housing alternative, it was likely to be located in a neighborhood that was occupied predominantly by other blacks. Such black neighborhoods often were situated in the least desirable sections of the city and offered dilapidated dwellings with substandard facilities (Broussard 1993, Chicago Commission on Race Relations 1922, Drake & Cayton 1962, Epstein 1918, Hughes 1925, Woofter 1928). Exploiting rare historical tract-level data for Cleveland from 1910 through 1990, Price-Spratlen & Guest (2002) showed that the population density within black neighborhoods increased substantially during the early stages of the Great Migration and did not begin to decline until after 1950. Still, despite the suggestions of many ethnographic studies of southern migrants' residential settlement patterns in northern cities, there appears to have been relatively little difference in the characteristics of dwellings or neighborhoods occupied by migrants and nonmigrants. For example, at the outset of the Great Migration (1920), migrants lived in dwellings that contained an average of 2.8 households, compared with an average of 2.2 households per dwelling for nonmigrants (Tolnay 2001). Migrants in 1920 also lived in neighborhoods with proportionately smaller native-white populations than those of nonmigrants, but the difference was quite small (Tolnay et al. 2002). In 1970, as the Great Migration drew to a close, southern migrants and native northerners also resided in generally similar neighborhoods, although more-recent arrivals in the North had been able to take advantage of increasing neighborhood succession to settle in neighborhoods that were less racially concentrated and less distressed (Tolnay et al. 2000).⁶

Recent quantitative studies of the families of southern migrants have also contradicted the largely unflattering descriptions presented by early ethnographic studies. It had long been assumed that migrant families were less conventional and stable than those of northern-born African Americans (Drake & Cayton 1962, Frazier 1932, 1939, Lemann 1991). This difference was generally attributed to the transplantation of a dysfunctional family culture from the rural South. In fact, however, analyses of PUMS files for 1940 through 1990 have revealed that black southern

⁶Tolnay et al. (2000) examined two dimensions of neighborhood distress: the percent of families living below poverty and the percent of children not living with two parents.

migrants were actually more likely than native northerners to be married and, if married, to reside with their spouse (Lieberson & Wilkinson 1976). In addition, migrants had lower levels of nonmarital childbearing, and migrant children were more likely than were their nonmigrant counterparts to reside with two parents (Tolnay 1997, 1998b; Tolnay & Crowder 1999; Wilson 2001). Although differences in family patterns during the earlier stages of the Great Migration have not been examined as thoroughly, in 1920 migrant and nonmigrant children were equally likely to reside with two parents (Tolnay 2001).

On the whole, then, southern migrants fared reasonably well in their new surroundings, relative to northern-born African Americans. For the most part, the reasons behind the economic and family advantages enjoyed by southern migrants over native northerners remain a mystery. Two possible general explanations have been mentioned: On the one hand, several scholars have suggested that migrant advantages can be attributed to a selection process in which southerners with certain characteristics or attributes were more likely to move north (see *Leaving Dixie: Who Were the Migrants and Why Did They Leave the South?*, above). Wilson (2001) showed that the greater stability of migrant families in the North is partially due to a general positive selection for family stability among migrants. In addition, others have noted that migrants' employment advantages might be due to their positive selection for a willingness to work hard, to accept less-attractive jobs, and to defer immediate gratification for long-term benefit (Lieberson 1978a, Lieberson & Wilkinson 1976, Long 1988, Long & Heltman 1975, Rose 1975). Reversing the direction of the selection explanation, one might argue that migrants who failed economically or experienced family disruption returned to the South, leaving only the more-successful migrants behind in the North (Lieberson 1978a, Lieberson & Wilkinson 1976, Long & Heltman 1975). On the other hand, it has been suggested that the nonmigrant disadvantage is partially due to their more-prolonged exposure to the destabilizing conditions of northern cities, which include increasing residential segregation, declining male employment, rising violence, and growing welfare dependency (Lemann 1991, Lieberson & Wilkinson 1976, Long & Heltman 1975, Tolnay & Crowder 1999). In short, prolonged immersion in a distressed urban environment might lead to a sense of hopelessness or to the rise of an oppositional culture that discounts traditional values and conventional routes to success (Massey & Denton 1993). This explanation is also consistent with the apparently increasing advantage of southern migrants over native northerners as the Great Migration progressed. To date, disappointingly little progress has been made in explaining the disparate outcomes for southern migrants and northern-born blacks. Although future efforts at solving this puzzle will face daunting data and analytical challenges, its solution must remain a high priority for future research.

