

## CHAPTER TWELVE

**Paying Attention to Moving Americans**

## Migration Knowledge in the Age of Internal Migration, 1930s–1970s

James N. Gregory

Two mass-market books reached bookstores in late 1972 and early 1973: *A Nation of Strangers* by Vance Packard, a journalist and pop sociologist, and *The Moving American* by George Pierson, a historian at Yale. Both called attention to what the authors considered very high rates of geographic mobility, echoing a pattern of journalistic and academic literature that for several decades had focused on internal migration, relocations of Americans across state lines and from farms to cities to suburbs. Packard, a chronicler of social trends, considered mobility a phenomenon that Americans needed to watch and worry about, as the title's reference to "strangers" indicates. Using terms like "restless" and "uprooted," he argued that geographic mobility had the potential to harm communities, families, and personalities and to produce loneliness, disorientation, and social fragmentation.<sup>1</sup> The historian Pierson celebrated the mobility of Americans, emphasized its continuity over time, and argued that it was part of "the American character." Ocean- and mountain-crossing pioneers had built his America, and to him geographic mobility showed a spirit of yearning, ambition, and self-reinvention that boded well for the nation's future.<sup>2</sup>

Reflecting two different disciplinary traditions—sociology and social dislocation, history and American character—these books capped a long period of public and academic interest in moving Americans. To read them is to revisit a time when internal migration competed with cross-border immigration for headlines and when multiple institutions of knowledge production and knowledge circulation focused on the problem of mobility. The period from the 1930s to the 1970s was the golden age of migration research, when public funds and public interest fueled studies by sociologists, demographers, econo-

mists, and historians; and when journalists, novelists, and mass entertainment industries spread scholarship's results beyond campus walls. The interface between scholars and publics at that time is worthy of our consideration. Migration scholars today—at a moment when more people around the world are in motion and living outside natal countries than at perhaps any time in human history—seem less capable of influencing broad publics than in the age of internal migration.

This chapter explores the rhythms of migration studies. It traces the shifts that have occurred in the relationship between producers of migration research and the institutions of communication that can give added social and political significance to this research. It will also discuss the relationship between two of the disciplines that produce migration studies. Historians and social scientists have not only differed in methods and findings but also interacted on different terms with the popular media. Analyzing the differences can help us think about what might be done to widen the channels of public access for current studies. Doing so is important, because migration knowledge is itself significant in the social systems that condition and respond to migration. When it circulates widely, migration research helps set the terms for migration decisions, migration receptions, migration politics, and also migrant identity formation.<sup>3</sup>

### The Age of Internal Migration

Migration was once front-page news. In nearly every mass medium, from newspapers to magazines, to radio and television, to film and fiction, even popular music, the topic of moving Americans captivated the public. The fiction is perhaps best remembered today. Novels like *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Native Son*, *Invisible Man*, *Go Tell It on a Mountain*, *The Dollmaker*, and *On the Road* remind us of a time when migration was treated as a complex social and personal issue and when mobility was thought to be emblematic of some central part of the American experience.<sup>4</sup> The patterns of popularity show up in the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, which has been indexing magazine articles since the 1890s.

Figure 12.1 shows the number of articles indexed in five-year intervals under two subject headings: U.S. immigration/emigration and internal migration.<sup>5</sup> Notice the fluctuating interest in immigration versus internal migration, which follows reasonably closely changes in American immigration laws and migration patterns. There were few articles about internal migration until the debates over immigration were resolved with the passage of the Immigration Restriction Act of 1924. The little hump of articles on internal mi-

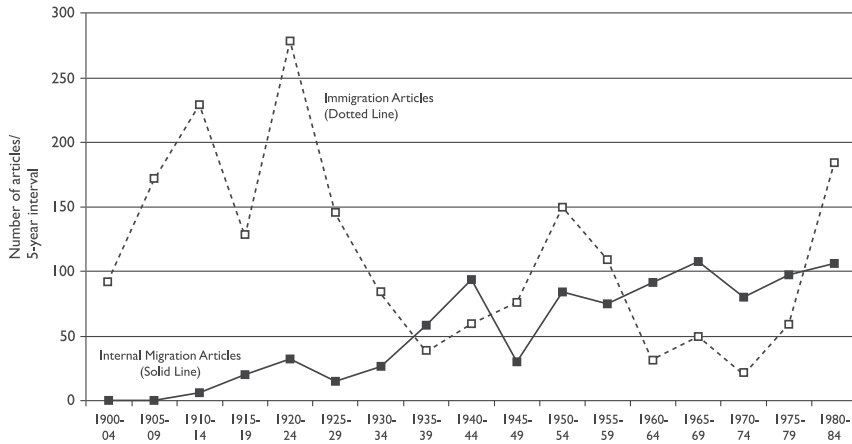


Figure 12.1 Popular magazines: Immigration and internal migration articles indexed by *Readers' Guide*, 1900–1984

gration articles during the First World War and early 1920s is largely about black migration out of the South. But as the doors shut and the volume of immigration from Europe and Asia plummeted, popular magazines shifted their focus. In the 1930s domestic mobility became an important subject, with the number of articles exceeding immigration articles during the ten years of 1935 to 1944. With the end of the Second World War a surge of articles about war refugees, braceros, and the McCarran Act temporarily renewed interest in border-crossing migrants, although attention to internal migration also remained strong and became dominant again in the 1960s and 1970s. The graph confirms that the half-century from the 1930s through the 1970s was when internal migration held the public's attention.

