Who is Headed South?

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This research examines inter-regional migration patterns in the United States by native-born whites and blacks over the final four decades of the 20th century. Our primary research question is whether regional changes in the United States have made the South a more favorable destination than it once was, especially for blacks. Using samples of census data from 1970 to 2000, we analyze white/black differences in primary (an original move) and return migration to the South, as well as in the selectivity of migration. We observe increasing rates of black (compared to white) migration to the South. Additionally, patterns of selectivity within this growing black migration stream suggest that younger, more educated black women are an important component of this regional population shift.

Introduction

The late 20th century saw a massive influx of immigrants into the United States. This new population dynamic looms large in the U.S. public imagination, and has caught the attention of journalists and scholars alike with “illegal” immigrants garnering particular scrutiny from the media. While the magnitude of this most recent wave of immigration *into* the United States has received well-deserved attention, a numerically larger migration dynamic has received less public scrutiny: the movement of millions of native-born persons *within* the United States. While foreign immigration has been mainly Hispanic and Asian (Malone et al. 2003), native-born migration has been mostly by non-Hispanic whites and blacks (Perry and Schachter 2003). In this study, we focus on these two key native-born populations, with particular attention paid to the U.S. South: the region *from which* many of these migrants moved previously and the region *to which* many are now moving decades later.

For much of the 20th century, the South was generally regarded as a place *from which*, rather than *to which*, people moved. For blacks...
in particular, it was a place to escape, yielding a massive South-to-
North population shift historians and demographers now term “the
Great Migration” (Fligstein 1981; Marks 1989; Lemann 1991; Tolnay
2003). Yet, while millions of people – black and white – left the South
during the 20th century, millions more moved to it. Much of the South’s
population growth occurred in the middle part of the 20th century, and
was attributable, in part, to the in-migration of native-born whites (Long
and Hansen 1975). Whites have, of course, historically constituted the
numerical majority of the U.S. population, so it is unsurprising that they
would constitute most of the flow of people to the South. However, a
substantial component of recent population growth in the South has
been (and may increasingly be) people of color: blacks, Hispanics and
Asians (Frey 2002).

Although the importance of immigration is well-recognized, we focus
here on native-born blacks and whites for three primary reasons. First,
these two race groups have the most long-standing historic ties to the
South as a region; historically, it is whites and blacks, and their often
conflict-laden relationship that come to mind when thinking about the
South. Second, prior racially comparative research on internal migration
(upon which we build) emphasizes the sharp differences between
these race groups, and focuses almost exclusive attention on them.
Third, foreign immigration and internal migration have generally had
different regional destinations, with the foreign-born moving primarily
to places outside the South and the native-born mainly moving to the
South (Frey 2002). As Frey (2001:4) notes, despite increased attention to
foreign (largely Hispanic) immigration nationwide, the South “retains its
historically distinctive racial profile as a mostly white-black region.”

Regional Change and Internal Migration

We agree with other observers that the South has largely retained its
historic racial profile. However, improved prospects for blacks in the
South (Heckman 1990) – alongside the fact that many non-southern
places have turned out to be anything but a “promised land” (Lehmann
1991) – have likely altered past patterns of black internal migration. Non-
southern places such as the Northeast and North Central regions (i.e.,
the “rust belt”) have experienced massive changes over the past several
decades that have left blacks especially hard-hit (Wilson 1997). The twin
macroeconomic forces of globalization and deindustrialization (Bluestone
1982) have transformed northern urban centers, concentrating poverty
in inner-cities and leaving blacks as racially isolated as anywhere in the
nation (Massey and Denton 1993). As a result, many blacks arguably
have dwindling stakes in remaining in those places.
At the same time, there is increasing evidence that the South, which millions once fled, has been substantially transformed, with a “New South” replacing the old one in some important ways (Falk 2004; Wright 1986). The South may be described as “new,” in large measure, because socially, politically and economically, blacks have found greater opportunities and acceptance, allowing them to more fully participate in all aspects of the region’s everyday life. Examples include marked declines in the black/white wage gap and improvements in education among blacks (Smith and Welch 1989), a growing black middle class of urban professionals (Allen and Farley 1986; Landry 1987), and evidence that de-facto racial segregation is actually lower in the South than other major regions of the United States (Farley and Frey 1994). These changes and regional differences, we believe, increase the likelihood that blacks view the South as a relatively attractive destination when migration decisions are made.

*Types of Internal Migration: Primary and Return*

To explore our general thesis, we update basic comparative data from the 1960s and 1970s (Long and Hansen 1975) by examining census data from 1970 to 2000 on the internal migration of native-born whites and blacks to (and from) the South. Following Long and Hansen, we make a distinction between two basic types of internal migration – “primary” and “return” – because we expect new trends in each type. Primary migration to the South refers to a move by someone born outside the South. Return migration to the South refers to persons migrating back to the region of their birth. A key example of late 20th century primary migration is the now well-established movement (beginning after WWII) of older Americans – especially white retirees – to places in the South and/or Sunbelt. Whites also show the highest rates of return migration (as well as constituting the numerical majority of such migrants) to the South over the past several decades.

