

## **Return Migrations of African-Americans to the South: Reclaiming a Land of Promise, Going Home, or Both?\***

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**ABSTRACT** Using samples of census data from the University of Minnesota Population Center's "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series" (IPUMS), we describe trends in African-American migration to the South across recent decades, and explore the applicability of the concept of "return migration" to various demographic patterns. Our findings suggest that the return movement contains multiple migration streams involving African-Americans of higher socio-economic status (compared with both origin and destination populations) moving to both urban and rural destinations. These patterns represent clear differences from the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century's "Great Migration" of African-Americans from South to North. The recent return migration streams suggest that the South may be replacing the North as a "land of promise" for some upwardly mobile African-Americans, and may also reflect what Carol Stack (1996) has termed a "call to home" as a motivating factor shaping recent African-American migration to the rural South.

African-Americans have been moving back to the South in increasing numbers in recent decades, a social movement commonly identified as "return migration" (Long and Hansen 1975; Robinson 1986; Smith, Longino, and Leeds 1992; Stack 1996; Adelman, Morett, and Tolnay 2000; Frey 2001). This demographic movement reverses the major trend of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the massive exodus of African-Americans from the South to other parts of the country, or what has been called the "Great Migration" (Marks 1989). Using samples of census data from the University of Minnesota Population Center's "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series" (IPUMS), we describe trends in African-American migration to the South across recent decades, and explore the applicability of the concept of "return migration" to various demographic patterns. More specifically, we are interested in whether important segments of the return movement can be understood as

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persons seeking a new “land of promise” and/or heeding a “call to home” (Stack 1996). We accomplish this by examining (1) the personal characteristics of those who have been changing their regional residences, (2) the Southern destinations to which African-Americans have been moving in recent decades, (3) the socio-demographic and place/location differences between Northern-born “primary” and Southern-born “return” migrants, and (4) the socio-demographic profiles of those return migrants who move to their state of birth, compared to those who return to a different part of the South.

### **Background**

Theoretically, migration has been conceptualized as the result of “push” and “pull” factors (Lee 1966). Those migrants who are pushed, and presumably exercise comparatively little choice, are described as “negatively” selected; those who are pulled, and presumably choose to move, are seen as “positively” selected. The larger reality, of course, is that migration decisions commonly result from a combination of these types of forces. Nowhere is this clearer than in the “Great Migration” of African-Americans who left the rural South for urban places both inside and outside the South (Marks 1989).

In the Great Migration, push and pull selection pressures varied in importance at different points in time. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, blacks left the South in large numbers not only to escape a life of sharecropping or tenant farming, but also to move North where economic and social opportunities were perceived as considerably better. For this group, there was a distinct sense of moving to a “promised land” (Lemann 1991) – a phrase loaded with social, economic, and religious significance. And, in this context, black churches, newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender* (Price-Spratlen 1998), previous migrants, and Northern industrial labor recruiters provided considerable encouragement for migrating. As writer Clifton Taulbert (1995) describes in his autobiography, “deep within most of our hearts, we harbored the desire to be part of that good life that waited for us all just North of the Mason-Dixon line” (p. 134).

After World War II, Southern agriculture continued to be mechanized and large numbers of blacks continued to leave the land (Fligstein 1981; Marks 1989), thus providing a new impetus and rationale for migration decisions. But, regardless of the timing and the reasons for its occurrence, the result was the same: millions of African-Americans left the rural South for places they hoped would become a “promised land” – something that was unlikely to become a reality in their rural Southern residences. The Great Migration was largely played

out by the late 1960s. Indeed, that was the last decade in which the black rural population (nearly 95 percent of which is in the South) had a significant decline (of about 10 percent). The 1970s witnessed the beginning of an increase in migration to non-metropolitan areas of the South, followed by a very small increase in the 1980s, and a significant one in the 1990s, with the rural South having a nearly 10 percent growth in its black population (Frey 2001; Fuguitt, Fulton, and Beale 2001; Robinson 1990). Clearly, the post-1960 period was one of demographic change for the migration of African-Americans.

More recently, the historic North/South divide has undergone a transformation. The collective hopes of a promised land in the North (used broadly here to refer to any non-Southern U.S. locale) have changed dramatically. Indeed, in many ways, the urban North became a hostile place that failed to generate much loyalty or attachment (Massey, Gross, and Shibuya 1994; Tolnay, Crowder and Adelman 2000). Declining economic opportunities (i.e., fewer jobs that paid a living wage), huge increases in crime and urban violence, and widespread drug use and other health-related maladies led to scholarly (Wilson 1997; Anderson 2000) and journalistic (Lemann 1991; Kotlowitz 1991) critiques centered around concerns over a growing urban "underclass," increasing concentration of poor people into "ethnic enclaves" (Wilson 1997), and a new form of "hyper-segregation" of African-Americans (Massey and Denton 1993).