The same period was also the heyday of internal migration studies for social scientists. Figure 12.2 displays the number of articles published in thirty-seven sociology journals catalogued by the *JSTOR* Consortium. They are divided between articles that appear to be about immigration or emigration and those focused on internal geographic mobility.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 12.3 expresses these data as a percentage of all articles in these journals. It should be emphasized that this database is far from complete. It includes only a selection of sociology journals. Another indication of the volume of internal migration research by sociologists, economists, and demographers is found in the bibliography *Rural-Urban Migration Research* (1974), which lists 1,232 articles and books on the subject, most of them published between 1955 and 1973.<sup>7</sup>

Historians were equally committed to internal migration studies. Figure

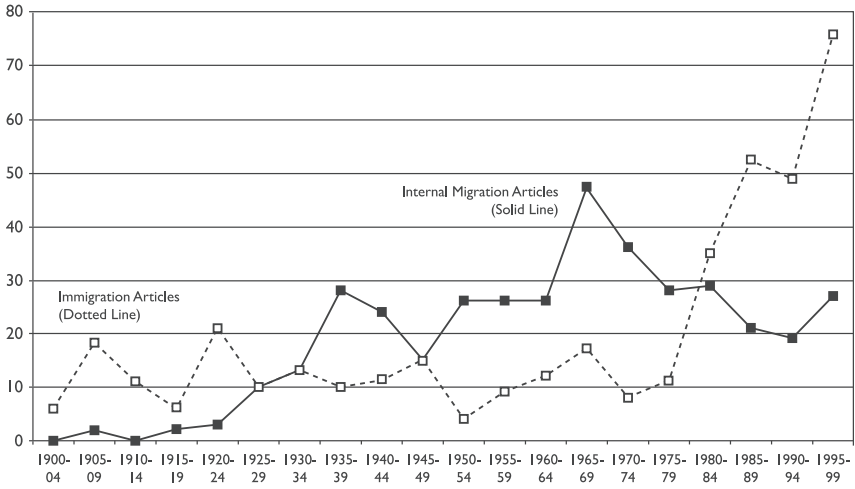


Figure 12.2 Sociology journals: Immigration versus internal migration articles, 1900–1999

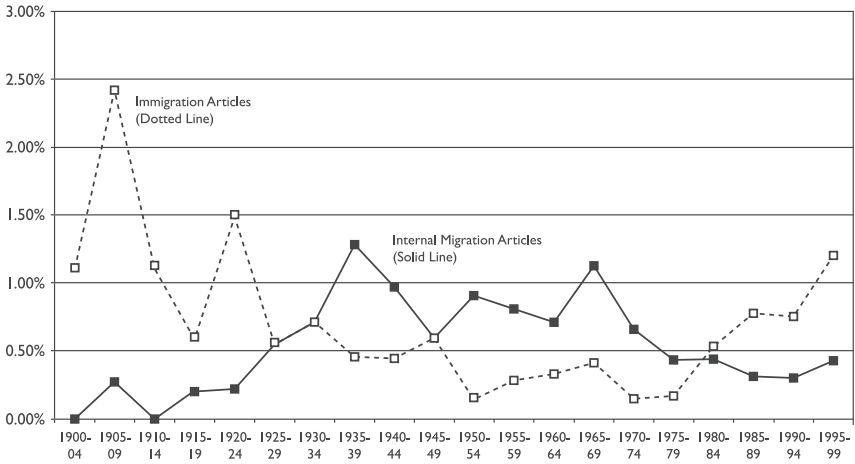


Figure 12.3 Sociology journals: Immigration and internal migration articles as percentage of all articles, 1900–1999

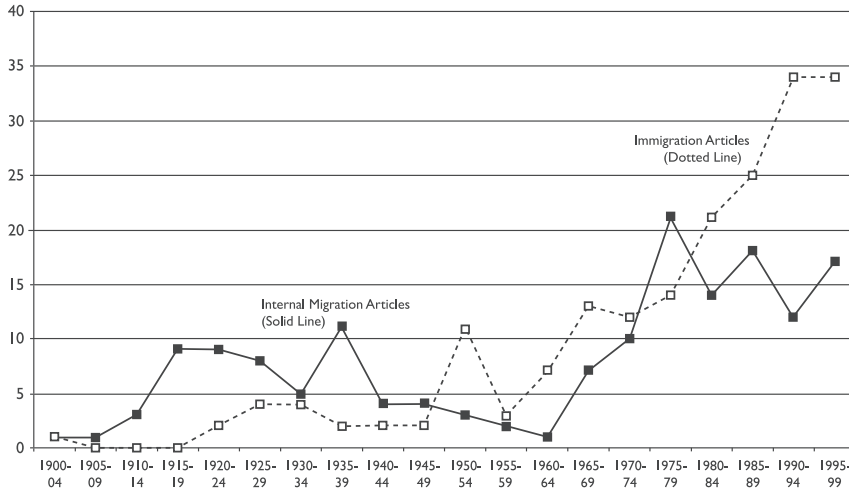


Figure 12.4 History journals: Immigration and internal migration articles, 1900–1999