Beginning in the 1960s, increasing numbers of blacks began moving south. Because black primary migration to the South was so low for most of the 20th century, blacks’ movement south has, historically, been disproportionately of the “return” type. This type of migration generally occurs among those whose biographies are interwoven with southern places and whose movement is linked to features of a personal situation (e.g., job loss, marital problems, even nostalgia). Structural changes associated with a “New South” should increase this type of movement on the part of southern-born blacks, but the more basic impact of recent regional changes on internal migration should be increased rates of primary migration among blacks as they increasingly seek opportunities in the South. However, because of blacks’ unique and distinctive intergenerational connections to the South as a place, we expect their
migration decisions may involve more complexity than those of whites’ (i.e., with blacks’ more likely influenced by both economic and non-economic factors; more on this point below).

**Race, Place and Migration**

During the 20th century, white primary migrants of a variety of European ancestries – most having no central connection to the South as a place – were (and continue to be) drawn to the South’s warmer climate, lower taxes and generally lower cost of living. Put simply, primarily economic considerations linked to jobs and/or retirement shaped their decision to move south. Not only did most white primary migrants have few direct biographical or historical connections with the South, many likely harbored at least some antipathy toward it based on long-standing patterns of stigmatization of the region and its inhabitants by much of the rest of the country (Killian 1970; Reed 1982, 1986). Thus, while whites moved to a place that happened to be “in the South,” these migrants are not generally thought of as “of the South” in the sense of a place representing an important anchor of identity.

By contrast, black primary migrants are more likely than their white counterparts to have historic and/or cultural ties to the South. The historic concentration of blacks in the agrarian economy of the South, followed by the northward movement of blacks in the Great Migration (during the first two-thirds of the 20th century), means that many black Americans who were subsequently born outside the South have clear inter-generational ties to the region. Consequently, black primary migration to the South may be influenced not only by economic considerations, but also by a more culturally-based sense of reconnection with a region where “family” and “place” are often inseparable (Stack 1996; Falk 2004). This may provide blacks with a distinctive – and perhaps especially strong – connection to the South in general and their historic “home” places in particular. Further, as Stack showed (1996), there is likely a gendered dimension to this aspect of migration, with black women feeling especially drawn back to home places where care for elderly parents and other family/kin issues are present.

**Prior Studies of Race and Internal Migration**

Although published more than 30 years ago, Long and Hansen’s (1975, 1977) analyses of return migration remain the most important comparative benchmarks informing current thinking on white and black return migration. There have been numerous studies of more recent return migration (Adelman, Morett and Tolnay 2000; Cromartie and Stack 1989; Robinson 1986; Smith, Longino and Leeds 1992), but most have not been explicitly comparative by race (most focus on changes in the black population).
Long and Hansen (1975:601) note that, during the 1970s, the South became “the nation’s fastest growing region” due, in part, to in-migration of various types (e.g., primary and return). Their analyses of census data for 1960 and 1970, along with some Current Population Surveys for the early 1970s, describe trends in the amount (sheer numbers) and rate (percent “at risk” for a move, who actually move) of return migration for whites and blacks. In addition, their analyses show the relative prevalence of return migration compared to other types of in- and out-migration.

Long and Hansen’s analyses show that the reversal of population flows in and out of the South were primarily due to “changes in the migration patterns of whites” (1975:611). In terms of sheer numbers, in-migration had begun to exceed out-migration for whites in the 1950s and for blacks in the 1970s. Return migration was less important in shaping the overall population reversal relative to decreased out-migration and increased primary migration. Because the sheer volume of whites’ movement to the South consistently exceeded that of blacks’ (due to whites’ larger population base), race comparisons were made based on rates of different kinds of migration (in part, to see if black return migration was as important a dynamic as suggested by concurrent media attention). These comparisons showed that, among southern-born persons living outside the South in the late 1950s and 1960s, whites’ rate of “return” was three to four times that of blacks. Thus, contrary to disproportionate media attention directed to blacks returning to the South, Long and Hansen found only limited evidence of the importance of the black return dynamic. A key question for current research is whether the trends identified by Long and Hansen have continued and/or changed.

**Baselines from the 1970s**

Long and Hansen showed three key empirical patterns regarding white/black differences in inter-regional migration. First, the proportion of return (vs. primary) migrants was considerably higher for blacks than for whites. Specifically, 67 percent of all black migrants were returning compared to only about 30 percent of whites – a difference due, in part, to the low rate of black primary migration to the South at that time. Second, among return migrants, blacks were more likely to be returning to their states of birth or “going home.” (Long and Hansen 1975:604) Data from the late 1960s showed that 66 percent of blacks who returned to the South went to their birth state, compared to 57 percent of whites. This “same-state” racial difference was explained with reference to the broader range of employment options available to whites – a factor also believed to contribute to the higher rate of whites returning to the South generally. Third, CPS data for the early 1970s suggested that the rate
of return migration for blacks was increasing more quickly than among whites (but was still below the white rate).

