

Characteristics of Migration Streams

The 1990 Census is still the most recent reliable source of regional information on the characteristics of the migrants. Although in principle it would be possible to tabulate the CPS migration data for characteristics of nonmetro Blacks by origin and destination of move, in practice the resulting sampling variation would be too large to yield reliable results.

Instead, we used the county-to-county matrix of 1985-90 decennial census migration data by race, education, and poverty status. These data help tell us (1) whether the growing addition of persons of southern metro background to the nonmetro areas enhances the educational and income composition of rural and small-town Blacks, and (2) whether migrants to the cities represent a drain of the better educated and more prosperous rural people.

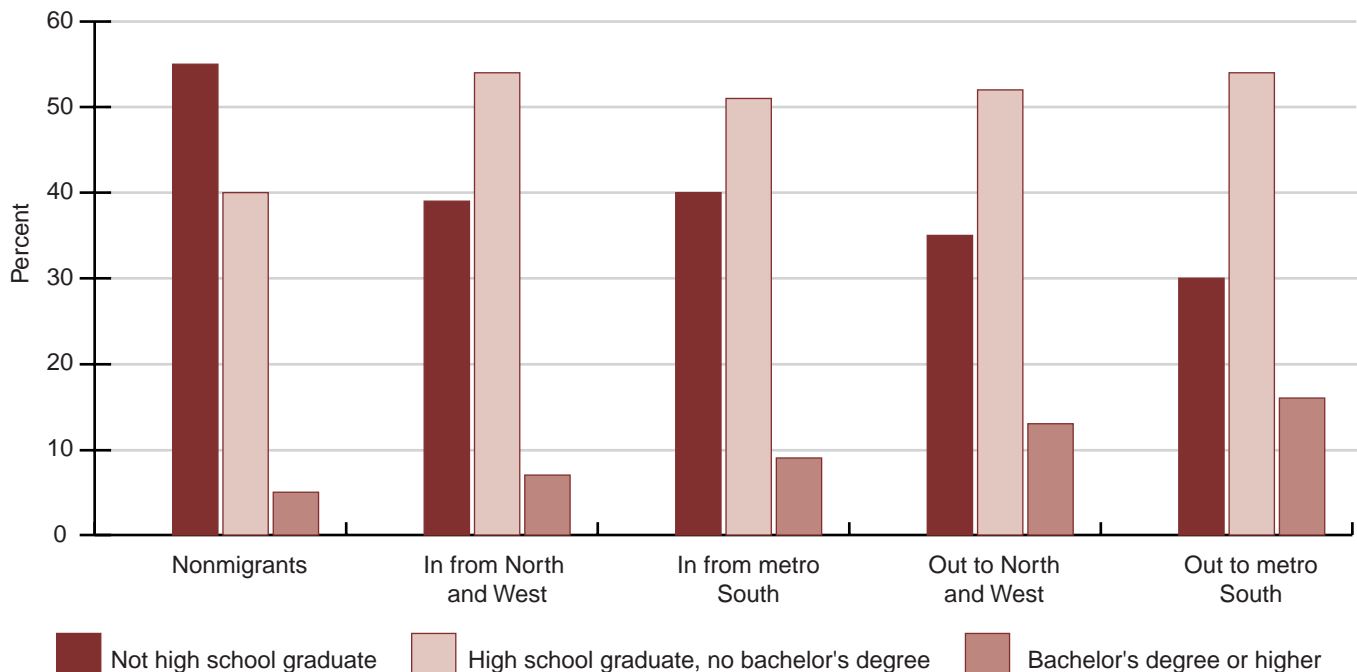
Educational Level

We examined the educational levels of nonmetro persons age 25 and over, distinguishing those moving either between the nonmetro South and the North and West or between the nonmetro South and the metro South. We also considered the remaining population,

which we term nonmigrants, although this group includes those who moved between homes within the southern nonmetro residence category. Figure 4 shows the proportions of nonmetro Blacks by migration status who reported their education to be (1) less than high school graduate, (2) high school graduate but no bachelor's degree, and (3) bachelor's degree or higher.