IMPACT OF THE GREAT MIGRATION ON THE NORTH

The most obvious consequence of the arrival of so many southern migrants in the North was the dramatic growth of many northern cities' black populations. As the number of African Americans in northern cities increased over time, so,

too, did the proportions of their black populations. For example, between 1910 and 1970, the number of African Americans in Chicago increased from 44,103 to 1,102,620, and the percentage of the city's black population jumped from 2.0% to 32.7% (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1913, 1973). Similar transformations occurred in virtually all major northern and western metropolitan areas. This growth strained the capacity of many cities to absorb and house such large migrant populations and, as mentioned above, led to considerable concern among the black and white northern-born population about the migrants and their potentially destabilizing influence on northern cities and northern culture.

Social scientists have also described a variety of possible long-term impacts of the growing black population on the social organization and structure of northern cities. Most commonly mentioned in the literature are discriminatory responses by the white community to the burgeoning black populations in their cities. Lieberman (1980) and others (e.g., Cutler et al. 1999; Massey & Denton 1993; Philpott 1978; Wilson 1978, 1987) have argued that northern whites intensified their efforts to restrict the residential and occupational opportunities available to African Americans after 1920, as more southern migrants arrived in the North. This phenomenon is often explained by drawing upon Blalock's (1967) Threat Models of race relations, which describe an increasing motivation for majority groups to discriminate against minority groups as the proportionate size of the latter grows. Thus, although the neighborhoods of northern cities had been racially segregated before the Great Migration, the white community was forced to resort to even stronger measures to maintain segregation as the black population expanded. They were able to do this by restricting the residential options of northern blacks through a combination of measures such as targeted violence, restrictive covenants, redlining, and racial steering (Massey & Denton 1993, Philpott 1978, Squires 1994, Yinger 1995). As a result of these efforts, the levels of residential segregation in northern cities were even higher at the culmination of the Great Migration than they had been at its initiation (Cutler et al. 1999, Lieberman 1980, Massey & Denton 1993).

In a similar fashion, the presence of a racially and ethnically defined occupational queue had constrained the employment opportunities for northern blacks even before the Great Migration (Lieberman 1980). Within that queue, blacks were located in the lowest strata and were concentrated in primarily unskilled or semiskilled occupations. Immigrants and native-born whites were situated above blacks in the occupational queue and, therefore, enjoyed greater access to more-desirable jobs in the labor market. The relative population sizes of the different groups in the occupational hierarchy had some effect on the range of jobs that was available to each group. There was limited potential for upward expansion, especially if there were adequate numbers of candidates from preferred racial or ethnic groups to fill the occupations in the higher strata of the queue. There was also limited potential for expansion within the lower stratum of the occupational queue, but virtually unlimited potential for workers to exit the queue completely through unemployment. Thus, as the northern black population grew absolutely and proportionately from the Great Migration, additional discriminatory measures may have been required to maintain the occupational status quo. Indeed,

Liebersohn (1980) concludes that such measures were implemented and that they reduced the occupational standing of northern blacks, relative to other groups, after 1920.