In a related study, Long and Hansen (1977) observed that out-migrants from the South, and return migrants to the South, were "positively" selected, meaning that migrants had higher status (in this case, higher education) than non-migrants did. This pattern is consistent with migration theory's general prediction that migrants tend to have greater human capital in comparison to non-migrants, and are often moving to seek and fill new work opportunities. Their 1977 study focused on adult black males, though the authors suggest that their findings should generalize to black females. Our analyses below address the "selectivity" issue of migration by examining how education, age, gender and marital status operate as selection factors.

Research Questions

To examine how migration patterns of native-born whites and blacks compared in the latter decades of the 20th century and to update prior analyses of important migration trends, we utilize samples of census data from 1970 through 2000 and pose several questions about blacks' and whites' migration patterns. Our general expectation is that a "New South" has become a magnet for blacks and their rate of primary migration will have increased over the last decades of the 20th century. Further, we expect the black rate of return migration will also have increased, though the tendency of blacks to return to the state of their birth may be declining owing to expanded opportunities throughout the region. So, we ask:

1. Do whites still evidence higher rates of primary migration to the South? We expect that the race gap has narrowed owing to the attractiveness of a New South increasing the tendency of blacks born outside the South to move to that region.

2. Is the black rate of return migration still increasing relative to whites? We expect that the answer is yes. If the New South is more welcoming toward blacks, their rates of return should show an increase across the past four decades.

3. Are blacks still more likely than whites to return to their birth state? If the realities of the New South mean less constrained choices of destinations for blacks, the pattern of greater "same-state" return on the part of
blacks should have decreased over time. However, we expect that blacks may still exceed whites on this score owing to race differences in attachment to certain places in the South.

Beyond these trends, we also examine the selectivity of migration by describing the socio-demographic characteristics of southern migrants. Classical migration theory (Lee 1966) holds that migrants differ from those who stay behind at a point of origin by having higher human capital. Past work in internal migration (Long and Hansen 1977) has suggested migrants are, in general, more highly educated and younger that those who remain in place. Thus, we ask:

4. Do southern migrants have distinctive socio-demographic profiles that suggest they are positively selected as predicted by migration theory? We expect that the answer is yes: if the New South is drawing a more select population, those migrating there should have a “status advantage” over those who remained in the Non-South.

Data

Prior studies comparing black and white internal migration drew directly on census data (Lee 1974; Long and Hansen 1975). In the present study, we use a series of samples drawn from census data by the University of Minnesota Social History Research Laboratory’s Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (Ruggles et al. 2004). All data sets for the years from 1970 to 2000 are 1 percent national random samples of the total United States population. We use the state 1 percent sample for 1970, the metro 1 percent samples for 1980 and 1990, and the general 1 percent sample for the 2000 U.S. Census.5

Variables & Measures

Regional Residence/Mobility Patterns

We identify eight residential/migration patterns (see Table 1). Using South/Non-South as the fundamental dichotomy, we examine: (1. a person’s region of birth, (2. the place a person lived five years prior to a given census, and (3. the place a person lived at the time of the census. For example, the SSS type refers to persons born in the South, who lived there five years prior to a census, and who resided there at the time of a census.6 Although we present initial descriptive information on all eight residential/migration
types (Table 1), most of our analyses focus on residents of the Non-South who recently migrated south (the NNS and SNS types), and how these types differ from those who did not move south.

**Place/Location Factors**

“Region” is defined using the U.S. Census classification of 16 states and the District of Columbia as the South (see note 1 for list) and all other states as Non-South.

**Selection Factors**

We address the issue of possible selectivity in migration behavior by examining persons’ education level, age, gender and marital status to see if migrants to the South differ from stable residents of the Non-South on these factors.7

“Education” measures number of years of formal schooling in terms of a nine-level 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 10 was completed, 6 = grade 11 was completed, 7 = grade 12 was completed, 8 = one to three years of college were completed, and 9 = four or more years of college were completed. These intervals were the only consistent metric across census years.

“Age” measures the number of years between a person’s birth and the year of a census; it is used to select people from the total sample for more systematic analysis at different points in the research and to see if race differences in migration rates of any time are linked to the different age compositions of the black and white populations. For estimating the frequency of specific types of residence/migration (e.g., Table 2), we focus on adults age 21 and older, and the factors involved in their migration patterns.8

“Gender” is coded 1 if female, 0 if male, and is examined to see (1. whether overall trends in migration are due to differentials in movement by men or women and (2. whether particular migration patterns show gendered effects.

