

The Second Great Migration: A Historical Overview

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“With a four-year-old boy and a ten-week-old girl I boarded a train bound for Oakland.” Thus begins Dona Irvin’s account of leaving Houston in September 1942. Her husband, Frank, was already in California and had taken a job in one of the shipyards that had recently started to hire African Americans. Full of anticipation, hoping for a better standard of living and freedom from southern Jim Crow restrictions, the young family instead found Oakland very difficult. Housing was a nightmare. Initially, they squeezed into an aunt’s already crowded flat in West Oakland, which before the war had been the site of Oakland’s small black community. Dona felt lost in the frenzied wartime city, where black people were finding certain kinds of jobs but struggled for living space. She appreciated the new freedoms. She could sit in the same seats on streetcars and shop in the same stores as white people. But Oakland crackled with racial tension. “I seriously considered returning to Houston,” Dona recalls. Then things got much worse. Four-year-old Frank Jr. died during a routine tonsillectomy. The devastated couple had many reasons to think that they had made a mistake in leaving Texas.¹

Dona and Frank Irvin, their daughter Nell, and their son Frank Jr. were part of the Second Great Migration, a term historians use to distinguish between two eras of massive African American migration out of the South. The exodus began in the early part of the twentieth century, especially during World War I and the 1920s, and that first phase has long been called the Great Migration. The label may have been premature. By some measures, a greater migration was still to come. Beginning during World War II and lasting through the Vietnam era, African Americans left home in unprecedented numbers, and in doing so, they reshaped their own lives and much more. Close to five million people left the South between 1941 and the late

1970s. More millions left farms and villages and moved into the South's big cities. Within one generation, a people who had been mostly rural became mostly urban. A people mostly southern spread to all regions of the United States. A people mostly accustomed to poverty and equipped with farm skills now pushed their way into the core of the American economy. And other changes followed. A people who had lacked access to political rights and political influence now gained both.²

This essay explores key dimensions of the Second Great Migration. Less is known about the second than about the first sequence of black migration from the South, and even the basic numbers appearing in encyclopedias and textbooks are often incorrect. New statistical data and new research by historians and sociologists enable us to clear up some of the confusion. Much of what I will report is based on the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) that have been developed by the Minnesota Population Center in cooperation with the Census Bureau.³ The pages that follow assess several issues: where people went and in what numbers; who moved and why; their impact on the cities they went to and on the South they left behind. And I also assess their experiences. Did most benefit from relocation?

The Second Great Migration is usually defined as migration from the South to other regions of the country. But the same forty years saw a massive intraregional shift from farms to cities within the South, and I will discuss some aspects of internal southern migration as well as migration away from the South. When I refer to the South or southern-born, I am following the Census Bureau's definition of the District of Columbia and sixteen states (Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia).

How Many?

Historians and demographers have typically underestimated the number of African Americans who left the South during the four decades associated with the Second Great Migration. Figure 1.1 provides an updated look at the volume of migration during each decade of the twentieth century. It uses IPUMS data and a more sophisticated formula than earlier studies, taking into account estimates of mortality and return migration in calculating how many new migrants left the South each decade. The volumes are low-side estimates. We can be confident that the actual numbers were higher.⁴

Over the course of the twentieth century, approximately eight million African Americans left the South. Figure 1.1 shows the relative size of the

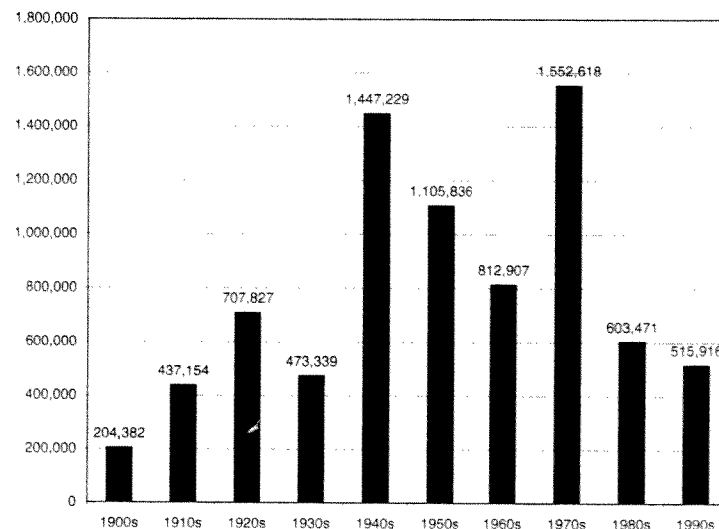


Fig. 1.1. Volume of black migration out of the South, by decade. (Data from 1900–2000 IPUMS samples; see note 3.)

Second Great Migration. From 1940 to 1980, roughly five million blacks moved north and west, more than twice the volume of the earlier sequence that is most readily associated with the label "Great Migration." The war years and the rest of the 1940s saw both the start and the peak volumes of the Second Great Migration, as close to 1.5 million southerners left home. Migration rates declined a bit in the 1950s. This chart may underestimate somewhat the volume of the 1960s and overestimate the 1970s by the same margin. A badly worded question in the 1970 census seems to have generated some erroneous birthplace information. Most likely, volumes of migration were steadier across the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s than they appear to be in the census data. On average, 1.2 million black southerners left that region during each of these decades. Those numbers fell off dramatically in the 1980s and 1990s, when a booming Sunbelt and a devastated northern Rust Belt reversed regional patterns of economic opportunity that had prevailed for more than a century.