In contrast to the increasingly grim sense of life in Northern inner cities, the South – somewhat ironically given its racial legacy – began to emerge as a region that offered a more promising economic future and a chance to connect (or reconnect) with historically significant African-American places and institutions. This is likely due not only to the sense of greater economic opportunities but, importantly, to (1) political changes in the South away from the stark racial inequalities that defined its past, (2) family-based legacies that preserved patterns of living available to be reclaimed – especially in rural areas where blacks were most likely to own land (Stack 1996; Falk 2003), and (3) a cultural attachment of African-Americans to the South as "place" (Davis 1988; Franklin 1994; McFeely 1994; Stack 1996; Bailey 2000; Falk 2003). Whatever their current place of residence, most African-Americans are likely to have long-standing ties to Southern places and people.

In most demographic studies of the black migration experience in the U.S., "return migration" has applied only to those people *originally* from the South who moved elsewhere for a period of time and then returned to the South. In contrast, Cromartie and Stack (1989) have urged adopting a broader view that sees an important component of the return migration to the South as motivated by Northern-born

African-Americans who are connecting with Southern people, institutions, and places. This could include those who have never been to the region before and/or persons who have little direct experience with relatives and others whose lives were rooted there. In this paper, we examine both first-time movers, as well as those returning to their region/place of origin.

Compared to the earlier Great Migration, we expect that the recent North to South movement is likely to contain more demographically complex migration streams, both in terms of the characteristics of the persons migrating and the places to which they move. As such, we ask four research questions: (1) Do African-Americans migrating to the South differ from those remaining in the North? (2) Do African-Americans migrating to the South differ from those who have been long-term Southern residents? (3) Do Southern-born African-Americans *returning* to the region of their birth differ from Northern-born migrants who are moving to a new region? (4) Do African-Americans who are returning to the Southern state of their *birth* differ from others returning to the South?

### **Data and Analysis Strategy**

We use the IPUMS samples for the 1970, 1980, and 1990 census years, as well as some preliminary data from the 2000 census, to examine the recent return migration. The 1970, 1980, and 1990 samples are one percent “metro” samples that, despite the label metro, contain both urban and rural areas. Most of our analyses focus on the black population, although the total population of the South (including all race groups) is used to create some indices that identify residential and racial density patterns in the 1990 census sample. Additionally, our interest in the issue of return migration led us to eliminate all foreign-born blacks from our working samples to focus our analyses on the native-born African-American population.

We first examine general trends in African-American migration and residence patterns across the four census intervals. Looking at patterns across decades, we chart general shifts in the distribution of an eight category typology of birth/residence patterns from 1970 to 2000 (Table 1). Next, using data from 1970 and 1990 we compare three types of migrants with stable residents of both the North and South on personal characteristics (Table 2) and key characteristics of Southern destinations (Table 3).<sup>1</sup> Next, we examine recent migrants comparing

<sup>1</sup> Some of these analyses rely on the 1990 data only. At the time of this writing, many of the factors examined in this study were not yet available for the 2000 census. Thus, the detailed analysis of the most recent patterns we examine is based on the more complete 1990 sample.

**Table 1. Percentage Distributions by Eight Types of Birth/Residence Profiles for African-Americans for 1970, 1980, and 1990 IPUMS "Metro" Samples and 2000 1% Sample<sup>#</sup> and Summaries of Out- and In-Migration from the South**

Type	Birth/Residence Profile			Census Year			
	Region of Birth	Residence 5 Yrs Ago	Current Residence	1970	1980	1990	2000
	NNN	North	North	North	29.5	28.4	31.2
SNN	South	North	North	15.1	16.6	13.3	9.6
NSN	North	South	North	.4	.3	.5	.4
SSN	South	South	North	1.7	1.1	.9	.6
NNS	North	North	South	.4	.8	1.1	1.3
SNS	South	North	South	.6	1.1	1.2	1.2
NSS	North	South	South	2.9	1.7	2.4	3.7
SSS	South	South	South	49.4	50.0	49.5	50.5
Migration Patterns:							
Recent Out-Migrants from South (NSN + SSN)				2.1	1.4	1.4	1.0
Recent In-Migrants to South (NNS + SNS)				1.0	1.9	2.3	2.5

Note: 1970, 1990, and 2000 samples weighted by HHWT. 1980 sample weighted by MIGSAMP.

<sup>#</sup> all native-born persons age 5 and over at the time of the census for whom a specific state of residence in the census year and five years prior could be identified.

Northern-born and Southern-born subgroups (Table 4). And, finally, we compare migrants who are returning to the Southern state of their birth with other migrants to the South on both socio-demographic factors and the characteristics their Southern destinations (Table 4).