12.4 is based on thirty-four history journals catalogued by *JSTOR*. The numbers are less reliable than in the field of sociology, because historians often use creative and idiosyncratic titles that interfere with keyword searches. Thus I may have missed articles that would be counted as being about internal migration. I wonder in particular about the small number of articles on domestic mobility themes indicated in figure 12.4 for the period 1940–64, because it conflicts with the impression given by the *Harvard Guide to American History*, 1954 and 1974 editions. Also noteworthy is that the graph shows a surge of historical writing about immigration starting in the 1950s, well ahead of the sociologists, who do not warm to that subject until the 1980s.<sup>8</sup>

### Migration Research

Let us begin by briefly examining the different kinds of research undertaken by social scientists and historians, before turning to the interactions between the mass media and academic migration research that helped keep the issue before the public. Migration studies had been a concern of researchers since the late nineteenth century, forming part of the emerging fields of demography and sociology. For American academics much of the work done before the 1930s centered on immigration from Europe and Asia and two forms of internal migration: migration from farms to cities; and tramping, or casual labor migration. The former reflected concerns about country life and rural depopu-

lation and the well-funded field of rural sociology, the latter an ancient fascination with tramps and fears of the menace that they posed to stable society. Carleton Parker's *The Casual Laborer and Other Essays* (1919) and Nels Anderson's *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man* (1923) were the most famous of this generation of mobility studies.<sup>9</sup>

Migration research exploded in resources and significance during the Great Depression, helped by public anxiety about transients looking for jobs and relief assistance. Federal agencies—notably the Department of Agriculture, Federal Emergency Relief Administration, and Works Progress Administration—funded scores of studies focusing on transient families, migratory farm workers, the Dust Bowl exodus, and other examples of poverty-induced labor migration. But scholars also seized the opportunity to think more broadly about patterns of interstate mobility and to find data and methods that improved understandings of who moved, when, where, and why. C. Warren Thornwaite's study *Internal Migration in the United States* (1934) and the follow-up *Migration and Economic Opportunity* (1936), with Carter Goodrich as lead author, marked the emergence of full-blown, massively funded research on national patterns of mobility. Based on work by huge teams of researchers who gathered data from public and private sources across the country, they also developed new statistical measures and new forms of presentation, including maps with dots and maps with arrows. Another team, led by Dorothy Swaine Thomas for the Social Science Research Council, expanded the search for data and improved methods.<sup>10</sup>

All of this set the stage for changes in government data collection: first with a revised questionnaire for the 1940 census, featuring a set of questions about where people had lived five years earlier, then with the development of Current Population Surveys starting in 1941. The culminating publication of this drive to improve data and map contemporary and historical migration patterns may have been *Population Distribution and Economic Growth: United States, 1870–1950* (1957–64), a three-volume compendium funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and produced by a team led by Simon Kuznets and Dorothy Swaine Thomas.<sup>11</sup>

Another research direction focused on the social and personal dimension of migration. This work was grounded in theories of dislocation and assimilation that sociologists at the University of Chicago had developed to explain the adjustment trajectories of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe. Starting in the 1920s and continuing through the next four decades, sociologists would in effect draw together the figure of the immigrant and the figure of the internal migrant, applying Robert Park's concept of the "marginal man" caught between two cultures, and the broader theory of sequential

adjustment that became known as “race-relations” theory. It is important to clarify that Chicago race-relations theory was fundamentally a theory of migration. Especially in its early formulations, race and ethnicity were less significant than the transition from peasant community to complex urban environment. The peasant, whether from Poland or America, whether Jewish, black, or Anglo-American Protestant, was understood to experience a traumatic set of challenges in the city that would take place in group contexts and follow a predictable set of stages, from conflict and social disorganization to social reorganization and eventual assimilation.<sup>12</sup> In hundreds of urban adjustment studies that centered on black migrants, Appalachian and other southern whites, and also on northern whites who moved from farm to city, social scientists from the 1930s to the 1970s understood domestic migration as a dislocating experience not much different from immigration across borders and national cultures. Using the concept of “uprooting” and looking for symptoms of trauma, they collected evidence of “maladjustment” and evaluated potentials for eventual assimilation.<sup>13</sup>

Historians were also writing about moving Americans, but in different ways. For much of the period they did not even use the same terminology—rarely mentioning “migrants” until the 1960s, writing about pioneers and settlers instead. The one subgenre of historical literature that did use the term “migration” shows just how much the disciplines were at variance. When historians before 1960 used the label “the Great Migration” in the titles of books and articles, they rarely referred to African Americans leaving the South. Their Great Migrations involved English people coming to America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries or their descendents moving west on the Overland Trail.<sup>14</sup>

The differing terminology reflected other disjunctures between the disciplines. Anglo Americans were the usual migrants of interest to historians throughout much of this period. Although Carl Wittke had added other Europeans to the field of immigration history with *We Who Built America* in 1939, followed by Marcus Lee Hanson’s *The Atlantic Migration* (1940) and Oscar Handlin’s *Boston’s Immigrants* (1941), and although Carter G. Woodson and the *Journal of Negro History* had initiated a subgenre of writing by black scholars about black migration even earlier, neither of these enterprises registered strongly with mainstream historians until the 1950s. The historical profession remained riveted to the migration dramas of the distant past, the sagas of movement across space that connected to issues of American foundations and American expansion. Explorers, settlers, and colonizers who moved across the Atlantic in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; and frontiersman, gold rushers, land rushers, farm builders, town builders, and other westward-

moving (mostly Anglo-American) pioneers of the nineteenth century—these were the moving Americans most interesting to the historical profession until late in the age of internal migration.