Destinations

The five million southerners who participated in the Second Great Migration mostly followed pathways that had been established by the generation of southerners who moved north during World War I and the 1920s. The key

Table 1.1 Ten Most Important Destinations for First Great Migration and Second Great Migration

1930		Southern-born black residents	% of city's black pop.
Rank	Metropolitan area		
1	New York–Northeastern NJ	260,952	56.8
2	Chicago, IL	198,061	72.7
3	Philadelphia, PA-NJ	152,329	63.1
4	St. Louis, MO-IL	88,459	56.6
5	Detroit, MI	68,101	72.2
6	Pittsburgh, PA	64,083	65.2
7	Cleveland, OH	59,454	74.1
8	Indianapolis, IN	42,125	69.4
9	Kansas City, MO-KS	39,904	50.5
10	Cincinnati-Hamilton, OH-KY-IN	34,264	71.4
Total, top 10 cities		1,007,732	
% of all southern-born migrants		71.8	
All southern-born in North and West		1,403,889	
1980		Southern-born black residents	% of city's black pop.
Rank	Metropolitan area		
1	New York–Northeastern NJ	750,157	28.1
2	Chicago, IL	532,861	34.0
3	Los Angeles–Long Beach, CA	386,290	39.5
4	Detroit, MI	328,161	36.8
5	Philadelphia, PA-NJ	244,311	27.4
6	San Francisco–Oakland–Vallejo, CA	172,344	41.0
7	Cleveland, OH	123,403	35.5
8	St. Louis, MO-IL	119,643	29.3
9	Milwaukee, WI	60,444	39.6
10	Cincinnati-Hamilton, OH-KY-IN	51,601	30.2
Total, top 10 cities		2,769,215	
% of all southern-born migrants		67.4	
All southern-born in North and West		4,106,945	

Source: 1930 IPUMS 0.5% sample; 1980 IPUMS 1% Metro sample.

geographic fact about both migration sequences is that they were tightly focused on big cities. This was a critical part of what made the great migrations “great.” The concentration of large numbers of African Americans in cities that were centers of the American economy and centers of political and cultural influence would give black Americans opportunities that would have been lost if migration patterns had been more dispersed.

Table 1.1 shows the major destinations of both waves. In 1930, almost

72 percent of all southern black migrants were living in just ten metropolitan areas: New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Kansas City, and Cincinnati. Only 11 percent of migrants had settled in rural areas and small cities. Another 17 percent were scattered in other metropolitan areas. The Second Great Migration added some new destinations while maintaining the basic pattern. New York and Chicago remained the top two destinations, and Detroit, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Cleveland continued to attract large numbers of newcomers. Those six cities in 1980 housed more than two million former southerners, over half the migrant population. Some cities that had been primary destinations ceased to be so in the second wave. Pittsburgh had 64,000 southerners in 1930, but fewer than 40,000 in 1980. Pittsburgh’s black population had continued to grow, but mostly not as a result of new migration. Indianapolis and Kansas City also experienced only modest new migration after 1940. But the second wave added new cities to the list of black metropolises. The West Coast had benefited very little from the early migration. With World War II, families like the Irvins turned west, creating, almost overnight, major populations in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area, as well as significant concentrations in San Diego, Seattle, and Portland.⁵

The westward turn was not the only geographic change of the Second Great Migration. Migrants now settled in more cities. The earlier migration had been tightly focused on the major cities of the mid-Atlantic and Great Lakes states, the nation’s traditional industrial belt. The new phase deepened the impact on those cities while adding others. By 1980, there were eighteen metropolitan areas outside the South claiming a black population of more than 100,000, and another eleven above 50,000.

These patterns set up the history-making potential of the two great migrations. Had black people dispersed as widely as white interstate migrants generally do (including white southerners), their impact would have been much more modest. The concentration in cities in numbers large enough to make a substantial impact on their social and political institutions was key to the transformations that would be set in motion by the great relocation.⁶

Reorganizing the South

The Second Great Migration decisively transformed the South. The earlier exodus had begun the shift from farms to cities. The second phase completed the process, all but eliminating black farm life in the South—indeed, in America. The southern agricultural economy had been losing acreage

and shedding people since the mid-1920s, as marginal lands were taken out of production and farming techniques were modernized and mechanized. This process had accelerated when prices in the cotton belt collapsed during the 1930s, but the major changes belonged to the era of the Second Great Migration. As late as 1940, the South's rural population was still growing, and that year 6,288,501 African Americans made their homes in the South's rural areas, most of them living and working on farms, typically as sharecroppers. These rural dwellers accounted for 63 percent of the South's black population in 1940.⁷ Forty years later, the black rural South existed in a much-reduced and very different form. The farm population was gone. Whereas 45 percent of blacks in the South had lived on farms in 1940, only 1 percent did so in 1980. Those who remained in areas classified as rural usually had little to do with agriculture. These declining numbers, dramatic as they are, understate the change. Villages and towns disappeared. Indeed, a whole subregion—the great cotton belt, also known as the “Black Belt”—changed composition. Whites also left, but not at the same rate. The rural South became whiter as a result of the Second Great Migration. By 1980, 85 percent of rural residents were white, as were 94 percent of all those living on farms. The “Black Belt” had pretty much disappeared.⁸

Mississippi, Alabama, and Arkansas had included the most productive section of the cotton kingdom and the demographic heart of black America. Each of these states experienced a dramatic diaspora, sending much of its African American population elsewhere. In 1970, 52 percent of all black adults who had been born in Alabama lived outside that state; 62 percent of adult black Mississippians and 63 percent of black Arkansans had left home. Figure 1.2 reveals more about the state-by-state nature of the diaspora. Blacks born in border states such as Maryland and Delaware rarely moved away. That was true also of Florida and Texas; fewer than 30 percent of their natives had left. Louisiana had lost 38 percent of its natives, but in other states at least 40 percent of adults had moved away by 1970, with West Virginians topping the list at 70 percent.