**Table 2. Means for Personal Characteristics of Three Types of African-American Migrants to the South Compared to Residents of the North and Stable Residents of the South (Native-Born Persons, Age 21 and Over)**

	Age		Female		Married		Divorced/ Separated		Education		In Labor Force	
	1970	1990	1970	1990	1970	1990	1970	1990	1970	1990	1970	1990
	NORTH	43.0	43.8	.55	.56	.57	.36	.19	.23	5.37	6.83	.58
NNS	<u>29.6*</u>	<u>32.3*</u>	<u>.45*</u>	<u>.50*</u>	.50	.38	.15	.21	<u>6.98*</u>	<u>7.59*</u>	<u>.65*</u>	<u>.71*</u>
SNS	<u>36.7*</u>	<u>40.0*</u>	<u>.44*</u>	<u>.51*</u>	.54	<u>.39</u>	<u>.24*</u>	<u>.29*</u>	<u>5.96*</u>	<u>6.96*</u>	<u>.67*</u>	<u>.62*</u>
NSS	<u>40.1*</u>	<u>36.6*</u>	<u>.48*</u>	<u>.54*</u>	.56	<u>.39</u>	.18	.21	<u>6.07*</u>	<u>7.32*</u>	<u>.66*</u>	<u>.73*</u>
Stable												
SOUTH	46.0	44.6	.56	.57	.58	.40	.15	.21	4.41	6.17	.58	.57

Note:    indicates migrant type is significantly different from NORTH,  $p < .001$  (two tailed tests).

\* indicates migrant type is significantly different from Stable Residents of South (SSS),  $p < .001$  (two tailed tests).

**Table 3. Comparisons (in Percent) of Three Types of Migrants to the South With Those Who Reside in the North and Those Who Have Been Stable Southern Residents, on Current Residence in a Deep South State and on Metro Area Classification (Native-Born Persons, Age 21 and Over)**

	State		Metro Area Classification					
			Inside Metropolitan Area				Outside Metro	
	% Deep South		Central City		Metro "Other"			
	1970	1990	1970	1990	1970	1990	1970	1990
NORTH	NA	NA	76	54	18	42	05	04
NNS	44*	53*	<u>46</u>	<u>21*</u>	<u>30*</u>	<u>65*</u>	<u>24*</u>	<u>16*</u>
SNS	50*	57	<u>44</u>	<u>20*</u>	21*	<u>56*</u>	<u>35*</u>	<u>24*</u>
NSS	39*	50*	<u>56*</u>	<u>30</u>	18	<u>53*</u>	<u>26*</u>	<u>14*</u>
Stable								
SOUTH (SSS)	58	58	41	28	16	42	43	30

  

1990 Southern Residents Only							
Revised Residence Classification							
Density	Large Urban		Small Urban		Rural	N	
	25%+ Black	Central City	Suburb Area	Metro Urban			
NNS	26*	19*	38*	23*	11	10*	1,259
SNS	38	17*	24*	24*	15	20*	2,076
NSS	27*	29*	30*	19	10*	15*	3,615
SSS	40	24	18	17	13	28	80,267

Note: \_\_ indicates migrant type is significantly different from NORTH,  $p < .001$  (two tailed tests).

\* indicates migrant type is significantly different from Stable Residents of South (SSS),  $p < .001$  (two tailed tests).

### Variables and Measures

#### Regional Residence/Migration Patterns

We identify eight types of residential/migration patterns using South/non-South as the fundamental regional dichotomy. "Region" is defined by adopting the United States Census classification of 15 states and the District of Columbia as the South. All non-South states are termed North for purposes of convenience. In the South, we also differentiate between "border" and "Deep South" states, with the latter identified as those with a historically large black population that was central to the South's agrarian economy. The states included in the Deep South are: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas. Border states are: Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Texas, and Florida, plus the District of Columbia.

**Table 4. Means on Key Study Variables by Type of Recent Migrant (NNS & SNS) and, for Recent Return Migrants (SNS) by Migration Destination (Other State Versus Birth State), for Native Born Persons, Age 21 and Over, 1990 Census**

	All Recent Migrants		Destination of Return Migrants (SNS)	
	Primary (NNS)	Return (SNS)	Other State	Birth State
Education	7.59	6.96*	<u>7.33</u>	6.68*
In Labor Force	.79	.69*	.78	.63*
Age	32.3	40.0*	<u>38.7</u>	41.0*
Female	.51	.51	.47	.54*
Married	.39	.40	<u>.53</u>	.30*
Divorced	.16	.23*	.16	.28*
Large Central City	.19	.17	.16	.18
Large City Suburb	.38	.24*	.35	.15*
Small Metro City	.23	.24	.27	.22
Non-Metro Urban	.11	.15*	.13	.17*
Rural	.10	.20*	.10	.27*
High Black Density	.26	.38*	.28	.46*
Deep South State	.54	.60*	.50	.68*
N	1,259	2,076	891	1,197

\* indicates  $p < .001$  for difference between NNS and SNS types of recent migrants and/or difference between return migrants (SNS) who move to other state versus to return to birth state (two tailed tests).