Nonmigrants have the lowest educational status, that is, the lowest proportion of college graduates and the highest proportion of persons who did not finish high school. This finding is not surprising, since nonmigrants are older, on average, and older people tend to have lower levels of education than other age groups. Moreover, much previous research on migration and education has shown that migrants in general tend to have more education than nonmigrants (e.g., Cromartie, Gibbs, and Nord, 1999). Comparing the immigrant educational levels with those for outmigrants reveals that the migration interchange with both the North and West and the metro South led to a net loss of those with higher education levels in nonmetro areas. The highest educational status among the migration streams is that of Blacks moving from the nonmetro South to southern metro areas in the 1985-90 period. Similar findings were reported for a delineation of southern nonmetro plantation counties for the 1985-90 period (Pfeffer, 1992).

Figure 4
Educational composition in 1990 of Blacks age 25 and over, southern nonmetro migration streams, 1985-90



In absolute numbers, the nonmetro South sent twice as many college graduates to the North and West and to southern metro areas combined than it received in return in 1985-90 (table 2). This is a major educational difference, but it accords with our expectations, given the far greater opportunities for college graduates to pursue careers in urban settings. At the opposite end of the education scale, the difference is not as strong, but nonmetro Southern areas acquired almost 11 percent more Black migrants who had not finished high school than the areas lost in their exchanges with the North and West and the metro South categories combined. Part of this difference probably represents an older average age (which would be associated with low education) among those returning from other areas—some of whom are of retirement age. Nevertheless, it shows that an important consequence of the migration process for nonmetro Blacks of both low and high levels of education is to lessen gains in the overall educational status of the Black population in the nonmetro South (Nord, 1998a).

In all streams of Black migration either to or from nonmetro southern areas or between the South and the rest of the country, people with less than a high school education were two to five times as numerous as college graduates, a measure of just how low the level of education is for many Blacks entering or leaving rural areas and small towns. (For the total U.S. population age 25 and over in 1990, those who had not finished

high school were 1.2 times as numerous as college graduates.) All told, in the 1985-90 period, the nonmetro South had a net loss of 14,000 Black college graduates and a net gain of 6,000 migrants who were not high school graduates. The net loss of college graduates amounted to 10 percent of the total Black graduate population that would have been present in the nonmetro South in the absence of migration, a considerable loss in just 5 years. This loss is probably the most significant educational impact of the migration pattern for nonmetro Blacks. The estimate of human capital loss, moreover, is likely to be somewhat low, since it is typical for many college students to have moved away before age 25.

Poverty Status

In its interchange with other areas, the nonmetro South received more Blacks from 1985-90 who lived in households with poverty-level incomes in 1989 (as reported in the 1990 Census) than it sent elsewhere. Specifically, 41 percent of all Blacks moving in from the North and West were poor, along with 39 percent of those coming from the metro South (fig. 5). This level of impoverishment is no lower than that among nonmetro Blacks who did not migrate (39 percent). Thus, the nonmetro South did not experience a reduction in Black poverty from the inflow of people from the North and West or the metro South.

Table 2 – Nonmetro Black migrants in the South by educational status, 1985-90¹

Education	In	Out	Net gain for nonmetro South	In/out Ratio
	<i>Number</i>			
Less than high school:				
North and West	20,504	15,654	4,850	1.31
Metro South	43,760	42,214	1,546	1.04
Total	64,264	57,868	6,396	1.11
High school, less than bachelor's degree:				
North and West	29,341	24,444	4,897	1.20
Metro South	54,574	74,504	-19,930	0.73
Total	83,915	98,948	-15,033	0.85
Bachelor's degree or higher:				
North and West	3,992	5,816	-1,824	0.69
Metro South	9,842	21,861	-12,019	0.45
Total	13,838	27,677	-13,843	0.50
Total age 25 and over in 1990:				
North and West	53,837	45,914	7,923	1.17
Metro South	108,176	138,574	-30,403	0.78
Total	162,013	184,493	-22,480	0.87

¹ Population age 25 and over.