Figure 1.2 also shows the preference for nonsouthern destinations. In almost every case, far more migrants settled in northern or western states than in southern states. This defies a long-standing assumption in migration theory. The rule of thumb is that people are more likely to move short distances than long distances and to choose the familiar over the unfamiliar. But not during the Second Great Migration. Even as southern cities grew dramatically, northern and western cities were much more attractive. Some black Mississippians, for example, moved to neighboring Tennessee, especially Memphis, and to New Orleans; but most left the South. In 1970,

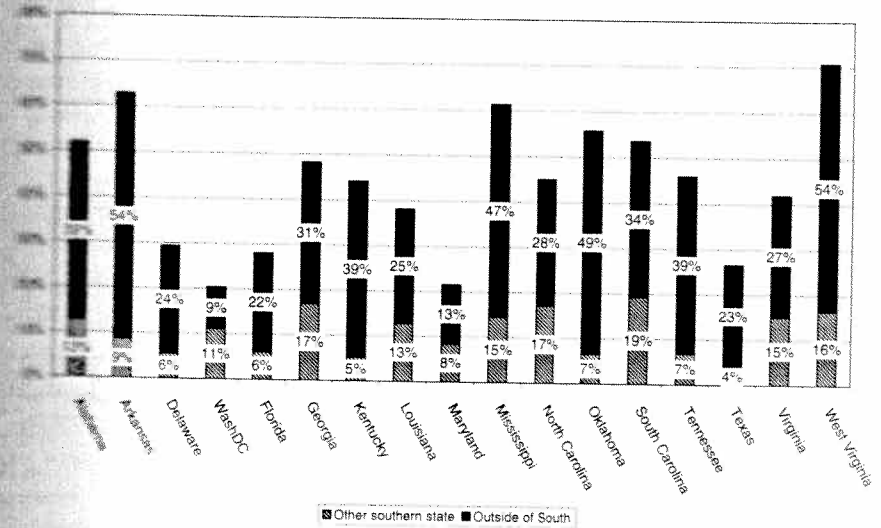


Fig. 1.2. Percentage of black adults born in a southern state who were living in either a different southern state or outside the South in 1970. [Data from 1970 IPUMS 1% Form 1 State sample; see note 3.]

there were more Mississippians living in Illinois (155,259) than in all of the states of the South beyond their birth state (127,963). Some Alabamians moved east to Georgia and Florida, but they headed north in much greater numbers, to the Great Lakes states or to New York or California.⁹

So who was moving to southern cities?¹⁰ As people left the farms and villages, they seemed to have made a choice: either go to a very nearby city or leave the South. Rarely did they choose a more distant southern city. The growth patterns of the southern metropolises reveal this tendency. Black populations of major southern cities expanded dramatically in the decades between 1940 and 1980, with growth rates comparable to those of the northern black metropolises. But the composition of these cities was very different. Table 1.2 shows the birthplaces of African American adults living in six key cities as of 1970, dividing those birthplaces into “same state” as the city, “contiguous states,” and “distant states.” Atlanta shows the pattern common throughout the South. Seventy-nine percent of its black adult residents had Georgia birthplaces; another 9 percent were from neighboring South Carolina, North Carolina, Alabama, Tennessee, or Florida. A mere 13 percent were from more distant states. Compare that to Chicago, where in 1970 only 33 percent of adults claimed Illinois birthplaces and 64 percent came from distant states, mostly in the South. These patterns had all sorts

Table 1.2 Birthplaces of Black Adults Living in Key Southern and Northern Cities, 1970

	Southern cities		
	Atlanta	Houston	New Orleans
Same state	79%	69%	80%
Contiguous states	9%	19%	11%
Distant states and abroad	13%	13%	9%
	Northern cities		
	Chicago	Detroit	New York-NJ
Same state	33%	29%	35%
Contiguous states	3%	2%	1%
Distant states and abroad	64%	69%	63%

Source: 1970 IPUMS 1% Form 2 Metro sample.

of implications. More homogeneous than the northern black metropolises, southern urban communities experienced less of the population circulation that promoted black cosmopolitanism elsewhere. They also, of course, dealt with different political systems and regimes of racial hierarchy.

Rural southerners made a choice between the nearby and the North, and they often did so in a particular sequence. It was common for farm people to first try out a southern city and then at a later date head north. Historians and demographers have argued over whether the Great Migration consisted mostly of rural people or of people with urban skills.¹¹ The data are mixed. A spot survey of the Detroit area conducted by the Census Bureau in March 1944 found that close to 30,000 newcomers had arrived from the South since 1940. Only 15 percent of them reported having lived on a farm four years earlier. Had they been a representative sample of black southerners, 45 percent would have said they had lived on a farm.¹² These early war migrants almost certainly were more urban than those who followed. Data from later censuses show that rural people made up a large segment of the migrant population. In 1960, 52 percent of southerners living in the North or West who had moved between states within the past five years had come from nonmetropolitan settings. Among those who left the South between 1965 and 1970, at least 46 percent had lived in nonmetropolitan areas.¹³

But these numbers may hide a more complicated migration story. Many former migrants talk about their relocation history as a series of tests and steps that began with an initial move to a nearby city, perhaps followed by a return home. Experiences of that sort made it easier to contemplate more distant relocations, and urban experiences in the South helped formerly ru-

ral people gain access to both skills and contacts that facilitated migration to northern and western places. Ultimately, it is hard to disentangle the rural-urban chain. What is clear is that the vast majority of migrants had grown up on the farms and in the villages of the South and that many had spent time in southern cities before leaving the region.