The changing racial composition of northern inner cities, owing largely to the influx of southern migrants, has also been linked to other long-term transformations in the racial organization and economic vitality of northern cities. Following World War II, the GI Bill, highway expansion, affordable mortgages from the Federal Housing Administration and Veterans Administration, and suburban development made it possible for whites to live outside of the central city but continue to work there. Although not entirely racially motivated, the end result was an extensive "white flight" from central cities to suburbs (Frey 1979). The residential disengagement of whites from inner cities further contributed to the deterioration of the inner-city infrastructure by shifting the urban tax base and the balance of political power so that they favored the predominantly white suburbs (Jackson 1985, Massey & Denton 1993, Sugrue 1996). For reasons articulated by Wilson (1978, 1987, 1996), well-paying, blue-collar jobs soon followed the lead of white residents by gravitating away from northern inner cities and toward suburbs, non-metropolitan areas, southern states, or abroad. In turn, this economic restructuring led to increased unemployment and underemployment among the predominantly African American populations of northern central cities, and to aggravated conditions of urban distress, including poverty, violence, and family decline.

A clear logical thread connects this diverse set of negative consequences with the Great Migration, primarily through the effects of the massive growth of the black populations in northern cities. Furthermore, the temporal associations between these consequences and the Great Migration are consistent with a causal connection. However, the empirical evidence demonstrating a linkage between the Great Migration and short- or long-term negative consequences for the northern black population is surprisingly limited (see, e.g., Tolnay et al. 1999). Perhaps the strongest indication of a causal association comes from case studies that describe the experiences of specific northern cities during and after the Great Migration (e.g., Bigham 1987, Bodnar et al. 1982, Broussard 1993, Drake & Cayton 1962, Frazier 1932, Gottlieb 1987, Lemann 1991, Trotter 1985). Although the evidence from such cases has provided extremely valuable contributions, the generalizability of it is limited. Therefore, a more-systematic investigation of the impact of the Great Migration on northern cities should be a high priority for future research in this area.⁷

A thorough consideration of the impacts of the Great Migration should not ignore the possibility of positive, rather than negative, consequences. A growing

⁷Also understudied are the short- and long-term impacts of the Great Migration on southern society. Some have suggested that one short-term consequence of the black exodus from the South was an improvement in the treatment of blacks in those areas where the out migration was especially heavy (e.g., Tolnay & Beck 1992). The possible long-term consequences of the Great Migration on the South have been virtually ignored.

population increased the political clout of blacks in many northern and western cities, eventually resulting in the election of black mayors in several major, northern metropolitan areas. A larger population also meant more customers and clients for black-owned businesses and black professionals (Lemke-Santangelo 1996, Rose 1975, Woofter 1928). However, there are doubts about the extent to which economic enclaves were successfully developed and exploited within the African American community (e.g., Boyd 1998, 2001). Finally, turning the argument by Price-Spratlen (1998; 1999a,b) on its head, a larger population likely facilitated the development of ethnogenic support mechanisms (e.g., black churches, black newspapers, an active NAACP chapter) within the black community. The possibility that the Great Migration contributed to these positive outcomes for the black communities in northern cities has also been understudied and deserves to be examined more thoroughly in the future.

BEYOND THE GREAT MIGRATION IN TIME AND SPACE

Although I have chosen to concentrate here on the Great Migration, African Americans were geographically mobile before, and after, that watershed demographic event (Johnson & Campbell 1981). Space constraints prevent me from examining those phenomena in the same level of detail. However, two relatively recent migration processes deserve more than passing mention: (a) the return migration of blacks to the South and (b) residential mobility of African Americans within urban areas.

Return Migration to the South

As with virtually all migration streams, the Great Migration had a reverse flow of former migrants who headed back to the South after spending some time in the North. Return migration has attracted considerably less scholarly attention than the Great Migration, and as a result, we know much less about it. The research that has been done on return migration to the South has concentrated on the time period after 1970 and has been largely concerned with describing the levels of movement and the general characteristics of the migrants. From that work we know that (a) return migration increased after 1970 (Adelman et al. 2000, Long & Hansen 1975, Robinson 1986), (b) black southern migrants were less likely than white southern migrants to return to the South (Adelman et al. 2000, Lee 1974, Long & Hansen 1975), (c) black migrants were more likely than white migrants to return to their southern birth states (Adelman et al. 2000, Long & Hansen 1975, McHugh 1987), (d) return migrants account for at least half of all African American migrants to the South (Campbell et al. 1974, Cromartie & Stack 1989), and (e) return migrants generally settled in southern metropolitan areas, often in suburbs (Adelman et al. 2000).