— indicates  $p < .001$  for difference between recent Primary Migrants (NNS) and

Using this definition of region we examine three features of a person's pattern of residence: (1) region of *birth*, (2) regional residence *five years prior* to a given census, and (3) regional residence *at the time of* a given census. The resulting typology contains eight types of residence/migration patterns, summarized in Table 1. To illustrate, the SNS type refers to persons born in the South, who lived in the North five years prior to a census, and who were residents of the South at the time of a census. By the same logic, the SSS type includes persons born in the South, who lived in the South five years prior to a census, and who were residents of the South at the time of a census.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> We refer to the SSS type as "stable residents of the South," though we cannot establish the fact of stability for certain. For example, we know that a person we label SSS was born in the South, was living in the South five years ago, and currently lives in the South; but we do not know where that person lived 10 years ago or whether after five years prior to a census they moved out of the South and came back. This means that our SNS "return migrant" group almost certainly underestimates the size of the "traditional" return migrant category. It is a near certainty that some people categorized in our SSS category are actually return migrants who left and then returned to the South prior to five years before a census.

Our analyses initially focus on three types of migrants and how they differ from people with other patterns of residence. Much of the subsequent analysis focuses on the SNS return type: those born in the South, who moved to the North, and who subsequently returned to the South. Additionally, we examine two types of Northern-born migrants. Those born in the North who moved to the South prior to five years before a given census year and who now live in the South (NSS), we call “*longer-term* primary migrants” (with all the qualifications noted above in the discussion of the SSS type). Those born in the North, who lived in the North five years prior to a given census, and who moved to the South within the last five years (NNS), are termed “*recent* primary migrants.”

### Personal Factors

Five personal factors are examined to see if migration is selective – i.e., whether those migrating have distinctive personal or socio-demographic characteristics. Drawing on classical migration theory, we examine age, gender, marital status, education level, and whether a person is in the labor force. We examine all these factors to see if migrants differ from people in the region they have left and/or people living in the region to which they are moving.<sup>3</sup>

“Age” measures the number of years between a person’s birth and the year of the census. For estimating the frequency of specific types of residence/migration (Table 1), we include all persons age five or over. This age grouping includes all persons for whom migration data is available, and it is the sub-sample that most closely approximates the general distributions described in census reports. In all other analyses we examine persons age 21 and over in order to focus on adults and the factors involved in their migration patterns.<sup>4</sup> “Gender” is coded 1 if female, 0 if male. “Marital Status” is measured with two dummy variables. The first is coded 1 if “married and living with one’s spouse,” 0 otherwise. The second is coded 1 if “divorced, separated, or not living with one’s spouse,” 0 otherwise. “Education” measures number of years of formal schooling in terms of a nine-category variable coded: 1 = no schooling, 2 = grades one to four were completed, 3 = grades five to eight were completed, 4 = grade nine was completed, 5 = grade ten was completed, 6 = grade eleven was completed, 7 = grade twelve was completed, 8 = one to three years of college were completed, and

<sup>3</sup> Some of the measures we discuss as “predictors” may not accurately describe some migrants prior to moving or at the time of migration since these variables (e.g., marital status, labor force participation) were measured at the time of a given census.

<sup>4</sup> Some investigators select only adults age 25 and older to ensure that educational attainment has a higher chance of being completed. We looked at both 21 and 25 age cuts and found no important differences.

9 = four or more years of college were completed. Finally, "In Labor Force" measures whether an adult is currently employed or actively seeking work (coded 1) or outside the labor force (coded 0).

### **Place/Location Factors**

We also examine the characteristics of the places where African-American migrants to the South have established residences. Beyond mapping residential locations ranging from central cities to rural areas, we also identify the racial composition of geographical areas (e.g., the "percent black" in a given area). We examine the kinds of residential places being established by in-migrants, and whether there has been movement to places where the black population was historically concentrated (as defined by a sizable black presence).

"Residence" is initially measured by the census classification of Metropolitan areas for comparisons across census years from 1970 to 1990. Classification of places of residence is complicated by the fact that census rules prohibit the IPUMS samples from identifying specific places by name depending on the size of a place and are different for various census years. For example, using the 1970 IPUMS samples, one cannot identify any place with less than 250,000 in population by name, whereas the 1990 census imposes a different lower limitation, prohibiting identification of places less than 100,000 in size. These differences make it difficult to identify some cities, most towns, and all clearly rural places in a consistent manner across the various census years. Because we wanted to compare migration patterns from 1970 through 1990, we elected to use an admittedly crude classification based on the census classification of metropolitan location.