Finally, because marital status has been shown to affect migration behavior, with that of the unmarried being less constrained generally (unmarried are more likely to move), and with regard to destination-choice (Adelman, Morett and Tolnay 2000; White et al. 2005) we employ measures identifying whether a person is currently married (1 = married, spouse present, 0 otherwise) or never married (1 = never married, 0 otherwise).9
## Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Eight Residence/Migration Profiles by Decade and Race

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<td>N</td>
<td>3.9</td>
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<td>N</td>
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<td>SSS</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>53.1</td>
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**Southern In-Migrants / All Non-Southern Residents**
- 2.8
- 2.2
- 3.3
- 4.1
- 3.2
- 4.9
- 2.9
- 6.5

**Southern Out-Migrants / All Southern Residents**
- 5.2
- 4.3
- 3.9
- 2.4
- 4.7
- 2.6
- 4.1
- 2.0

Notes: This table is based on the IPUMS 1970 “state” sample, 1980 and 1990 “metro” samples and 2000 “1%” sample. Analyses contain all native-born whites and blacks ages 5 and older at the time of the census for whom a specific state of residence in the census year, as well as five years prior, could be identified. Subsequent tables are limited to persons ages 21 and older. The 1970, 1990 and 2000 samples are weighted by perwt and the 1980 sample is weighted by migsamp.

N = Non-South  S = South.

** Southern In-Migrants (SNS+NNS)/All non-southern residents five years prior to census (SNS+NNS+NNN+SNN)

***Southern Out-Migrants (SSN+NSN)/All southern residents five years prior to census (SSN+NSN+NSS+SSS)
Findings

*Residence/Migration Profiles in Black and White*

Prior to addressing our specific research questions, we describe basic trends in southern in- and out-migration by race. Table 1 provides data on important trends in the form of distributions (in percentages) of our eight residence/migration types for white and black native-born persons ages 5 and older from 1970 through 2000. The lower panel of the table summarizes trends by (1. comparing recent migrants to the South (SNS + NNS) with all who resided in the Non-South five years prior to a census, and (2. comparing recent migrants from the South (SSN + NSN) with all who resided in the South at the earlier time.

Results in the upper panel show little change in percentages among whites for either the return (SNS) or the primary (NNS) profile across the four decades examined. However, for blacks, both primary and return migration proportions increased from 1970 to 2000. The percentage of blacks who are recent primary migrants increased three-fold from 1970 (.4 percent) to 2000 (1.2 percent), while the percentage of those who are return migrants increased by slightly more than a third (from .8 percent in 1970 to 1.1 percent in 2000). These results suggest that the increasing rate of black return migration observed by Long and Hansen (1975) for the early 1970s has continued.

The lower panel of Table 1 expresses recent in- and out-migration as a percentage of all non-southern and then all southern residents, and suggests a race difference exists regarding changes in these patterns. First, comparing recent migrants to the South (SNS and NNS) to all those residing in the Non-South five years prior to a census, shows that southern migration is fairly stable for whites but clearly increasing for blacks where the percentage of black non-southern residents who migrated south increased by nearly three-fold from 1970 to 2000 – from 2.2 to 6.5 percent. To map recent out-migration from the South, we compare the SSN and NSN types to all southern residents in the bottom-most portion of Table 1. Here, whites and blacks are more similar, with both showing less out-migration over time, though this decline is sharper for blacks (a shift from 4.3 to 2.0 percent compared with 5.2 to 4.1 percent among whites).

These trends for both types of recent movement in and out of the South clearly show that by 2000, proportionately more blacks than whites are heading south, and fewer blacks are leaving the South. In short, more blacks are both “going home” and “staying home” relative to whites.
Table 2: Percentage Distributions of Non-Southern Residence/Migration Profiles and Rates of Migration to the South by Decade and Race

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<td>Whites</td>
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<td>Blacks</td>
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<td></td>
<td>SNN S N N</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>54.0</td>
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<td>NNS N N S</td>
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<td>.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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<td></td>
<td>SNS S N S</td>
<td>.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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Percentage who migrate of all those at risk

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<tr>
<td>Recent primary migrants (NNS/NNS+NNN)</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black/White Ratio (Black % / White %)</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.40</td>
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<td>Recent return migrants (SNS/SNS+SNN)</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>10.3</td>
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<td>Black/White Ratio (Black % / White %)</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.67</td>
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Percentage who return to their state of birth

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<tr>
<td>Recent return migrants (SNS)</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>46.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black/White Ratio (Black % / White %)</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>1.17</td>
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A Closer Look at Southern Migrants: Primary and Return

Our primary research focus is on race differences in rates of primary and return migration to the South. Because we are interested in the factors shaping adult decisions to migrate to the South, we restrict subsequent analyses to native-born adults, ages 21 and older, who lived in a non-southern state five years prior to a given census. This restriction allows us to establish the proportion of adult whites and blacks who are moving south, out of the total adult non-southern population “at risk” for a move.