Who Moved?

There has been a great deal of research in recent years on the demography of the two great migrations, most of it enabled by the IPUMS data. We have a better sense than ever before of the selectivity of the migrants: how they compared in terms of age, sex, education, and family composition to southerners who did not leave.¹⁴

Dona Irvin was twenty-five years old when she left Houston. In that sense, she was a very typical migrant: cross-country relocation was for young people. Figure 1.3 shows the age distributions of migrants during the two intervals for which we have adequate data. The 20–24 age group led all others, and a large portion of each migration cohort consisted of people between the ages of 15 and 29. That cohort accounted for 45 percent of those who moved between 1955 and 1960, and 54 percent of the 1965–70 movers. Some of the migrants were in their thirties, but willingness to relocate trailed off dramatically with age. Just 18 percent of movers were 40 or older in 1955–60, and only 12 percent in 1965–70. This age distribution doubled the demographic effect of the exodus. It meant that the South was losing—and the other regions were gaining—not just the migrant generation, but also their unborn children and grandchildren.

The Irvins' experience also represented a fairly typical family migration configuration. Frank had gone west first to check things out, following aunts and cousins who had moved to Oakland before the war. Dona and the children joined him soon after. Intact young families of this sort were very common. A spot census conducted in Detroit in April 1944 found that among new migrants over the age of fifteen, 63 percent of females and 71 percent of males were married, and more than three-quarters of the married segment had a spouse present. Those percentages came down in later decades, but it is safe to assume that the majority of migrants either traveled as families or reconstituted family life in short order.¹⁵

Belle Alexander was not married, and in that sense she was not a typical migrant. In 1943, the twenty-three-year-old Georgian signed up for a training program conducted by the National Youth Administration to prepare young people for jobs in defense plants. She had been living in Atlanta for

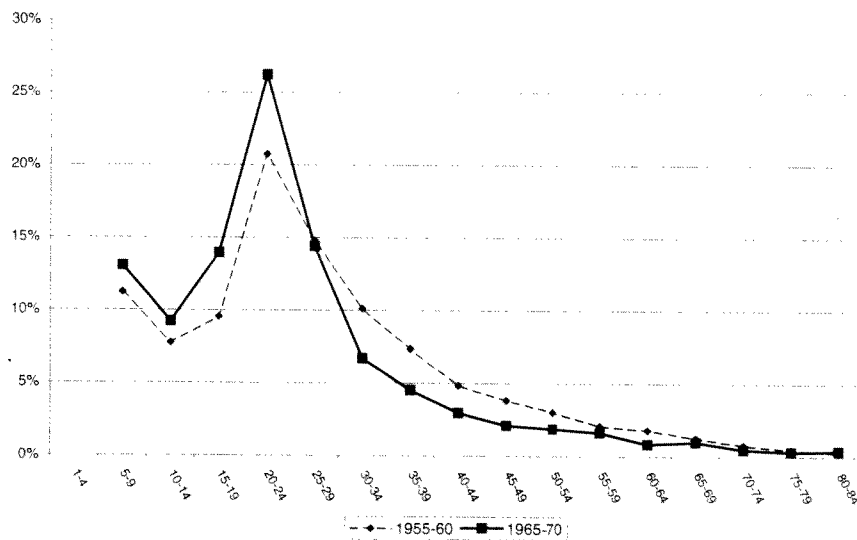


Fig. 1.3. Age distributions of new migrants, 1955-60 and 1965-70. (Data from 1960 IPUMS 1% sample and 1970 IPUMS 1% Form 1 State sample; see note 3.)

some time, having left her Georgia farm village—like so many other young women—because there were few opportunities. Now she was about to join a second migration. After several months of training in sheet-metal work, she and her classmates learned that jobs awaited them in a place called Seattle, where the Boeing Airplane Company had finally agreed to hire African Americans. "I don't know nothing about Seattle," she told her supervisor, "but I will take it." She recalled, "There must have been fifty or seventy-five of us got on that train, and five days later we ended up at Union Station in Seattle."¹⁶

Belle Alexander may not have been statistically typical, but she represents one of the surprising dimensions of the Second Great Migration: the important role played by unaccompanied females. Demographers often assume that men are more likely than women to undertake long-distance relocations. In the early phase of the black exodus, during World War I, that was indeed the case. But women outnumbered men during the 1920s and throughout the Second Great Migration. In late March 1944, the Census Bureau conducted spot censuses of Detroit, Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area, San Diego, Seattle-Tacoma, and Portland, all of which had been designated "Congested Production Areas." Except for the last two, females were in the majority in each of these black communities, and the female population had grown at least as fast as the male population since 1940.¹⁷

The trend continued after the war. During 1955-60, there were only 88 migrating men for every 100 women; in 1965-70, 91 men accompanied each 100 women.¹⁸ Females especially outnumbered males in the young adult age range.