Yet the questions that historians asked were broader than those of social scientists. The historians' project was usually grounded in the frontier theory of the turn-of-the-century historian Frederick Jackson Turner. Turner's thesis emphasized a particular kind of space—the frontier—as a zone of continuous migration and community building. The existence of a frontier shaped American political development, sustaining opportunity, individualism, and democracy throughout the first century of the nation's history. For historians writing about early American migration, settlement became the chief analytic concern, and it had several dimensions. As settlers, migrants were understood to have not only a personal stake in relocation but also a community-building and society-building stake. Historians in effect followed their migrants further than sociologists did, connecting geographic movement to historical outcomes in a way that the social sciences would not do.

The Turnerian agenda also meant that historians mostly employed a different tone and valuation scheme. The migrants appearing in historical research endured hardship transitions and came out of the experience not traumatized, as the sociologists worried, but reinvented. They were less apt to be understood as victims of migration experiences and more likely to be masters of their own fate. As historians told it, migration in earlier centuries had been an empowering experience, key to the making of America.

### **Journalism and Mass Circulation**

Scholars nowadays understand that the production of an idea or text is separate from its circulation and impact, that if a great theory remains unread it is probably not very great at all in its own time, or at least that there are differences between ideas that circulate widely and those that do not. Journalism, popular fiction, and the entertainment media are key mechanisms of circulation; they are capable of spreading ideas both to broad audiences and to influential elites and also are often responsible for translating complex ideas into new forms, changing them in the process. Journalism (broadly defined) and academic research have long been paired in this way. Some of the founding scholars in the fields of sociology, political science, and economics worked as newspapermen, a prime example being Robert Park, the leader of the University of Chicago's famous Sociology Department. Park had earlier spent eleven years as a newspaper reporter and editor and, as Rolf Lindner argues, his Chi-



chicago brand of sociology developed a set of methods and orientations that reflected a commitment to “urban reportage.”<sup>15</sup>

It was a two-way relationship. Journalists monitored key areas of social science, harvesting compelling stories and issues. They in turn flagged some of the issues in ways that set agendas for researchers. A good example is the circulation that began with Paul Taylor, the labor economist at Berkeley who discovered and named the Dust Bowl migration. His article in *Survey Graphic*, “Again the Covered Wagon” (1935), noted the movement into California of thousands of “drought refugees” looking for work in the cotton fields of San Joaquin Valley.<sup>16</sup> Magazines and newspapers jumped on the story, attracted by and replicating Taylor’s dramatically contrasting metaphors: refugee and covered-wagon pioneer. That in turn opened the door for dozens of research projects, including a massive one by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics that surveyed the children of recent migrants in thousands of schools in California. Congress got into the act, establishing the Tolan Committee in 1939 to investigate “the Interstate Migration of Destitute Citizens,” accompanied by more funding, more studies, more journalism, and one extraordinary novel that worked the tension between refugee and covered wagon into one of the classics of American literature. The road to *The Grapes of Wrath* had begun with Paul Taylor and gone back and forth between the linked worlds of social science, history, and journalism.

While journalists in the 1930s and early 1940s had interacted readily with social scientists studying the poverty migrations of the Depression and the defense migrations of the war years, it was not until the 1950s that other aspects of social-science-based migration research began to move out of the academy and into journalism and popular discussion. Before then migration was almost always journalistically framed as a social problem, linked either to poverty, the decline of farming, or challenging impacts on cities. In the 1950s and 1960s the new demographic data helped fuel a surge of popular interest in the high rates of mobility among all sorts of Americans and in the social and psychological implications of relocation. We can see the subject shift in figure 12.5, which shows the changing distribution of articles catalogued under three subcategories of migration in the *Readers’ Guide*: (1) black migration, (2) migrant labor, and (3) the more general categories of “mobility,” including the subject terms “moving” and “internal migration.” Notice that not until the 1950s did the general “mobility” categories become important. Much of what was written in the 1930s and 1940s was indexed under the label “migrant labor” and included articles on Okies, farm workers, other itinerant workers, and the defense migrants of the Second World War.

The ups and downs of “black migration” articles are revealing. Initially

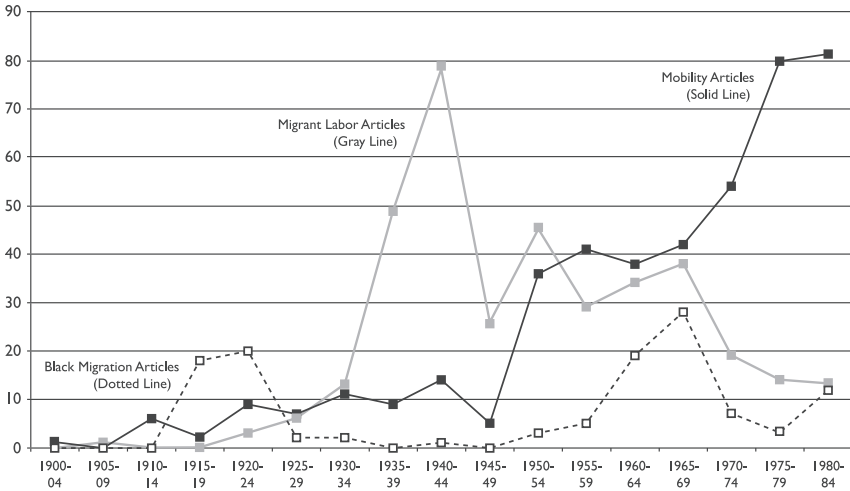


Figure 12.5 Subthemes of articles on internal migration indexed by *Readers' Guide*, 1900–1984