Table 2 presents the residence/migration percentages, by race, for adults with non-southern residences five years prior to a census. These data show that white percentages in most residence/migration profiles do not change much over time, while there is considerable change for blacks. The most dramatic changes from 1970 to 2000 are in the percentage of blacks who are stable residents of the Non-South (NNN or SNN) – with the direction of change sharply different depending on the region of a resident’s birth.

First, the uppermost panel shows that the percentage of blacks born outside the South who remained there (the NNN type), increases from 43.7 percent 1970 to 66.1 percent in 2000 – a change of over 22 percentage points. In addition, in this panel, we can see that – across the same time interval – there is a dramatic decrease in the percentage of southern-born black migrants who remained outside the South (the SNN type). In 1970, more than half (54 percent) of blacks in the Non-South were southern-born – a clear legacy of the Great Migration; yet by 2000, less than a third (29.4 percent) of black non-southern residents had southern origins – a change of almost 25 percentage points. These sizeable shifts over time mean that the number of blacks “at risk” for a primary move south increases across the years, while the sub-population who might make a return move south gets steadily smaller over the decades.

Addressing Our Specific Research Questions

Our first specific research question asks whether the rate of white primary migration has remained higher than that of blacks. The data suggest that it has not. As can be seen in the middle panel of Table 2, the rate of white primary migration increases from 2.2 to 3.3 from 1970 to 1980, and then declines beginning in 1990 resulting in a small net rate increase (.3) from 1970 to 2000. In contrast, the rate of black primary migration shows a steady increase from 1970 to 2000, changing from 1.4 in 1970 to 3.5 in 2000, a rate higher than that of whites. These results suggest it was about the time of the 1990 census when the rate of primary migration south for blacks converged with the rate for whites. This conclusion is reinforced by comparing black and white percentages of primary migrants. In 1970, the black percentage was slightly less than two-thirds (black/white ratio = .64)
that of whites. By 1990, these percentages had converged, and by 2000, the black percentage had increased to slightly less than one and a half times (black/white ratio = 1.40) that of whites. It is clear that a dramatic change in primary migration has been occurring over the past several decades, with blacks more likely than whites to make such a move in the last decade of the 20th century.

Our second research question asks whether blacks’ rate of return migration is still increasing relative to that of whites. The second part of the middle panel of Table 2 shows that in each census interval from 1970 to 2000 the rate of return migration for whites is higher than that of blacks, as was observed by Long and Hansen (1975) for the 1960s and 1970s. However, the data also show a clear trend pointing to changing rates of return by race – increasing for blacks at the same time that it has been decreasing among whites. Specifically, for blacks, the rate of return migration increases from 3 percent in 1970 to 7 percent in 2000; the white rate declines somewhat from 11.6 percent to 10.4 percent across the same time period. Further, whereas in 1970 the black percentage “returning” was just over a quarter (black/white ratio = .26) of the white percentage who were return migrants, by 2000 the black percentage was two-thirds (black/white ratio = .67) that of whites.

Our third question asks whether blacks are still more likely to return to their home states, as observed in earlier research (Long and Hansen 1975). Findings reveal an affirmative answer for each census interval. While in both race groups there is a reduction from 1970 to 2000 in the percentage of return migrants who return to their birth state (-7.2 points for whites, -4 points for blacks), blacks show a higher rate of such return at each census interval. Thus, there is both something new here and something familiar: while blacks are now more likely than whites to be primary migrants in their move south, among those returning to the South, blacks continue to move back to their birth-state at a higher rate than whites.

Selection Factors Distinguishing Southern Migrants

Our final research question asks whether migrants demonstrate distinctive socio-demographic profiles (e.g., indicating “positive selection”) relative to persons who remain in the Non-South. To explore this question, we consider data from 1970 and 2000 (Table 3) and examine possible changes in selection patterns across this time period. Table 3 presents relevant means and percentages allowing comparison of primary (NNS) and return migrants (SNS) with their “similar-origin” counterparts who remained in the Non-South. Interestingly, the selection patterns anticipated by standard migration theory (the most advantaged and unconstrained being the most likely to move) are observed for all of the
Table 3: Selected Socio-demographic Comparisons of Migrants to the South and Stable Residents of the Non-South, by Decade and Race

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<tr>
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Notes: * = migrant vs. other comparison significant (p < .001)
Bold = white vs. black comparison (within a census year) significant (p < .001)
sociodemographic variables (among both whites and blacks) with the exception of how gender and marital status operate among black primary migrants in the most recent time period.

First, regarding age and education, Table 3 shows that all southern migrants, whether white or black, primary or return, tend to be younger and more educated than persons who remain in the Non-South. Although there are race differences in education level and age (blacks have less education and are younger on average), none of the “southern migrant vs. comparison group” comparisons in Table 3 counter the impression that migrants to the South are positively selected. One noteworthy race difference regarding age is that black primary migrants are clearly younger than white primary migrants in both 1970 and 2000 (mean age = 29 vs. 38 in 1970 and 34 vs. 43 in 2000). These results suggest that white and black return migrants may be demographically more similar than white and black primary migrants, possibly indicating two distinct age-linked migration streams among blacks – older return migrants and younger primary ones.