The gender distribution had something to do with unequal job opportunities in the rural South. Farmwork privileged young males, especially as agriculture contracted and family-oriented production through tenant farming and sharecropping gave way to employment on consolidated and mechanized farms. Because this was usually seasonal and undependable work, it put pressure on family incomes. Female incomes became increasingly important but also increasingly difficult as women in the rural South competed for scarce positions, mostly in domestic service. Belle Alexander thus had more reason than the young men in her village to head for a city.¹⁹

On another dimension, neither Belle Alexander nor Dona Irvin was a typical migrant. Both were better educated than the norm. Belle had graduated from high school. Dona had graduated from Prairie View College, an all-black institution in Texas. As college graduates, she and Frank were part of a tiny minority. As of 1950, only 5.7 percent of adult former southerners living in the North or West had any sort of college experience. Only 17.8 percent had graduated from high school. The majority had stopped school at the eighth grade or before.²⁰

Even though they were much better educated than most who left the South, the Irvins and Belle Alexander illustrate something important about the Second Great Migration: the exodus represented a brain drain from the black South. In 1970, 38 percent of all southerners who had ever been to college lived outside that region.²¹ Moreover, migrants were, on average, better educated than southerners who remained behind. Like many mass migrations, this one shows evidence of self-selection on the basis of education and ambition. The best study was conducted by Stewart Tolnay, who compared the schooling levels of blacks who left the South with those of blacks who remained and found that migrants enjoyed a significant educational advantage that shows up consistently across the decades. He also reported that the migrants were educationally disadvantaged in comparison with African Americans born in the North or the West, and also in comparison with whites. Compounding that, northerners assumed that southern schools were inferior in quality. Even blacks with educational credentials had trouble using them in their new homes.²²

One other selection criterion looms large in the Second Great Migration: military service. The South has long contributed disproportionately to the armed forces. During World War II, close to one million African Americans

served, mostly southerners. And military service took them to other regions and overseas. After discharge, many chose to settle outside the South. That was true also for the servicemen and women who followed in the 1950s and 1960s. Military service proved an important pipeline out of the South. In 1970, 41 percent of southern-born black veterans lived outside their birth region.²³

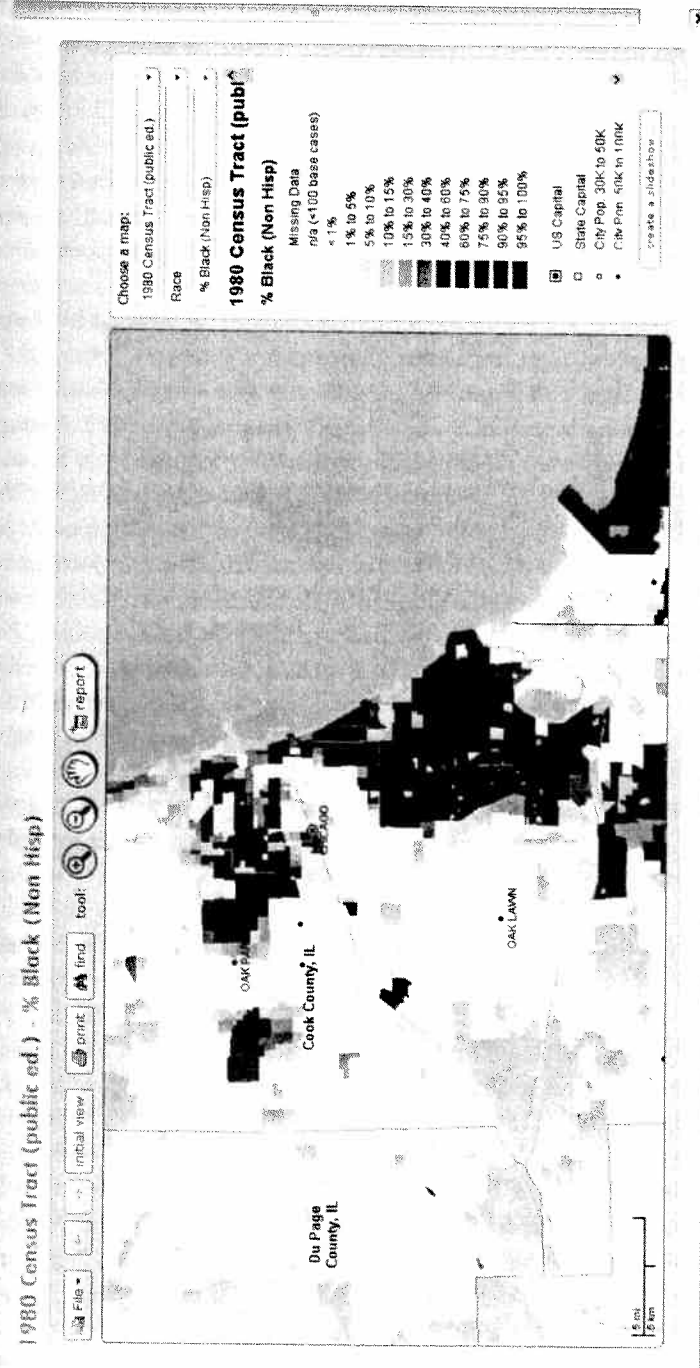
Transforming Cities

Apart from the introduction of automobiles, it would be hard to think of anything that more dramatically reshaped America's big cities in the twentieth century than the relocation of the nation's black population. This began with the first era of migration, but the most dramatic changes occurred as a result of the second phase. In 1940, blacks were just beginning to become a political force in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and a few other cities. Nowhere outside of the South did they account for more than 13 percent of a city's population. By 1980, African Americans were a majority in several cities and above 40 percent in many others. And they had developed political influence proportional to those numbers. What's more, the growing concentration in major cities had keyed dramatic reorganizations of metropolitan space, accelerating the development of suburbs and shifting tax resources, government functions, private-sector jobs, and a great many white people out of core cities.²⁴