dominating magazine publishing about internal migration during the First World War and the early 1920s, this subject heading almost disappears between the 1930s and the late 1950s. This does not mean that journalists had stopped writing about black migrants, but it does indicate a different way of writing and indexing that reflects the influence of sociological thinking.<sup>17</sup> Sociological research in the 1930s and 1940s deemphasized race, particularly in connection with migration. African Americans were understood to be experiencing a transition from peasantry, as were white farm-to-city migrants. This perspective seems to have influenced journalism. Instead of writing directly about the second Great Migration that began during the Second World War and had such powerful effects on cities across the North and West, magazines usually folded black migrants into stories about “defense migrants,” covering white migrants as well, often in ways that deemphasized racial differences. Typical headlines in the 1940s include “Whither the Migrants” (*Newsweek*), “Strangers in Town” (*Survey*), and “Rolling Tide of War Migrants” (*New York Times Magazine*). It was not until the late 1950s, as civil rights struggles heated up, that stories on black migration returned to the magazine headlines. Here are some from 1958, the last two prompted by a short-lived segregationist proposal to deport blacks who demanded civil rights: “Race Problem Moves North” (*U.S. News and World Report*), “Far Flowing Negro Tide” (*Newsweek*), “Senator Russell Wants Negroes to Move” (*U.S. News and World Report*), and “Tickets for Negroes?” (*Newsweek*).

A new category of postwar journalism may be discerned from the headlines of other articles from 1958, indexed under the generic headings of “mobility,” “moving,” and “internal migration”:

- Americans on the Move to New Jobs, New Places (*Life*)
- 40 Million on the Move (*American Home*)
- Don't Move Until You Read This (*Good Housekeeping*)
- If You Have to Move (*House and Garden*)
- Child in a New Neighborhood (*New York Times Magazine*)
- New Family in Town (*McCall's*).

This second batch of articles reveals a new fascination with demographic numbers that in the postwar years were widely reported in the news media and convinced Americans that their society has become highly and uniquely mobile. Second, they reveal an interest in the mobility of “ordinary” white families and their movement from cities to suburbs and from east to west. Third, and most important, they reveal the dimension that sustained much of the popular attention to migration throughout the middle twentieth century: a fascination with its psychological implications.

### The Dislocated American

Migration studies attracted media attention in part because of perceived social problems, in part because of exciting new data, but also in part because of a set of exciting ideas—theories that were captivating in their logic and implications. Among these ideas were the social adjustment and social dislocation theories mentioned earlier, which were part of a larger fascination with the insights of social psychology. In *The Romance of American Psychology* Ellen Herman explores how in the decades following the Second World War, psychological theory and psychological experts “carved out a progressively larger sphere of social influence” that extended through many academic disciplines and policy arenas, and that fundamentally reshaped discourse and culture, seeping “into virtually every facet of existence.”<sup>18</sup> For educated Americans of the postwar generation, social psychology offered an entrancing theory of the self and society—an under-the-hood glimpse into the social mechanisms that supposedly structured personal development and into the psychological mechanisms that supposedly structured social problems. Fascination with the insights of social psychology animated any number of public debates and media crusades in the postwar period, including campaigns against racism, bigotry, and the “authoritarian personality.” Migration was one of the arenas

where these debates and crusades were played out, and an important one, as journalists and novelists joined sociologists and psychologists in understanding migration as a disorienting process that produced stressful adjustments at a personal and social level.

Social and psychological adjustment theories had been crossing over into migration journalism and popular literature for some time by the 1940s, showing up in the way subjects were framed and in the circulation of key terms like “uprooted,” “social disorganization,” and “marginal man.” The popularizers often misunderstood the theory and used it selectively and in ways that bothered the experts, and much of what they were borrowing and translating was considered out of date by social scientists. It is best to think of the process not as a close translation of ideas but as a mediation that transformed ideas even as it gave them much wider circulation and potentially great potency. This circulation and mediation can be seen in many of the migration novels of the day, including such classics as Richard Wright’s *Native Son*, in which the author tried to incorporate migration theory of the Chicago sociologists. His main character, Bigger Thomas, is a migrant disoriented by the transition from rural community to bewildering big city, and doubly marginalized because of his race. Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* also takes key constructs from migration and marginalization theory and may have even owed its title to Park’s well-traveled concept of the marginal man. Other borrowings are evident in *Go Tell It on a Mountain* by James Baldwin and *The Dollmaker* (1954), Harriett Arnow’s novel about a white Appalachian family struggling and failing in Detroit.<sup>19</sup>

These books were part of a broader system of popularization that included journalism and entertainment media. We may not recognize the finer points of academic theory in the proliferation of comedic films, television situation comedies, and popular songs that focused on dislocated Americans in the era of internal migration, many of which used the old trope of the rube in the city to achieve their laughs. But it is no coincidence that some of the most popular entertainment productions of the time featured migrants and their adjustment travails—from *Amos ’n Andy* on radio in the 1930s, through *The Beverly Hillbillies*, the most popular television show of the 1960s, to country music’s endless songs about wanderers and homesickness. What animated all of this was a concern with dislocation, uprooting, and being out of place that had been elevated out of academic publishing and into public discourse. The moving American was the dislocated American, engaging in a complicated personal transition. This was the kernel of the social theory that artists, journalists, and even television producers seized upon in the great age of migration writing. Bigger Thomas was out of place, The Joads were out of place. *The*

