

## Conclusion

The era since the culmination of the civil rights crisis and the mechanization of southern row-crop farming has seen a major decline in the propensity of rural Blacks to leave the South for the North and West, but with a simultaneous redirection of outflow to southern cities. Nearly the same gross amount of rural outflow took place from 1990-95 as from 1965-70, but while 46 percent of outflow left the South in the earlier period, only 13 percent did so in the 1990s. This change suggests a gradual attenuation of the strong personal ties that have existed between Blacks in the rural South and those in the North and West. The perceived advantages of southern metro residence, however, have grown over the years, as has the willingness of metro Black southerners to move into (or back to) rural districts.

The trend produced only a minimal overall net loss of nonmetro Blacks through outmovement in the first half of the 1990s, compared with a 7.4-percent loss in 1965-70. In demographic terms, the migration has become “ineffective,” that is, with both inmovement and outmovement occurring, but little net change. The South is a large region, though, and the county-level data for 1990-2000 show strong subregional differences in population change. Decline in total population, stemming from continued outmovement, is still common in counties with significant Black populations in the western South, while growth and even inmovement have become the rule in the eastern South.

As expected, the nonmetro South exported more Black college graduates than it received. While such outmovement is rational, it can have a negative impact on the nonmetro population whose general educational level is low and whose educational opportunities were so limited in the past. The effect of this trend was compounded by the fact that the nonmetro Black population received more people with limited education than it lost.

Poverty levels of Black nonmetro residents remained very high in 1990 regardless of migration status. We were surprised to find that the poverty rates of the 400,000 Blacks who came into the nonmetro South from 1985-90 were as high as those of the nonmigrant population in 1990, indicating no nonmetro income benefit from the urban inflow, at least as measured by poverty incidence. The Black rural outflow to the metro areas is still somewhat disproportionately poor but is now very small as a percentage of the population of these areas and has much less current impact on metro population composition than immigration from abroad.

As noted earlier, our expectations were supported regarding changes in the overall structure of Black migration between the nonmetro South and both the North and West and the metro South. For nonmetro Blacks, the metro South has emerged as the major focus of population interchange, with high levels of both in- and outmigration.

Our findings concerning the educational and poverty levels of migrants show that movement both in and out of nonmetro areas supports a continuation of the disadvantaged social and economic status of Blacks in the rural and small-town South. These findings are consistent with other research (Nord 1998a, 1998b).

The nonmetro South is not monolithic. Rather, it is a large and varied area, a fact reflected in the analysis of both 1975-90 Black migration for the South Atlantic States versus the rest of the South and in subregional population change after 1990.

Over the last quarter century, the South has turned a corner in the historic movement of Blacks to the North and West, especially those from rural and small-town communities. The Great Migration, entailing long-distance moves to places where Blacks had little prior representation, is essentially over. But the mutual interchange within the South between metro and nonmetro areas has developed at a scale not foreseen.

Increasingly, Black residents of the rural and small-town South are caught up in the effects and sprawl of metropolitan expansion or the growing use of rural areas by urban residents for recreation or retirement. Whatever the downside entails, such developments increase and diversify employment opportunities and diminish or end net migration losses. But other large segments of nonmetro Blacks continue to reside in areas, such as those noted in the western South, that still have high poverty rates, limited economic opportunities, and compelling reasons for young adults to leave.

The detailed 2000 Census results will provide further insight into the evolving dimensions, directions, and effects of Black nonmetro migration. Census data on additional characteristics of migrants, such as age, work status, and State of birth, will enhance our study. Our findings suggest it would also be useful to look at variations among smaller geographic groupings within the region than the two used in this work. The Black population continues to play a significant role in the remarkable changes occurring in rural and small-town America and merits further efforts to document and understand the demographic aspects of these changes.