A new online tool allows us to quickly map the spatial expansion of black communities in the major cities. SocialExplorer.com provides a mapping system using census-tract data for every decade since 1940. With these maps, we can illustrate the expansion of ghettos in, for example, Chicago, one of the cities dramatically transformed by the Second Great Migration. In 1940, virtually all African Americans in Chicago were crammed into a narrow corridor of census tracts on the city's South Side. In 1960, whites were still fiercely contesting black residential needs, but the ghetto had expanded, covering an area at least three times as large as twenty years earlier. The expansion accelerated in the next two decades. Chicago was still a sharply segregated city in 1980, but African Americans now had much more living space (see map 1.1).²⁵

Success and Failure

Much of what has been written about the Second Great Migration emphasizes difficulties and disappointments. Nicholas Lemann's *The Promised*



Map 1.1. 1980 Chicago census tract, percent black (non-Hispanic). [Courtesy SocialExplorer.com.]

Land is the best-known book on the subject, and it is decidedly pessimistic about the experience of southerners in the North. Lemann focuses on an extended family led by Ruby Haynes, who moved to Chicago in 1946 from Clarksville, Mississippi; he describes lives notched with more failures than successes. He ends the book with Haynes returning to Clarksville in 1979, grateful to be back home after thirty-three complicated years in a northern city that proved to be something less than the "promised land." Lemann's book is valuable in many ways, including his attention to the policy failures that by the 1970s had left northern ghettos with shrinking job access and escalating poverty. But the impression that the Great Migration lived up to few of its promises is misleading.²⁶

Belle Alexander and Dona Irvin, like many veterans of the migration, speak in very different terms about their experiences. Belle faced enormous challenges in Seattle. At Boeing she became a "Rosie," she says, but not a "Rosie the Riveter": "I cut the parts" that other women riveted. She liked the work, and within a year she was also happily married. But as the war ended, fortunes shifted. She lost her Boeing job when the company laid off much of the workforce, especially females. Her husband, who had been serving in the Navy, came home with a fatal medical condition. By 1946, Belle was a widow with small children. The Veterans Administration helped her buy a house, and she went back to work at the local VA hospital in food service. She spent most of the next thirty years working in that hospital and today is as proud of that as she is of her now celebrated status as one of Boeing's pioneer "Rosies." She is also proud of her children and their education and careers. As she talks about her life, there is not a hint of the broken-dreams tone that infuses much of the academic writing and journalism about the Second Great Migration.²⁷

Dona Irvin has spent years thinking about and writing about the meanings of her life and migration experience. Author of two books—a memoir and a history of the Oakland church that she and fellow migrants from Texas and Arkansas turned into a center of community life and political activism in the 1950s and 1960s—she knows that migration experiences varied dramatically, and she avoids clichéd concepts such as "the promised land" that invite monolithic assessments. Her own story encompasses a full range of experiences, beginning with the unimaginable tragedy of losing her eldest child. And there were other disappointments. For years, her college education counted for almost nothing in the racialized labor market of California. She was even rejected when she applied to a training program to become a physical therapist: "Your training would be useless. No one would hire you, a Negro woman." It was only after years of low-skill jobs,

and only after civil rights activism began to open doors, that she "started to climb the ladder of inner and outward progress, milestone by milestone." She became a medical technician, an education specialist, an administrator with the Oakland Public Schools, and finally a writer. There were other triumphs. Her husband, after a time, found a rewarding career as a technician in the Chemistry Department at the University of California, Berkeley. Her daughter, ten weeks old when the family set out for California, grew up to become the eminent historian Nell Painter. "Time has been generous in the magnificence of its gifts to me, from childhood into the ninth decade," Irvin writes at the end of her memoir.²⁸

Like most who have contributed memoirs or oral histories, Dona Irvin and Belle Alexander are proud of their experiences. That is predictable: people who feel differently are less likely to volunteer their life stories. So we do not want to rely too heavily on such sources in trying to evaluate the overall pattern of migrant experiences.

But census data suggest that most migrants benefited economically from migration and lend support to the kind of evaluations found in so many oral histories. Table 1.3 compares the average incomes of black southerners living in the North and West in 1950 and again in 1970 with the incomes of those remaining in the South. The table focuses on men and women in the prime earning years (ages 35–49) and separates them by educational level. The benefits of migration are clear in these comparisons. In 1950, men who had left the South reported incomes from the previous year that averaged 68 percent higher than for their counterparts who had remained in the South; for women, incomes were 67 percent higher.²⁹

There were important variations based on education. Poorly educated southerners gained more from migration than better-educated southerners; indeed, college-educated women on average earned 11 percent less in the North or West in 1949 than their counterparts in the South. Like Dona Irvin, most discovered that their education held little value in their new homes. The teaching jobs that were a mainstay for educated females in the Jim Crow South were usually not available in the school systems of the other regions. Well-educated men also struggled, both because race discrimination closed off most white-collar positions to African Americans until the late 1960s and because degrees from the historically black colleges of the South were considered inferior. Men with college experience did earn 25 percent more than their southern counterparts in 1949, but compare that to the 71 percent premium earned by a grammar-school-educated male who had left the South or the 82 percent income advantage of poorly educated females.