In contrast to parallel efforts focusing on the Great Migration, surprisingly few researchers have attempted to determine the selection processes that operated

during return migration to the South (i.e., return migrants versus southern migrants who stayed in the non-South), or to compare the characteristics of return migrants to those of nonmigrant southerners. The research that has been done yields conflicting evidence for both issues. Some investigators have concluded that return migrants were negatively selected from the larger population of southern migrants living outside the South (e.g., Li & Randolph 1982, Lieberman 1978b); others have inferred a more positive, or at least "mixed," selection process (Adelman et al. 2000, Long & Hansen 1977). Similarly, comparisons of return migrants with the southern-born, sedentary populations have provided conflicting evidence. Most investigators have concluded that return migrants were better educated than non-migrant southerners (e.g., Adelman et al. 2000, Campbell et al. 1974, Robinson 1986), but even that conclusion has not been unanimous (see, e.g., Li & Randolph 1982). Greater consensus exists that return migrants exhibited higher levels of unemployment than southern nonmigrants did (Adelman et al. 2000, Campbell et al. 1974, Li & Randolph 1982), although to what extent the disruptive influence of recent interregional migration accounts for that difference is unknown.

Perhaps it is not surprising that we have such conflicting portraits of the return migrants. There are a number of daunting challenges and complexities involved in the study of return migration to the South. First, the available data are not ideal. Most quantitative investigations have been based on census data and have inquired about individuals' residences in the recent past (usually five years preceding the census, but only one year in 1950). Unfortunately, these data do not capture all return migration, and they include little information that can be used to describe the premigration characteristics of return migration. Second, the circumstances leading to return migration, and the characteristics of the migrants, may have changed substantially over time. Third, return migrants may have been motivated by widely varying factors (see Adelman et al. 2000), including (a) a response to personal or economic disappointment or failure in the North, (b) an effort to flee the deteriorating conditions of northern innercities, and (c) relocation after retirement. These challenges do not make the identification of a "return migrant profile" impossible, just more multidimensional and nuanced.

The relative paucity of previous research on the return migration of blacks to the South represents a significant opportunity for future study that might be organized around the following general topics, which I use above to guide my discussion of the Great Migration: (a) Who were the return migrants and why did they go back home? (b) Where did the return migrants go and how did they fare after they arrived? (c) What impact did the return migration have on the South? Although census data, particularly the PUMS files, will continue to be an important source of information for studying return migration, researchers should also consider alternative sources. For example, Stack (1996) has demonstrated the potential value of qualitative evidence drawn from interviews with return migrants and their families. Additionally, although the sample sizes will certainly be small, more general-purpose longitudinal files, such as the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, may hold some promise for studying return migration to the South.

Residential Mobility Within Urban Areas

Blacks living in cities have always been residentially mobile, as have all urban residents. During the Great Migration, southern migrants changed residences frequently after their arrival in northern cities, but they generally moved within the confines of the black community (e.g., Drake & Cayton 1962, Frazier 1932, Grossman 1989, Lemann 1991). Analyses of more-recent time periods have revealed that the level of residential mobility among blacks was roughly comparable to that for whites (Long 1988). However, that overall similarity is partially the result of blacks being more likely than whites to exhibit sociodemographic and life-cycle characteristics (e.g., age, marital status, home ownership, and income) that are associated with higher rates of residential mobility (e.g., South & Deane 1993). Once those characteristics are controlled, blacks are significantly less likely than whites to move.