*Real McCoys* and *The Beverly Hillbillies* were out of place. And all of this out-of-placeness was thought to be of great consequence.<sup>20</sup>

Vance Packard brought the dislocated American conversation to a point of culminating clarity when he published *A Nation of Strangers* in 1972. Throughout his career Packard profited from the interaction between academia and journalism. The most famous of the tribe of journalists who read, reinterpreted, and popularized the work of social scientists, Packard was emblematic of the way ideas moved across the academic barrier. His biographer Daniel Horowitz details the tensions in the relationship. As he cranked out a sequence of bestselling books of social criticism starting with *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957), Packard faced harsh reviews from academics who accused him of sensationalizing, oversimplifying, and otherwise misusing research and who resented his ability to reach audiences far larger than their own.<sup>21</sup> Packard's books fed the popular fascination with social psychology even as he plundered select bits of academic research. Whether he was writing about the anxious middle class (*The Status Seekers*), the culture of affluence and corporate planned obsolescence (*The Waste Makers*), or threats to privacy and individuality posed by government and corporate surveillance (*The Naked Society*), his books climbed the bestseller lists by identifying disturbing trends and issues in contemporary life and delivering a mix of sharp criticism and what readers took to be up-to-date research.

In 1968 Packard turned his attention to recent reports and data on internal migration, especially the statistic that close to forty million Americans, 19 percent of the population, changed residence each year. Four years later *A Nation of Strangers* appeared with the fanfare that usually greeted his books and immediately made the nonfiction bestseller list of the *New York Times*, reaching the number six spot and remaining in the top ten for eight weeks.<sup>22</sup> The book focused on what Packard took to be historically high rates of mobility while working with notions of the dislocated American that he culled selectively from social adjustment and mental health studies. Packard's argument was that excess mobility, often in service to corporations that casually shift jobs and people from place to place, disrupts lives and communities, creating a rootless and disoriented people, a nation of strangers.

While friendly articles in the *Ladies' Home Journal* and some other popular venues helped to promote the book, sociologists hammered *A Nation of Strangers* and its author.<sup>23</sup> The *American Journal of Sociology* invited three scholars to evaluate the book in a special symposium. Amos Hawley, Claude Fischer, and Brian Berry were unanimous in dismissing its conclusions, its research, and especially its core logic, pointing out that there was no reason to

believe that rates of mobility were higher than they had been in the past, nor that “because we are mobile . . . we are a ‘nation of strangers.’” In voicing these criticisms they implicitly distanced themselves from the body of scholarly literature that Packard and other journalists had been highlighting. He had borrowed his thesis of the dislocated American from decades of sociological research, albeit while taking it out of context, twisting some of its meanings, and milking its alarmist potentials—all of which were standard consequences of the commingling of journalism and social science.<sup>24</sup>

George Pierson’s *The Moving American* achieved nowhere near the sales of Packard’s book but suffered the same sort of criticism at the hands of academic reviewers, who found it underresearched, inconsistent in argument, and out of date. Pierson, the Yale historian, had been working on this book for years, probably decades. *The Moving American*, clearly intended for a general audience, is written in a breezy style and consists of discrete essays that do not readily cohere, some of them barely revised versions of articles that Pierson had been publishing since the early 1940s. He shares Packard’s view that excess mobility can be dangerous. But the Turnerian American dominates as he moves back into history, showing the migrant as a pioneer, a builder, the quintessential American. Rowland Berthoff and William Gottesman were harsh in their reviews, ridiculing Pierson’s attempt to fashion a new theory of migration (which he called the “M-factor”) based on principles introduced by the demographers E. G. Ravenstein and Everett Lee. The reviewers were equally impatient with his research, noting that he ignored the work of social historians who for more than a decade had been revising understandings of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century mobility and community patterns and who no longer embraced the overly psychologized and monolithic concept of “American character.”<sup>25</sup>

Both books stand as end-of-an-era markers, highlighting and summarizing perspectives that were still circulating outside the academy but were no longer fashionable inside. They also mark the end of a relationship that enabled some of the research to reach a broader public, helping a generation of Americans to see mobility as a subject of interest and of some importance.

### **Losing Public Attention**

Since the 1970s public awareness of moving Americans has faded. News media and other popular venues have been less eager than before to circulate information about mobility. We no longer see magazine stories like those that ran in 1958 about moving day, strangers in town, or millions of Americans changing residence or leaving cities. In part this reflects changes in migration pat-

terns. Americans have become less mobile since the early 1970s. Each year from 1948, when the Census Bureau began its Current Population Survey, until 1970, roughly 19 percent of Americans would report a change of residence in the previous twelve months. Rates then began a slow decline, falling to an average of 17 percent moving per year in the 1980s, 16 percent in the 1990s, and 14 percent since 2000, dropping to 11.9 percent in the recession year of 2008.<sup>26</sup>

While domestic mobility has slowed, journalists have refocused their attention on the dramatically increased volume of cross-border immigration. The Immigration Reform Act of 1965 was almost ten years old before magazines began to catch on. The “boat people,” refugees from Vietnam, Cuba, and Haiti, were often in the headlines in the 1970s, but concern about illegal immigration and curiosity about the new demography of immigration, largely from Asian and Latin American countries, soon followed. A set of headlines from *U.S. News and World Report* suggests the scope of magazine coverage in the 1970s:

- Now a Growing Surge of Immigrants from Asia (1973)
- How Millions of Illegal Aliens Sneak into U.S. (1974)
- Rising Tide of Immigrants to U.S. (1975)
- Latest Wave of Immigrants Brings New Problems to U.S. (1976)
- U.S. Opens Its Doors to the Floating Refugees” (1977)
- Still a Land of Refuge” (1979)
- Now It’s Haiti’s Boat People Coming in a Flood (1979).