Turning to gender, whites show the expected “migrant/comparison group” difference for gender on all comparisons, with migrants more likely to be male. Blacks also generally conform to expectations, with the notable exception of primary migrants in 2000 where females constitute 54 percent of both the migrant and comparison group. Further, looking at over time change from 1970 to 2000, among blacks, the percentage of primary migrants who are female increases nine points (from 45 to 54), compared to only four points among whites (from 46 to 50). These gender patterns point to a potentially important white/black difference emerging in the movement of people south (and are suggestive of what the New South may become).

Finally, regarding marital status, as expected, Table 3 results show that those who are less constrained by marital ties are more likely to move; for both whites and blacks, the married are less likely, and the never married are more likely, to be present among those moving south. However, as with gender, there is a noteworthy exception for black primary migrants in 2000: in that census year, a black primary migrant was more likely to be married (36 percent) than those who remained in the Non-South (28 percent), and less likely to be never married (41 percent) compared to those staying in the Non-South (43 percent).10

In sum, Table 3 results show that, for most comparisons, black and white Southern migrants are distinct in being younger, more educated, more likely to be male, and less likely to be married than their counterparts who remained in the Non-South. Exceptions to these patterns are observed for gender and marital status among black primary migrants in 2000. Recent black primary migrants may be disproportionately female (and may have become increasingly so over time) owing to real and/or perceived
differences in human capital factors leading black females to be seen as more employable.\textsuperscript{11} The evidence also suggests that marriage may increase rates of recent black primary migration, though we cannot tell definitively owing to the cross-sectional nature of our data (see note 9). Future research using longitudinal data should seek to more effectively determine whether southern primary migration among blacks is disproportionately fueled by younger, married couples, or whether the South is a more productive and attractive marriage market for younger, more educated blacks.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

The U.S. Census Bureau projects that the South will continue to be the most populated region of the United States (a pattern that began in the 1940s), and that internal migration to the South will be an important component of future population growth in the region (Campbell 1996; U.S. Census Bureau 2005). Our analyses reveal that black and white inter-regional population movements established in the 1960s and 1970s (Long and Hansen 1975) have changed – primarily among blacks. The most dramatic changes for blacks are in (1. primary migration where rates now exceed those for whites, and (2. return migration where rates have also increased, and, in so doing, have reduced the white/black differential seen in earlier studies. Thus, recent media attention drawing attention to blacks moving to/back to the South highlights an important population dynamic worthy of more social science research.\textsuperscript{12}

With few exceptions, trends over the past four census intervals point to different dynamics than were present in decades earlier in the 20th century. This suggests that the South is a population magnet attracting a diverse populace. It is clear that regional shifts by blacks have become more distinctive, as evidenced by blacks’ declining tendency to leave the South, their increased tendency to move to the South, and their persisting tendency to return their point of origin. Thus, in thinking about the South as a region, it appears that blacks, more so that whites, are both staying home and going home.

What this means for the future of the region is unclear. While white migration patterns are more demographically consequential owing to their larger population base, and immigration is likely to be an increasingly important factor, it is blacks’ increasing tendency to move to, return to, and stay in the South that will likely help redefine southern landscapes in important ways. To speculate briefly about this, we pose a series of questions concerning (1. primary migration, (2. return migration, and (3. the tendency of blacks to return to their state of birth. In each case, we also assess the importance of new selection factors shaping the black and white populations of the U.S. South.
What Are the Prospects for Increased Black Primary Migration to the South?

All signs point to continued increase in the primary migration of blacks to the South. Apart from a major transformation of non-southern industrial cities (the destinations of most blacks during the Great Migration) rendering such places more hospitable to blacks, the South may be increasingly seen as a “land of promise” where new opportunities can be pursued and past traditions reclaimed (Falk, Hunt and Hunt 2004). In short, the South may become the destination for a new, yet to be named migration – a movement of an increasing number of relatively-advantaged blacks to pursue new economic opportunities and to reclaim historical space occupied by their ancestors. This movement may be composed of younger, more educated blacks (possibly with distinctive marital ties), but also older black “baby boomers” approaching retirement decisions.

Whether and how blacks’ increased choice of a southern destination will alter that region is an open question. Much will depend on where black and white migrants settle. The shift of net migration from Non-South to South beginning in the last quarter of the 20th century will almost certainly not have the same impact that the earlier Great Migration had upon the North. During the Great Migration, both blacks and whites left the South following the push of declining opportunities in the region and the pull of hopes for a better life elsewhere. However, while whites moved to a variety of residential settings (both urban and rural), black migrants ended up almost exclusively in urban locales. This meant that old patterns of racial segregation from the South took on a new and more physical/spatial character across a broad landscape in other places such as northern and midwestern cities.