The metropolitan classification we use has three categories and permits rough comparisons across census years. Here, a basic consideration is whether a household is *inside* or *outside* a large metropolitan area, with the "inside" category subdivided into those living within a central city or adjacent to a central city. While the category "adjacent to a central city" is largely suburban, it also includes other types of residences, including places classified as rural by other census rules of defining geographical locations. The third category we examine is "outside a metropolitan area," which is an approximation of rural, nonurbanized areas, but does not differentiate smaller cities that exist outside the geographical reach of large metropolitan centers and more clearly rural areas. While this measure permits some limited comparisons across the different census periods, it is not adequate for models examining specific patterns shaping the in-migration to the South.

Thus, to examine residential location and a more nuanced definition of place, we focus on the 1990 census, and create a more complex

classification of residence, employing both the census metropolitan area classification and a dichotomous census variable that classifies places as either urban or rural. Using this approach, we identify five kinds of residence: (1) in a large metropolitan area's central city, (2) in an area adjacent to a large metropolitan area, (3) in a metropolitan area not adjacent to and/or having an identifiable central city, (4) in a place outside a metropolitan area defined as urban (size unspecified), and (5) in a rural location (defined as both non-metropolitan and rural by the two different census classifications).

"Density" is measured in the 1990 sample by the proportion black (25 percent or more) living in a particular geographical area to see whether migration is flowing to areas with high concentrations of African-Americans. For metropolitan areas that can be identified by a place name, we use the percent of the total population that is black within that named area. For areas that cannot be identified by name, we use the "proportion black within an area unit" variable created by IPUMS called PUMA (Public Use Microdata Area), which is generally a county or group of counties. In both cases, we attempt to identify places in the South where blacks were and are a major demographic presence.

### Findings

The upper panel of Table 1 provides distributions (in percent) of the eight residence/migration types for the 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000 census years. The lower panel provides some summary patterns describing trends in out-migration (from the South) and in-migration (to the South) across census years. Most generally, the IPUMS data suggest three patterns: (1) the Great Migration is over, (2) a complex pattern of both "primary" and "return" migration of African-Americans to the South began during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and (3) this return migration has been increasing over the last few decades.

Table 1 shows that among current Northern residents, it is the longer-term residents of the North (NNN) that are an increasing proportion of the African-American population. In addition, there has been a clear decline in the percentage of the African-Americans who have moved from South to North (SNN and SSN). To illustrate, the percentage of the NNN type increases from 29.5 in 1970 to 32.8 in 2000; across these same census years, there has been a clear decline in the percentage of the SNN type – the migrants constituting the Great Migration – from 15.1 in 1970 to 9.6 in 2000. There is also a decline in the proportion of recent migrants from the South (SSN). Combining both sources of in-migration to the North, the percentage of the African-American population that moved from South to North was 17.7 in 1970, and

declined to 10.2 by the 2000 census. The fourth type of residence pattern is a "Northern return" type (NSN) that shows only minor fluctuations over the decades.

Turning to those who reside in the South, the data show a clear increase in migration to that region. The percentage of the African-American population who are the stable residents of the South (SSS) does not change much from 1970 to 2000 (49.4 to 50.5%), but there is a clear increase in the pattern of all three in-migrant types (NNS, SNS, NSS). Rather than describe these patterns in detail, we direct the reader's attention to the second panel of Table 2 that summarizes the pattern of recent out- and in-migration relative to the South. These summary figures show a clear decline in African-American out-migration from the South (from 2.1% of African-Americans in 1970 to 1.0% in 2000), and a clear increase for in-migration to the South (from 1.0% of African-Americans to 2.5% by 2000). These data patterns demonstrate that the Great Migration is over and that, on balance, a reverse/return migration to the South has been increasing among African-Americans over the past few decades.

### **Personal Factors**

Given the increased in-migration to the South from 1970 to 2000, we first examine the characteristics of persons involved in these population shifts. Specifically, we compare the personal characteristics of migrants with the population remaining in the North (the "origin" point of reference) and the stable Southern population (the "destination" point of reference). Table 2 presents these differences on six personal characteristics in 1970 and 1990. Consistent with migration theory, the data show that migrants are younger than either the stable Northern or Southern populations, and are more likely to be male (though the data by 1990 suggest a growing female presence among those changing regional residences).

Classical migration theory suggests that for socio-economic status (SES) variables, migrant populations tend to be in between origin and destination populations (Lee 1966). The migrant is typically more advantaged than those they leave behind but less advantaged than those already residing in the destination area. This pattern seems clear in the case of the Great Migration. Tolnay (1998) has shown how the people of the Great Migration were more educated than those they left behind, but less educated than those already residing in the North. Additionally, despite the lower education of migrants to the North than those already there, the migrants fared well in labor markets and were more likely to be in the labor force (Tolnay 1998).