Residential mobility within urban areas took on new meaning during the last quarter of the twentieth century as economic restructuring and the deterioration of central cities made newly developing suburbs more attractive to urbanites of all races and ethnicities. A process of "neighborhood succession" during the 1960s and 1970s allowed some black families to move into less-segregated, more-desirable neighborhoods in central cities as they replaced whites who were moving to suburbs (Taeuber & Taeuber 1965). However, in many cases the locational benefits for blacks were temporary, as these neighborhoods eventually completed the transition to become part of the larger, segregated, African American community. During the 1980s and 1990s, blacks employed two mobility strategies for improving their neighborhood locations: (1) moving from central cities to suburbs and (2) moving from poor to nonpoor neighborhoods within central cities. Recently, researchers have examined the degree of success that blacks have enjoyed from these two types of residential mobility (Alba & Logan 1991, 1993; Crowder 2001; Logan & Alba 1993; South & Crowder 1997a,b). In most cases, these studies have compared the patterns of residential mobility of blacks with those of other racial/ethnic minority groups. Evidence has shown that blacks suffer from a number of significant disadvantages in the suburbanization process and in their effort to escape distressed urban neighborhoods. Compared with other racial and ethnic groups of the same sociodemographic characteristics, blacks are less likely to move from central cities to suburbs.⁸ In addition, the suburbs that they do inhabit are closer to the central city, have a higher concentration of black population, and suffer from elevated levels of distress (e.g., more crime, higher levels of poverty, weaker tax bases) than the average suburbs of

⁸The suburbanization process has been somewhat different for southern and nonsouthern blacks. Because of differences in historical residential patterns, southern blacks living in previously rural settings have become suburbanized as southern metropolitan areas have expanded to encapsulate them.

nonblacks.⁹ Similarly, taking into consideration a variety of sociodemographic factors, blacks are less able to move from poor to nonpoor neighborhoods, and are more likely to move from nonpoor to poor neighborhoods, than are whites.

The research that has led to an inference of black disadvantage in residential mobility has relied heavily on two theoretical perspectives: the spatial assimilation model and the place stratification model. According to the spatial assimilation model, any racial or ethnic variation in residential mobility patterns should be the result of group differences in relevant sociodemographic factors (e.g., education, employment, income). In contrast, the place stratification model argues that institutional barriers to black suburbanization and locational attainment must also be considered and that these barriers have the potential to produce residual racial differences, even when group differences in sociodemographic characteristics are controlled. Also according to this model, discriminatory real estate and lending practices prevent blacks from being as successful as other racial/ethnic groups at moving to suburbs or better neighborhoods, and these practices make it more difficult for blacks to translate higher socioeconomic status into residence in suburbs or preferred urban neighborhoods (see e.g., Alba & Logan 1991, 1993; Logan & Alba 1993; South & Crowder 1997a,b; Tolnay et al. 2002). These two models have proven quite useful for framing the analysis of racial and ethnic variation in residential mobility, as well as for interpreting the findings obtained. However, the continued counterposing of these two theoretical perspectives may have limited potential to further our understanding of the African American disadvantage in residential mobility.

Let me elaborate briefly. It is common for social scientists to observe residual racial differences in demographic outcome variables (e.g., marriage, fertility, mortality, birth weight, etc.), even after group differences in a variety of relevant sociodemographic factors have been controlled. Thus, it is not too surprising that the spatial assimilation model is incapable of fully accounting for racial variation in residential mobility or neighborhood characteristics. Indeed, it would be somewhat surprising if this model did. The challenge for researchers, then, is to come up with compelling explanations for the residual racial differences that are consistently observed. Undoubtedly, the place stratification model is correct when it identifies racially motivated discrimination by realtors, lenders, and landlords as an important component of those residual differences. However, in the

⁹A closely related question is the extent to which middle-class blacks have abandoned the inner cities in favor of suburbs, contributing to the further distress and deterioration in the former. Wilson (1987) describes a substantial exodus of middle-class blacks, while Massey and colleagues (e.g., Massey & Denton 1993, Massey & Eggers 1990, Massey et al. 1994) argue that middle-class blacks face limited potential to improve their residential situation through migration. Quillian (1999) has carved out a middle position in this controversy, one that has taken on some of the characteristics of a "half-empty versus half-full" disagreement.

future, researchers will need to make greater progress toward empirically linking those mechanisms to the mobility behaviors of individual blacks. For example, researchers have yet to provide convincing evidence that city-wide patterns of discrimination significantly shape blacks' mobility expectations, their likelihood of carrying out an anticipated move, or their mobility destinations. As a result, there are still legitimate grounds for debating the relative contributions of discrimination and voluntary preferences as explanations for the residual racial difference in residential mobility or neighborhood characteristics (Clark 1992, South & Crowder 1998).