The South was, of course, highly segregated before the Great Migration, but not in the same way that the Non-South became. Jim Crow arose in the South, in part, because of physical proximity, interdependence, daily interaction between the races, and the unique historical circumstances that produced them. Deference rituals and other detailed rules governing white/black interaction patterns in the Old South were an outgrowth of this proximity and interdependent history. By contrast, these same rituals and rules were not as central to non-southern places, in part because southern-born blacks and whites moved to different destinations. Whites moving to rural and small town areas were almost certainly more geographically isolated from blacks than was the case in the South prior to their movement (Loewen 2005). In addition, whites in urban areas were spatially separated by race owing to blacks’ concentration in urban slums (Massey and Denton 1993). Whether the increasing movement of blacks to the South will lead to a reconstitution of racial and spatial segregation patterns more reminiscent of an older South, today’s North,
or a New South with novel forms of race relations and residential patterns is an important question for future research.

The idea of the “New South” is important here because, by whatever name, it is clear that millions of people have found the region to be more attractive than not. For whites, it is easy to argue that historical advantages from one place are simply transferred to a new one. For blacks, this same argument did not hold historically; however, the South circa 2008 may be more advantageous for blacks than it has ever been. More blacks hold elected political office in the South than elsewhere in the United States and selected areas – especially metropolitan Washington, D.C. and Atlanta – have experienced pronounced concentrations of black wealth. While the South may not become the “Promised Land” that the North was once thought to be, it may become a land of promise in the continuing black experience.

**Will the Increasing Rate of Return Migration for Blacks Begin to Exceed that of Whites Over the Next Several Decades?**

The trends observed in this study suggest that the answer may be yes, but with some important qualifications. The extensive out-migration of blacks from the South that defined the Great Migration established a large base of potential return migrants. However, in so far as the Great Migration is over, the decrease in black out-migration from the South (more so than for whites) means there will be an ever-shrinking base of potential black return migrants over the next few decades. That fact, coupled with the aging of the black southern-born population already residing outside the South, may mean an eventual decline in the rate of black return migration. This projection is reinforced by past studies showing that blacks, compared to whites (1. tend to remain in place when aging or leaving the labor force, and (2. have not been moving south to retire in proportions close to those of whites (Hayward and Grady 1990; Newbold 1997). Barring changes in retirement patterns for blacks, the prospects for the aging, black, southern-born population returning to their region of birth seems less and less likely to exceed that of their white counterparts in coming years.

On the other hand, a key dynamic that could increase the rate of black return migration is the distinctive connection of blacks to the South as a place where family ties are historically grounded (Falk, Hunt and Hunt 2004; Franklin 1994; Stack 1996). While some research has shown that blacks were not as likely as whites to choose destinations based on kin connections (Liaw and Frey 2003), some recent thinking, including that of Frey (see El Nasser 2005), posits that family connections are becoming more important in shaping the decisions of blacks to move south. This buttresses the classic argument found in Stack’s (1996) poignant phrase
“call to home.” Other studies of black migration suggest that incorporating non-labor-market factors such as kinship patterns, attachment to particular destinations, and housing circumstances is more important for understanding black, as opposed to white migration (Stack 1996; Falk 2004; Lee and Roseman 1997). The increased primary migration to the South on the part of younger, more educated blacks may lead the older generation to follow in order to maintain family connections. This family-based hypothesis finds some limited support in the tragic case of movement prompted by Hurricane Katrina (Falk, Hunt and Hunt 2006) (i.e., people are inclined to go where others they know and love already live), and is worthy of further investigation.

**What Does the Future Hold for the Greater-Black-Than-White, Same-State Return Pattern?**

Will blacks continue to move back to their state of birth at higher rates than whites do, or will expanding opportunities draw them away from home places when they return to the South? The pattern of greater black same-state return has changed the least, relative to other comparisons of black and white southern migrants. This race difference was interpreted by Long and Hansen (1975) to reflect, in the early 1970s, greater white opportunities for employment (a factor that also accounted for the then-higher rate of white return migration), and the fact that black return migration was more constrained by racial discrimination in labor markets and other institutions. Our results suggest the rates of return migration for blacks and whites are converging, yet the greater black tendency to make a home-state move persists. Seen alongside the fact of increasing primary migration among blacks, which no doubt reflects greater access to southern labor markets and other social arenas, the persisting pattern of greater black home-state migration in 2000 presents something of a puzzle.