Those who left nonmetro communities had lower levels of poverty in their new settings than those who remained (34 percent poverty among migrants who went to the North and West, 30 percent for migrants to the metro South, and 39 percent for nonmigrants). But one cannot say how much the migrants' incomes reported in the 1990 Census were affected by change occurring after they moved, given the 5-year full length and 2.5-year average length of the migration period studied. In any event, the macro poverty consequence by 1990 was small. The metro South, for

example, acquired only 13,000 more poor people from the disproportionate poverty of Black rural immigrants on a base population of over 9 million (table 3). Black migrants to the metro South from the North and West had higher incomes (as reflected by lower poverty rates) than the Black nonmigrant population of the metro South (data not shown), but figure 5 shows that Black migrants to the nonmetro South from the same regions had a poverty rate that was even a little higher than that of nonmigrants.

Figure 5

Poverty composition in 1989 of Black migration streams for nonmetro southern areas, 1985-90

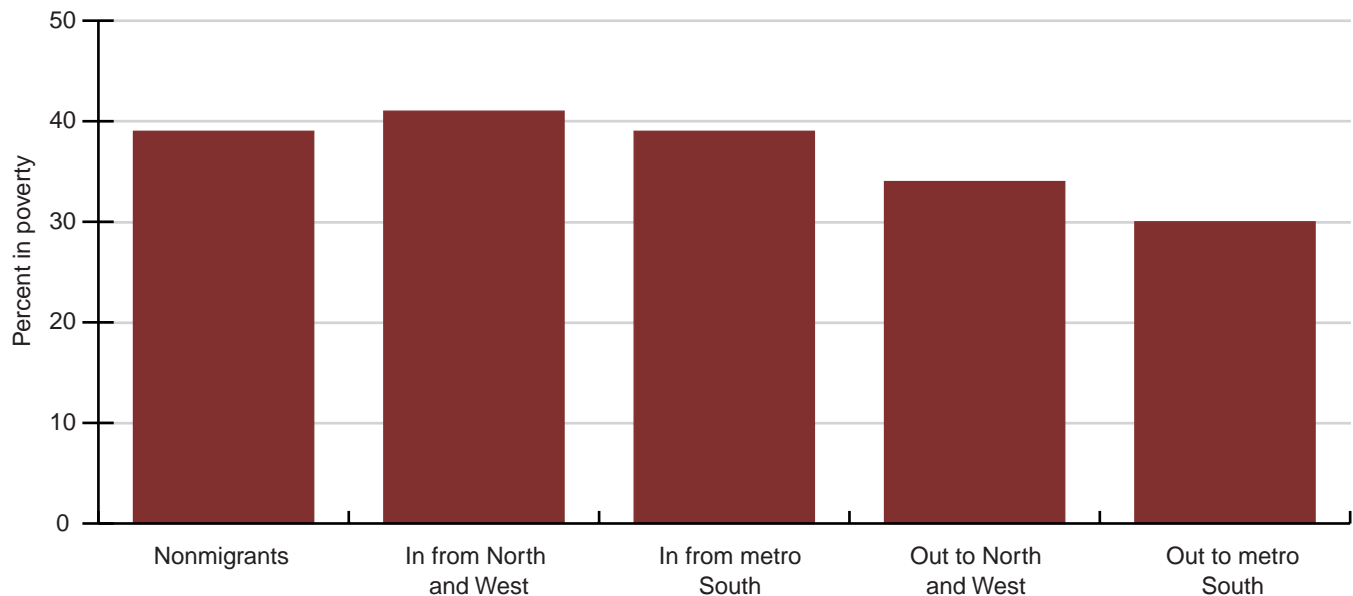


Table 3 – Nonmetro Black migrants in the South by poverty status, 1985-90¹

Status	In	Out	Net gain to nonmetro South	In/out Ratio
	<i>Number</i>			
<i>In poverty:</i>				
North and West	34,980	26,201	8,779	1.34
Metro South	53,529	66,809	13,280	0.80
Total	88,509	93,010	-4,501	0.95
<i>Not in poverty:</i>				
North and West	49,976	51,314	-1,338	0.97
Metro South	81,763	157,542	-75,779	0.52
Total	131,739	208,856	-77,117	0.63

¹ Poverty status was determined only for population in households.