Then in the 1980s media attention soared. *Readers’ Guide Retrospective* identifies almost as many magazine articles on immigration in the first three years of the 1980s (131) as had been printed in the two previous decades combined (160).<sup>27</sup>

Journalists did continue to write about certain internal migration sequences, especially those involving rearrangements of political power and race. The Sunbelt migration became a story in the late 1970s and gained importance through the 1980s and early 1990s, as the South reversed its historic role as a population-sending region and started to pull millions of jobs and people out of the Northeast and Midwest. Gentrification migrations also earned headlines in the same period, as whites moved back into the big cities, raising property values, transforming urban spaces, and changing balances of power within the urban electorate. There was some attention to the movement of black families, focusing both on their relocation from central cities into the suburbs and also on the return migration of African Americans to the South, which journalists highlighted as one of the ironic effects of the Sunbelt surge.<sup>28</sup>

But there have been noticeable differences in the tone as well as the volume of internal migration journalism since the mid-1970s. Population movements within the United States are reported without much sense of urgency, mostly as curious phenomena that readers may find interesting. When significance attaches to these demographic changes, it is primarily on the level of politics and the economy. The Sunbelt shift is taken to be important for the regions that were losing and gaining jobs, people, and voting power. What has been missing is the tense personal and social dimension that animated journalism during the age of internal migration. The issues of adjustment are no longer at the center or often even part of the story. The moving American is no longer the dislocated American. Moving is now taken to be only mildly interesting on both a personal and social level. People move. So what?

The “so what” in earlier decades had come from sociological and psychological theory, and its absence from current journalism reveals an important shift in American intellectual life. The passing of the age of big sociological theory and particularly social psychology theory has registered in American journalism since the 1970s. It has changed the way Americans understand migration and much more. Academics now work either with smaller theories that lack the power to interest journalists or are so complex and unwieldy (as with poststructuralism of various kinds) that reporters ignore them. Social science research still finds its way into newspapers and magazines, but journalists seem more interested in new data than in the analysis that scholars develop. Especially since the 1980s, it seems that social research finds fewer outlets in the popular media and that the walls between academic knowledge and public knowledge have grown thicker.<sup>29</sup>

Does it matter that migration research no long seems to circulate and that important geographic mobility patterns remain unacknowledged in major media, and thus are much less visible to broader publics than they would have been thirty or forty years ago? It certainly matters to those who do migration research and to funding agencies. But it also has consequences for moving Americans and for all Americans.

Immigration politics have almost certainly been affected by the new isolation of academic research. Journalists have paid scant attention to the studies of new immigrants produced by sociologists, demographers, and anthropologists. Newspapers will occasionally quote economists who debate whether immigration produces economic growth or drains public resources, but anything more complex is ignored. This includes work like Douglass Massey's well-documented finding that militarized borders have an unintended consequence, turning temporary illegal immigrants into permanent illegal immigrants who are afraid to go home because they will not be able to return.



Despite the obvious relevance to current policy debates, the mass media have failed to expose and explore this and other research.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, the lowered lighting that now accompanies some migrations may have positive consequences. Many of the newer patterns of internal migration would have attracted journalistic attention, and with it heightened controversy, a generation ago. The black families who have been moving steadily out of central cities and into what had been largely white neighborhoods; the Latino families moving into what had been black neighborhoods as well as white neighborhoods; the gay and lesbian redistributions—all of these fundamental rearrangements of cities and suburbs have been taking place without the kind of media attention that in the mid-twentieth century might have ramped up anxieties.

The media spotlight is dimmer now; journalists are writing less about domestic migration, and this means that most Americans are thinking less about who is moving and what moving means. The mobility itself continues, at rates that are still high in comparison with those in many other societies. In most years close to forty million Americans change residences, moving short distances or long distances, sometimes radically shifting personal contexts, sometimes rearranging neighborhoods or larger communities where they settle. That we are no longer paying attention to internal migration does not alter the basic patterns of movement and settlement, but it does change some of the meanings and interactions.

### Notes

- 1 Vance Packard, *A Nation of Strangers* (New York: McKay, 1972). On Packard see Daniel Horowitz, *Vance Packard and American Social Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).
- 2 George W. Pierson, *The Moving American* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973).
- 3 See for more detail James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Alex Morrow, "Studying the 'Problem' of Migrant Labor: Social Science, Transient Workers, and the Depression," unpublished paper, Pacific Coast Branch American Historical Association meeting, August 28, 2006; Carol H. Weiss and Eleanor Singer, *Reporting of Social Science in the National Media* (New York: Russell Sage, 1988); Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
- 4 Farah Jasmine Griffin, *"Who Set You Flowin'": The African-American Migration Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Lawrence R. Rodgers, *Canaan Bound: The African-American Great Migration Novel* (Urbana: University of Illinois