The answer to this puzzle may lie in the two age-differentiated migration streams that are present in black, as opposed to white, southern migration. Specifically, at the same time that younger, more educated black primary migrants are flowing to new places within the South, an older generation of blacks (who comprise most of those making a literal return the South) may be disproportionately returning to their home places. Following this logic, for the older generation of return migrants it is the previously mentioned kin connections and a strong “sense of place,” more so than recent changes in southern economic conditions (e.g., expanded labor market opportunities), that are shaping migration decisions. The extent to which black migration to the South is an increasingly age (and gender) differentiated trend is an important possibility that future research should address.
We close by noting that for much of the 20th century, greater economic opportunity and social justice existed outside rather than within the South. To the extent that this is no longer true, the array of inter-regional “push and pull” forces shaping migration decisions has been altered. The New South has become a population magnet drawing outsiders in, and increasingly holding on to its native flock; southern-born whites and blacks arguably have fewer reasons to move away from their home region, and more reasons to stay. What kinds of economic opportunities will exist “at home,” as well as how cultural ties to the South as a place will shape decisions to move or not, are open and evolving sociological questions.

Notes
1. There is considerable debate regarding what states constitute the “real” South; we use the U.S. Census definition in this research: Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas and the District of Columbia. We recognize, of course, that the “South” is not a singular entity and contains considerable diversity. However, we believe the “Census South” is the most appropriate baseline for the analysis of trends over time.

2. Such “home” places are also very often more affordable places to live (Falk, 2004; Stack, 1996; Fuguitt, Fulton and Beale. 2001). This is due in part, and especially for blacks, to what is called “heirs property” – land deeded to multiple family members often traceable to the Reconstruction era. This arrangement provides a base on which one may build a house or locate a mobile home, in close proximity to other family members.

3. The extensive work of Frey (see multiple cites in references) and a recent study by Fuguitt, Fulton and Beale (2001) are notable exceptions to this generalization. However, Frey’s work has concentrated largely on relatively recent trends, rather than the question of how migration patterns have changed (or not) for blacks and whites since the early 1970s. Additionally, the Fuguitt, Fulton and Beale study examines general migration streams and their impact on a specific type of place: the non-metropolitan South, rather than examining (as we do) primary and return migration to the region as a whole.

4. Interestingly, Long and Hansen did not report the rate of primary migration by race (in part, because this rate among blacks was so low). However, their analyses did show that – in terms of sheer numbers – among persons born outside the South, white primary migrants markedly outnumbered black primary migrants.

5. The “state” and “metro” samples for the years 1970 through 1990 differ only slightly regarding the sizes of the smallest geographical that can be identified. In a “state” sample, the smallest geographic unit is a state, whereas for “metro” samples, the smallest unit is a metropolitan areas and/or country groups. Both types of samples contain both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas.
The 2000 sample does not distinguish between “state” and “metro” samples. We chose the “state” sample for 1970 because it contained more information on key variables across decades than did the 1970 “metro” sample, which would have limited some trend comparisons.

6. Of course, we cannot be certain of all details of someone’s residential movements. For example, for each census period, 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 they lived 10 years ago, or whether after five years prior to a census they moved out and came back.

7. The legacy of race stratification has resulted in sizable white/black differences on factors influencing migration processes. Regarding factors reducing the likelihood of migration, the black population, compared to the white, has lower educational levels and a higher proportion of females. Regarding factors increasing the likelihood of migration, the black population is comparatively younger and is less likely to have stable marriage ties.

8. 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. Further, while we agree with Cromartie and Stack (1989) that children should be considered part of the return migration process, our interest is the factors shaping decisions to move from a particular place or destination, and thus we elected to restrict analyses to adults.

9. Because blacks are less likely to be married, this factor should be explored in a study of migration behavior that is comparative by race. Because we are using cross-sectional data, we cannot determine whether “being married” is truly a selection factor since we cannot establish whether a marriage occurred prior to, or after, a move to the South (this would require longitudinal data). It is easier to say something with certainty about the never married, as that status was present both at the time of the move and in the following census.

10. Motivated by the suggestion of distinctive gender and marriage effects for black primary migrants in 2000, and to confirm the robustness of Table 3 findings generally, we ran a series of multivariate models predicting various migration outcomes. These results (available upon request) confirm that, among both whites and blacks, the results in Table 3 are stable when controlling for other reported sociodemographic variables.

11. Analyses of educational level and, among the employed, Duncan SEI scores, confirm the previously documented pattern of higher human capital for black females than black males. This gender difference is much less marked among whites. Additionally, one of the authors of this manuscript is presently engaged in an ethnographic case study of one part of the South. There, Hispanics have largely replaced blacks in much of the entry-level service sector, and their presence is widespread in much of the landscaping and construction industries. It seems likely that black males are more directly affected by such
ethno-racial competition for jobs than are black females. This could underlie why black females with greater human capital are increasingly represented in southern-bound black migration streams.

12. In recent years, the amount of media coverage has been too extensive for any brief summary and encompasses wide variety of media including (1. mainline newspapers such as the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, the New York Times, The Washington Post, etc.: (2. print articles in magazines/journals targeting a largely black audience (e.g., Ebony, The Crisis); (3. several television specials on major TV networks, (4. discussions on radio forums on National Public Radio and (5. several Internet sites, the most impressive of which is that produced by the Schomberg Center for Research in Black Culture (www.inmotionaame.org).

References