The more recent return migration phenomenon presents a different pattern for points of both origin and destination on SES factors. The SES characteristics of recent migrants, as indexed by educational attainment and current labor force participation, show that migrants have higher SES compared with their “stable” counterparts in *either* the North or the South – a clear departure from the classic pattern.<sup>5</sup> And, while there are few sharp differences in marital status, the return migrant type (SNS) is clearly more likely to be divorced or separated. These patterns point to the possibility that primary migrants have more human and/or social capital resources, and may more likely be motivated by standard economic considerations in moving to what is perceived to be a land of promise. In contrast, return migrants may have fewer resources, and may be incorporating elements of a personal domestic situation into their migration “home.”

In sum, the return migration to the South does not follow the historic selection patterns of the Great Migration. The recent North to South migrant population is distinctive in having higher SES than persons residing in both origin and destination locations, suggesting the dominance of pull (over push) factors that positively select these recent migrants to the South.

### Place/Location Factors

While those moving to the South are clearly distinctive in personal characteristics, are they also moving to distinctive *destinations*? The upper panel of Table 3 shows – for 1970 and 1990 census samples – the distribution of the three migration types by whether they reside in a Deep South state (compared to stable Southern residents), and whether these migrants differ from those living in the North and/or those who have been stable Southern residents. In the second panel we present data for the 1990 census and Southern residents only. These data compare migrants and stable Southern residents on the density of the black population (25 percent or more) living in a geographical area and a refined classification of residence types that isolates rural areas in a more detailed manner than possible with the classification used to compare 1970 and 1990 residential patterns.

*Deep South.* In 1970 all migrant types were less likely to be located in the Deep South (where African-Americans were historically

<sup>5</sup> OLS and logistic regressions controlling for both age and gender show that both of these SES differences are stable, net of controls. These analyses are available upon request. We report descriptive statistics in the tables for ease of interpretation, and because the causal assumptions required by regression modeling are not always satisfied by available measures of key concepts in this research.

concentrated) compared with the stable Southern population. And, while the return type (SNS) was somewhat more likely than the primary migrants to reside in the Deep South in 1970, their proportions are still less than those of stable residents of the Deep South. However, by 1990 there are clear shifts in the destinations of all three types of in-migrants to the South. The percentage of stable Southern residents (SSS) does not change from 1970 to 1990, but all three migrant types show increases in migration to the Deep South. Those migrants who were Northern-born (NNS and NSS) are much more likely (comparing 1970 to 1990) to reside in the Deep South, though still not at the level of stable Southern residents. However, by 1990 the return migrants were as likely to reside in the Deep South as the stable Southern residents.

*Metropolitan area classification: 1970 and 1990 comparisons.* In general, black migrants to the South have dramatically different residential patterns than those who remain in the North. The African-American experience in the North has been and remains a highly urban one, standing in marked contrast to patterns of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when a large proportion of African-Americans lived in the rural South. While there has been a decline in the percentage living in central cities from 1970 to 1990 (76 to 54) and a rise in the percentage of those living outside central cities but inside a metropolitan area (18 to 42), the percentage of *non*-metropolitan residents has been quite stable (at about four to five percent of African-Americans located outside large metropolitan areas in the North). Thus, the major change in Northern residential patterns has been a shift from central cities to suburbs or outlying areas that are not rural. Consequently, any increase in the overall black rural population due to population movement is likely to be registered in the South.

All three types of in-migrants to the South have distinctive residential patterns compared to stable Southern residents. Interestingly, the long-term primary migrants (NSS) were more likely to live inside a central city in 1970, but did not differ from the more stable Southern population in 1990. This suggests the possibility that earlier population movements (prior to 1970) involved people moving from the urban North to the urban South. By contrast, the recent migrant types (NNS and SNS) did not differ from stable Southern residents in 1970 but were clearly less likely to reside in central cities by 1990.

The patterns for non-central city areas are quite mixed, but it is clear that all three migrant types were more likely to be in this kind of residential location by 1990 than any other place. While this residential category is largely suburban, the precise profile is impossible to calculate, given that different metropolitan definitions were used between 1970 and 1990. At a minimum, it seems that the central cities

of large urban areas were not attracting in-migrants toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Whether any of this flow was to rural areas, and what type of migrant was going there, are questions the present measurement of residence cannot effectively address.

*1990 revised residence classification.* Next, we refine the measurement of residential location, focusing on the 1990 census data and Southern residents only. In the lower panel of Table 3, we present where different types of residents of the South were located on the factor of high density of African-Americans in a geographical area (25 percent or higher), as well as on a more detailed residential classification scheme that more clearly identifies rural areas. The key research issue here is whether migrants to the South gravitate toward particular places of residence. Specifically, have they moved to places where African-Americans were a major historical presence – i.e., to high black density areas and/or smaller rural places? And, what are the differences, if any, that exist between primary and return migrants?