- Press, 1997); Erin Royston Battat, "Literature, Social Science, and the Development of American Migration Narratives in the Depression Era" *Literature Compass* 4, no. 3 (2007), 539–51.
- 5 Compiled from *H. W. Wilson Databases: Reader's Guide Retrospective* (April 28, 2006). The internal migration category is a combination of the following subject headings: "Migration, internal," "migrant labor," "blacks/migration," "moving," "social mobility." I edited the results, eliminating scholarly journals and articles that did not appear to be related to geographic mobility in the United States. The database ends in 1982. To maintain the five-year interval I have extrapolated the period 1980–84.
  - 6 While the *Readers' Guide* indexes articles by subject headings, I am relying on keywords that appear in titles or abstracts in the *JSTOR Archive*: versions of "immigrant," "emigrant," "immigration," "emigration," "migrant," "migration," "mobility," "adjustment," "migratory," "floating," "resettlement." I have edited the output, sometimes moving items from the immigration to internal migration or vice versa after reading the abstract.
  - 7 Daniel O. Price and Melanie M. Sikes, *Rural-Urban Migration Research in the United States: An Annotated Bibliography and Synthesis* (Washington: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 1974).
  - 8 *JSTOR* catalogues 158 history journals. I included only those that focus substantially on U.S. history. Some important journals are not part of *JSTOR*, including the *Journal of American Ethnic History*, which began in 1975, and *Journal of Social History*, which began in 1967. Keywords used were the same as above, with the addition of variants of "settler" and "pioneer."
  - 9 Examining this literature are Frank Tobias Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo Workers and Community in the American Midwest, 1880–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Morrow, "Studying the 'Problem' of Migrant Labor"; Kenneth Kusmer, *Down and Out on the Road: The Homeless in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
  - 10 Jennifer Platt, *A History of Sociological Research Methods in America, 1920–1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 142–54; Dorothy Swaine Thomas, *Research Memorandum on Migration Differentials* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1938).
  - 11 *Population Redistribution and Economic Growth: United States, 1870–1950*, prepared under the direction of Simon Kuznets and Dorothy Swaine Thomas (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1957–64); Platt, *A History of Sociological Research Methods in America*, 150–58; Margo J. Anderson, *The American Census: A Social History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).
  - 12 Seminal works include W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927); and Robert Ezra Park, "Human Migration and the Marginal Man," *Race and Culture* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1950). On the influence see Fred H. Matthews, *Quest for an American Sociology: Robert Park and the Chicago School* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1977).

- 13 More than two hundred urban adjustment studies are listed in Price and Sikes, *Rural-Urban Migration Research*.
- 14 Examples from WorldCat (OCLC): Nellis Maynard Crouse, *Causes of the Great Migration* (1932); Edwin Clarence Guillet, *The Great Migration: The Atlantic Crossing by Sailing-Ship since 1770* (1937); Edmond S. Morgan, "Provisions for the Great Migration," *New England Quarterly*, March 1939; Philip Parrish II, *The Great Migration: 1842* (1943); Allen French, *Charles I and the Puritan Upheaval: A Study of the Causes of the Great Migration* (1955). The only book in WorldCat to use the label in reference to African Americans before 1960 is William Morgan Markoe, *A Great Migration* (1924). Black journalists like Markoe began using the term in the 1920s. By the 1940s it was appearing in the social science literature in reference to African American migration.
- 15 Rolf Lindner, *The Reportage of Urban Culture: Robert Park and the Chicago School*, trans Adrian Morris (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 16 See also James N. Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 80–113.
- 17 Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*, 59–79.
- 18 Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 2–3.
- 19 Carla Cappetti, *Writing Chicago: Modernism, Ethnography, and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
- 20 For more detail on comedic representations of hillbillies and black southerners see Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*, 54–79; Anthony Hawkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 21 Horowitz, *Vance Packard*, esp. 185–95.
- 22 Adult *New York Times* bestseller lists for 1972, Hawes Publications, <http://www.hawes.com> (July 24, 2009).
- 23 "A Nation of Strangers," *Ladies' Home Journal*, September 1972, 104.
- 24 *American Journal of Sociology* 79 (July 1973), 165–75.
- 25 Rowland Berthoff review: *Journal of American History* 60 (December 1973), 767–68; William Gottesman review: *American Historical Review* 79, no. 1 (1974), 213–14.
- 26 "Current Population Survey: Annual Geographical Mobility Rates, by Type of Movement, 1947–2008," U.S. Bureau of the Census, <http://www.census.gov> (August 8, 2009). On historic migration rates see Larry E. Long, *Migration and Residential Mobility in the United States* (New York: Russell Sage, 1988).
- 27 Compiled from *H. W. Wilson Databases: Reader's Guide Retrospective* (April 28, 2006).
- 28 I have tracked these subjects in the annual editions of *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*.
- 29 Weiss and Singer, *Reporting of Social Science in the National Media*, 175–207, did not find major changes in the volume of news reporting of social science research between 1970 and 1982. Other reports stress declining policy access without looking at journalism: David L. Featherman and Maris A. Vinovskis, eds., *Social Science and*

*Policy-making: A Search for Relevance in the Twentieth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001); Charles E. Lindblom and David K. Cohen, *Usable Knowledge: Social Science and Social Problem Solving* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Andrew Rich, *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

- 30 Massey has reported this study in numerous publications, most comprehensively in an anthology edited with Jorge Durand, *Crossing the Border: Research from the Mexican Migration Project* (New York: Russell Sage, 2004).