Table 1.3 Average Income at Prime Earning Age (35-49) for Southerners Who Left and Those Who Stayed Behind, by Sex and Education, 1949 and 1969

	1949			1969		
	Migrants	Remained in South	% gain / (loss) for migrants	Migrants	Remained in South	% gain / (loss) for migrants
Males, age 35-49						
0-8th grade	\$2,253	\$1,318	71	\$6,681	\$4,111	63
9th-12th grade	\$2,604	\$1,858	40	\$7,376	\$5,389	37
Some college	\$2,940	\$2,351	25	\$10,206	\$8,238	24
All	\$2,375	\$1,415	68	\$7,548	\$5,036	50
N	1,109	2,325		3,584	5,967	
Females, age 35-49						
0-8th grade	\$1,167	\$640	82	\$3,512	\$2,032	73
9th-12th grade	\$1,379	\$884	56	\$4,063	\$2,932	39
Some college	\$1,737	\$1,950	(11)	\$6,499	\$6,024	8
All	\$1,273	\$761	67	\$4,342	\$3,066	42
N	713	1,726		2,563	5,119	

Source: 1950 IPUMS 1% sample; 1970 IPUMS 1% Form 2 State sample.

Migration continued to pay off in substantial income benefits twenty years later, but the differential had been reduced. In 1969, men in the prime earning years improved their incomes by 50 percent, women by 42 percent. And the educational differences continued. Migration remained more financially beneficial for those with less education than for those who had been to college.

These income comparisons need to be put in context. The same data also show that migrants struggled with labor markets that offered only limited opportunities to African Americans. If anyone had headed north expecting to escape severe racial discrimination, they would indeed have been disappointed. The clearest way to demonstrate the powerful effects of race in the labor markets of the North and West is to compare the jobs and incomes of black southern migrants with those of white southern migrants, who shared many of the background factors (mostly rural southern origins, mostly poorly educated) and who were participating in their own great migration out of the South. I have demonstrated this skin-color effect elsewhere and will summarize it here.³⁰ Table 1.4 shows the wage gap between the two groups of southerners living in the metropolitan areas of the Great Lakes region (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin). It controls for sex, age, and education. In 1949, black male southerners in their prime

earning years earned on average 79 percent of what white southern migrants earned, while black females earned 78 percent of their counterparts' income. These ratios had become worse by 1959, when black male southerners in the Great Lakes region earned only 69 percent of white southern-born incomes; this figure improved slightly, to 73 percent, in 1969. Notice again the strange effects of education. The worst ratios were endured by college-educated black men, especially before 1969. College-educated black women earned incomes that were closer to those of white southern women in 1949 and 1959 and actually exceeded their 1969 earnings. The female comparison, however, is a bit misleading. Black southern women logged slightly longer workweeks on average than their white counterparts, and their jobs did not carry the same status as those of the white migrants.

A third framework of comparison is also revealing. Most of the scholarship on the Second Great Migration explores the question of success and failure through a comparison of the accomplishments of southern migrants

Table 1.4. Average Income for Black and White Southerners Living in Metropolitan Areas of the Great Lakes States, by Sex and Education, 1949-69

	Males, age 35-49			Females, age 35-49		
	Black	White	Ratio B/W (%)	Black	White	Ratio B/W (%)
1949						
0-8th grade	\$2,481	\$3,035	82	\$1,109	\$1,369	81
9th-12th grade	\$2,740	\$3,805	72	\$1,354	\$1,720	79
Some college	\$3,271	\$5,271	62	\$1,850	\$2,011	92
All	\$2,583	\$3,250	79	\$1,251	\$1,606	78
N	455	423		256	192	
1959						
0-8th grade	\$3,845	\$5,021	77	\$1,711	\$2,252	76
9th-12th grade	\$4,365	\$6,063	72	\$1,958	\$2,518	78
Some college	\$5,178	\$9,311	56	\$3,134	\$3,456	91
All	\$4,137	\$6,028	69	\$1,956	\$2,531	77
N	1,742	2,099		1,255	1,145	
1969						
0-8th grade	\$6,659	\$8,399	79	\$2,770	\$3,394	82
9th-12th grade	\$7,583	\$10,401	73	\$3,714	\$3,931	94
Some college	\$10,739	\$14,998	72	\$6,411	\$6,048	106
All	\$7,628	\$10,478	73	\$3,851	\$4,106	94
N	1,483	2,519		1,300	1,554	

Source: 1950 IPUMS 1% sample; 1960 IPUMS; 1970 IPUMS 1% Form 2 State sample.

with those of blacks born in the North and West. For decades, it was assumed that southern migration imposed social and economic costs on northern black communities, that migrants came north with educational and other social disadvantages that would hurt their chances and drag down their new communities. This was the impression developed in fiction as well as scholarship. Richard Wright's *Native Son*, James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, E. Franklin Frazier's *The Negro Family in Chicago*, and *Black Metropolis* by St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton—these classics all emphasized the idea that southerners were poorly prepared for life in the big cities and likely to suffer for it.