The identification of "strong" and "weak" versions of the place stratification model has broadened its utility by making it consistent with both greater and smaller residential returns to human capital for African Americans (Logan & Alba 1993). In exchange, however, this distinction has weakened the model's theoretical integrity and specificity. On the one hand, the strong version of the model argues that blacks reside in neighborhoods that are more racially concentrated and of lower quality, and that blacks are less successful than whites in translating higher socioeconomic status into preferred residential locations. On the other hand, the weak version contends that socioeconomic status and neighborhood characteristics are more strongly related (positively) for blacks but that they continue to live in more segregated and less-desirable neighborhoods. Essentially, proponents of the place stratification model enjoy a win-win situation because there is no outcome that can falsify it, short of blacks living in better neighborhoods than whites and receiving returns on their human capital that are neither less than nor greater than those enjoyed by whites. Here, too, is an area in which future research could contribute by identifying the specific circumstances under which the strong and weak versions of the model should apply and then marshaling empirical support for those scope conditions.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the twentieth century, geographic mobility was an important strategy that African Americans employed as they continued their quest for better living conditions and more-promising opportunities for themselves and their children. Indeed, this is one of the common threads that unites the various migratory experiences examined in this essay. Beyond that, however, there is also a degree of historical dependence among these experiences. For example, the Great Migration triggered social and economic transformations in northern cities that eventually contributed to the desire by black inner-city residents to relocate to the suburbs, to better neighborhoods within the central city, or back to the South. Furthermore, the maintenance of cross-generational familial and cultural connections to the South among many blacks in the North has led to their selection of the South as a migration destination in the post-Great Migration era (e.g., Stack 1996). As part of the African American experience, then, these episodes of migration and residential

mobility are better viewed as intrinsically linked, rather than entirely separate and unique.

It is appropriate and fruitful to approach the study of African American migration and mobility in the twentieth century as additional examples of individuals or families seeking to maximize their social, and especially economic, well-being. However, it is also critical to recognize how strongly the racial context has influenced black migration and mobility. For virtually all of the issues considered in this essay, the experiences of African Americans have been shaped by their position in the racial and ethnic hierarchy. The disadvantaged position of blacks in the southern society and economy created incentives for out migration that were not shared by whites who also moved north in large numbers between 1910 and 1970. Gradually, the institution of racism and the ecological dynamics of segregation and concentrated poverty that accompanied the growth of the northern ghetto constrained the residential mobility of African Americans in ways that were not experienced by other racial and ethnic groups. Those social forces still have important effects today (Lieberson 1980, Massey & Denton 1993). In addition, the South had important business to complete (e.g., accepting, at least in principle, the social, economic, and political equality of blacks) before return migration to the region would become an attractive option for large numbers of blacks, as it was for whites (e.g., Adelman et al. 2000, Berry 2000). These are important reminders that the future study of black migration and mobility must be undertaken with an appreciation for the broader racial context within which it occurs, as well as for the social and demographic history that has produced that context.

Finally, although this essay may reach an audience composed disproportionately of sociologists, I close with an appeal for a multidisciplinary approach to the future study of African American migration and mobility. Many disciplines, including anthropology, demography, economics, geography, history, and sociology, are represented in the literature cited in this review, and each has made important contributions to our understanding of the various issues examined here. Combined, these fields of study tell a richer, more comprehensive story of the history of black migration and mobility than could be told by research conducted within a single disciplinary tradition. With continued multidisciplinary contributions, along with greater communication across disciplines, the potential for future research to tell even better stories is considerable and exciting.

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ERRATA

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