In general, the data suggest that return migrants (SNS) more closely resemble the longer-term residents of the South (SSS), than do the two types of Northern-born primary migrants. On the black density factor, the return migrants are not different from the stable Southern residents in the likelihood of living in places with dense black populations. Regarding rural residence, all types of migrants are more likely to reside in non-rural areas than are stable Southern residents, though the return migrants are closer to the stable Southern population than are the two types of primary migrants. In sum, most of the migration flow of Northern-born African-Americans is not to high black density areas, nor to rural areas. There is a clear indication that the return migrant type is found in high density areas, and may be – depending on the comparison point – more likely to reside in rural locales.

## Recent Migrants

The general comparisons of migrants with stable origin and destination populations suggest two different migration streams: recent *primary* migrants (NNS) and recent *return* migrants (SNS). We turn next to closer inspection of the differences between these two important sources of increase in recent in-migration to the South among African-Americans. In the first two columns of Table 4 we report the results of comparing the two types of recent in-migrants on all study variables. Then, in the final two columns of this table, we report results of the comparison of two subgroups of return migrant (SNS) differentiating between persons who returned to the state of their birth versus some other Southern state.

The comparisons of recent migrants (who lived outside the South prior to the census year) reinforce our impression that Northern-born blacks (NNS) are moving to the South more as a place of opportunity, while the Southern-born return migrants (SNS) are more likely to be returning home. The Northern-born have a distinctive demographic profile on personal characteristics. They tend to be young, more highly educated, never married, and in the labor force. And, regarding residential/location factors, the recent primary migrants are most likely to reside in the suburbs. By contrast, the Southern-born return migrants are best described as older, less educated, less likely to be in the labor force, and moving to non-metropolitan – especially *rural* – places, where fully 20 percent of the return movement is located. These return migrants are also more likely to reside in a Deep South state, and in areas of high black density – patterns highly consistent with the image of going home.<sup>6</sup>

To further explore this “going home” hypothesis, we examined whether return migrants who moved back to the state of their birth are different from those who return to a different Southern state. This final analytic step was taken following the reasoning that returning to one’s birth state is likely a better approximation of going home than other available measures.<sup>7</sup> And, as expected, results in the last two columns in Table 4 suggest that “same-state” return migrants are distinctive on nearly all of the study variables. Regarding residential/location characteristics, migrants returning to their state of birth are much more likely to reside in rural places, in areas of high black density, and in the Deep South. On personal characteristics, they are also distinct: they have less education, are not as likely to be in the labor force, are older, are disproportionately female, and are less likely to be married.

Finally, and importantly, these data also reveal that it is migrants who are returning to their Southern birth-state who account for nearly all of the previously discussed differences between Northern-born primary migrants (NNS) and recent return migrants (SNS). Indeed, the Northern-born primary migrants only differ from recent return migrants *who moved to a Southern state other than their birth-state*, on three personal characteristics variables: age, education, and marital status. These results reinforce the argument that some migrants – and especially those returning to the state of their birth – are moving to places suggestive of a return to rural origins. And, those most clearly

<sup>6</sup> Although we do not know for certain that these current areas of black density are those places people in the Great Migration abandoned, the conjecture is worthy of more research.

<sup>7</sup> Logistic regression models controlling for other study variables show the same basic data patterns seen in Table 4. These analyses are available upon request.

returning to such places tend to be lower SES, women, older, and unmarried. This suggests support for Stack's (1996) argument that an important segment of the return migration is motivated by a desire to be situated in social worlds comprised of familiar places and people.

### Discussion and Conclusions

Our analyses show that the Great Migration is over and a newer in-migration of African-Americans to the South is underway. These analyses also suggest that this migration contains different streams, and is resulting in various residential patterns being established by migrants with distinctive socio-demographic characteristics. It is likely that this in-migration will continue well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, raising important questions to be addressed when the more detailed 2000 census materials become available. We turn now to a discussion of the implications of our findings for the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and offer some speculations that admittedly extend beyond our empirical results.

It is uncertain whether the recent in-migration will become a major demographic movement eventually known as the Return Migration (broadly conceived), but in the past few decades, the regional and residential patterns generated by the Great Migration have clearly been reversed. As a result of recent migration *to* the South, the African-American population has become *less Northern* and *less urban*, raising the possibility that those moving South are reclaiming a new land of promise and/or are returning "home" (Stack 1996).