But recent scholarship has shown just the opposite. Compared to northern-born African Americans, southern migrants did reasonably well during the era of the Second Great Migration, earning slightly higher incomes, maintaining more two-parent families, relying less on welfare services, and contributing less to prison populations than the old settlers. Larry Long, Stewart Tolnay, Kyle Crowder, Stanley Lieberman, and others have conducted the detailed analyses of census and other data that show these modest but meaningful differences.³¹ Table 1.5 displays some of what can be found in 1970 census data for residents of the metropolitan areas of the Great Lakes states. Here we broaden the age range to the main working years: ages 25–54. Southern-born men were more likely to be employed than men born in the North or West (85.7 percent versus 80.6 percent). Southern-born women had slightly lower rates of welfare use (12.7 percent versus 13.2 percent). Southern-born black men enjoyed significant income advantages, earning on average between 6 and 12 percent more than their counterparts, depending upon educational level. Among women, the income patterns were less consistent. Northern-born black women with high school or college experience earned somewhat more than southerners. At lower educational levels, southerners averaged 10 percent more than their northern-born counterparts.

There are a number of theories about why black southerners enjoyed this advantage: selective migration by more ambitious individuals; selection that favored stable and helpful family systems; selective return migration by those who had trouble in their new homes; hard work and ambition as a self-fulfilling mythology among the migrant generation; and the possibility that northern young people grew up with less advantageous value systems in ghettos that after midcentury became zones of distress and discouragement. All of these factors may have been involved.³²

Five million people participated in the Second Great Migration, and each of their stories was unique. Some suffered the kinds of disappointments that

Table 1.5 Employment Status, Welfare Status, and Average Income by Education for Black Southerners and Nonsoutherners Living in Metropolitan Areas of the Great Lakes States, 1970

	Males, age 25–54		Females, age 25–54	
	Southern-born	Other U.S.-born	Southern-born	Other U.S.-born
% employed	85.7	80.6	51.4	52
% receiving welfare	3.2	3.6	12.7	13.2
Average income, 1969				
0–8th grade	\$6,337	\$5,672	\$2,944	\$2,666
9th–12th grade	\$7,317	\$6,712	\$3,582	\$3,714
Some college	\$9,481	\$8,941	\$5,971	\$5,991
All	\$7,273	\$6,842	\$3,742	\$3,938
N	2,908	2,522	2,546	2,421

Source: 1970 IPUMS 1% Form 2 State sample.

Lemann chronicles. A few knew the sort of triumphs that Dona Irvin celebrates. Most led lives marked by the dignity of smaller accomplishments, lives that took some of their meaning from the sense of having done something important by leaving the South.

They had indeed done something important, and not just in the way they remade their own lives. The Second Great Migration proved to be one of the great engines of change for late-twentieth-century America, resulting in major transformations in where and how African Americans lived and setting up stunning developments in politics and culture. The urbanization of black America, which had begun during the first great migration, reached its apex during the second, as cities in the North, the West, and the South became increasingly African Americanized. The proletarianization of black America followed the same trajectory. Breaking both the spatial and racial barriers that had long kept African Americans trapped in agricultural and service sectors, blacks fought their way into key industries and core jobs. Deindustrialization would soon threaten these gains, but census data from the end of the 1970s show that African Americans held a disproportionate number of industrial and blue-collar jobs.³³

Urbanization and proletarianization in turn enabled new cultural and political formations. As southerners moved in force into the cities, they provided the expanded consumer power and often the leadership that made the postwar black metropolises centers of innovation in music, literature, journalism, sports, and religion. They also helped supply the energy and ideas that turned the black metropolises into epicenters of political change,

fueling first the northern civil rights struggles of the 1940s and 1950s, then the southern civil rights breakthroughs of the 1960s, and then the electoral mobilizations that brought African Americans into urban political leadership in the 1970s and 1980s.³⁴ The millions who had left their homes to participate in the Second Great Migration indeed had much to be proud of. Without their collective and individual efforts, the late-twentieth-century history of the United States would have been very different.

 CHAPTER TWO

Blacks, Latinos, and the New Racial Frontier in American Cities of Color: California's Emerging Minority-Majority Cities

ALBERT M. CAMARILLO

By the dawn of the twenty-first century, a new racial frontier had emerged in the cities and suburbs that make up the American metropolis. Census 2000 revealed a demographic change of enormous magnitude, showing that people of color constitute the majority population in the nation's largest cities. Moreover, Latinos and African Americans—the two largest racial minorities in the United States—increasingly find themselves living near and among one another in many central cities and suburban communities. These two groups, together with various other immigrant minorities, are reshaping the landscape of ethnic and race relations in large American cities and suburbs. This new racial frontier signals a significant departure from historic race relations, which were defined largely by interactions between white majorities and racial and ethnic minorities. Today, many formerly white suburbs are “minority-majority” communities, and as new immigrants continue to flow into large cities, the older, established inner-city neighborhoods that once held white ethnics and later African Americans are in the throes of population change once again. American cities and suburbs are sites of interaction where both conflict and cooperation among and between groups coexist.

The new racial frontier is not entirely new. Throughout American history, when new groups moved in and displaced more-established groups, conflict over neighborhood and community identity has occurred. Tensions over the control of local political institutions and the allocation of economic, educational, and other resources in poor, working-class communities have played themselves out for generations. Indeed, these types of conflicts characterize much of the current tension among blacks, Latinos, and others. But the new racial frontier is different from past ethnic and race relations on at least three counts. First, interactions on a daily basis in the new cities and suburbs of



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