In general, the Return Migration appears to be one where African-Americans are abandoning urban residences and moving to smaller-scale living, including residence in rural places. All three types of Southern migrants examined in this study are far more likely to live in non-metropolitan or rural places, compared with their Northern counterparts. Beyond this, all three types of migrants are more likely to move to suburban areas (i.e., areas proximate to central cities) and are less likely to reside in rural locations relative to the stable Southern population. One possible exception to the latter pattern is that the prototypical return migrant (SNS) who appears to be relocating in areas defined by both high black density and non-urban residence where the stable Southern population is most concentrated. In that respect, the SNS return migrants most clearly display elements of "going home," in Stack's (1996) sense of the term.

On the question of the *selectivity* of the migrants to the South, all three types of migrants share some common features that set them apart from the stable Southern population: they tend to be younger

and are more likely to be male (although the proportions of female appear to be increasing toward the end of the century). Migrants are not distinctive in their marital patterns, except for the return migrant type, who are more likely to be divorced – especially those who return to the state of their birth. The fact that the divorced/separated status is a particularly strong predictor of this component of the return migration phenomenon suggests a motivation to return to kin-defined places as a survival strategy.

It is with regard to *socio-economic status* that the return migration appears to be a new and distinct demographic phenomenon relative to both the patterns of the Great Migration and stable residents of both the North and the South. Although the issue of selectivity for those involved in the Great Migration is unresolved (Marks 1989), it seems likely that this movement was largely comprised of a rural, relatively uneducated cohort of persons supplying most migrants to the North (Fligstein 1981; Tolnay 1998).

In the case of recent in-migration to the South, it seems clear that this movement is more selective of African-Americans with a consistent status advantage (see also recent work by Crowder, Tolnay, and Adelman 2001). All three types of migrants have higher educational attainment and are more likely to be in the labor force than either the Northerners they left behind *or* the people in the region to which they are moving. Thus, in contrast with the general profiles of those in the Great Migration, the migrants to the South over the past several decades appear to be more educated, more skilled, and more closely resemble the image of the “best and the brightest.” It is the Northern-born primary migrants who have benefitted from educational opportunities in the North who are particularly well-positioned to take advantage of better job markets in the South, thus “reclaiming” a new land of promise. They are more educated than any “stable” segment of the African-American population – North or South – and their movement is likely one motivated less by desperation than by the increasingly attractive “pull” features of a “New South.”

Finally, the fact that the in-migration to the South has two major streams differentiated by the region of a migrant’s birth has important implications for further research – especially in how we think about African-American migration in terms of the concept of “return.” The literal return of people born in the South to the South (SNS) – whose personal biographies are interwoven with Southern places – is the most obvious case of a return to home. But, the dynamic of a Southern-born population moving out of the South and then returning probably has a limited future, as fewer and fewer African-Americans are leaving the South (and, for a variety of reasons, are effectively staying “home”).

Thus, the narrow view of return emphasized in past research may have a limited applicability to future migration streams. And, the story told by the “literal-return” pattern of migration is not one that reflects major structural transformations in the larger society; rather, it is likely to be a movement that follows from the characteristics of personal situations (e.g., loss of jobs, marital problems) motivating a return to home.

The more important migration stream over the next few decades is likely to be an increasing *primary* migration to the South on the part of those born or raised outside the South. Both the “push” of a hostile Northern urban world and the “pull” of changing opportunity structures and kin-based residential places in the South should mean that Northern-born migrants will prove to be quite different from those involved in the Great Migration. In recent decades, primary migrants to the South are among the most advantaged African-Americans; irrespective of region, they are moving not just to large cities, but to a variety of residential settings – including smaller cities with newly opened job markets and even rural areas. Although not nearly as “rural” as the stable black population, nor those returning to the region of their birth, the flow of migration defined by primary migrants is clearly transforming the Northern, urban character of the African-American population.

Future research needs to examine the reasons for this increasing in-migration to the South with an eye toward uncovering patterns that are consistent with standard migration theory (macro-economic considerations and micro-personal issues) as well as patterns that require additional exploration of kinship, community size, and religious and cultural factors in the movement of African-Americans to the South. A broader meaning of the image of return migration – based not only on events in personal biography, but also on dimensions of collective experience – holds out the possibility that some African-Americans who move South are “returning” to a place where their ancestors (if not they themselves) lived, and may prove a valuable guiding hypothesis in future research.

While one can say a Southern-born person returning to the South may be motivated by personal memory of its places and/or people, can the “return” concept also apply to people motivated by collective memory generated by experiences occurring outside the region? For such migrants, there may be complex elements of both negative and positive selection operating: Northern cities characterized by diminished economic opportunities, urban violence, and pervasive drug use providing the push, alongside a changed South offering increased job opportunities, existing family ties, greater opportunities for land ownership – and perhaps the collective memory of a homeland – providing the

pull. Future research should aim to fill in the details of this important, emerging pattern that promises to reconfigure, once again, the boundaries of the African-American experience.

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