

Summary

This report focuses on the migration of Blacks between the nonmetropolitan (non-metro) South and the rest of the Nation from 1965-70 through 1990-95. It considers trends both within the South and with the rest of the Nation, including education and poverty status of migrants. For perspective, comparisons are made with the movement of the non-Black population, more than 90 percent of which is White.

From 1965-95, perhaps the most dramatic change in southern Black nonmetro migration was the major decline in the proportion of outmigrants who moved to Northern or Western States. From 1965-70, 46 percent of outmigrants moved to those States, but by 1990-95 only 13 percent did so, as the great majority chose to move to southern metro areas instead.

Simultaneously, the rate of movement of southern metro Blacks into the nonmetro South also rose throughout the 30-year period, but especially during the 1990s. By 1990-95, the movement of Blacks from Southern cities and suburbs into the rural and small-town environment of the nonmetro South nearly equaled the movement in the opposite direction.

Data from the 1990 Census show that the nonmetro South's migration interchange with both the North and West and the metro South led to a net loss during 1985-90 of Blacks having at least a 4-year college degree. Twice as many Black college graduates moved to the North and West and the metro South as came from those locations to the nonmetro South. At the other end of the education scale, 11 percent more Blacks who had not finished high school moved into the nonmetro South than moved away. Many of these immigrants are thought to be older people, from a less educated prior generation, returning to rural homes. Thus, the pattern of migration acted to retard progress somewhat in advancing the educational status of nonmetro Blacks.

Given the educational makeup of migrants, it is not surprising that the poverty rate in 1990 of Blacks moving into the nonmetro South nearly equaled that of non-metro residents who had not moved during the 1985-90 period. For both immigrants and nonmigrants, two-fifths lived in households with poverty-level income. Nonmetro Blacks moving to the North and West or the metro South had somewhat lower poverty incidence in 1990 than did the nonmigrant population of the areas they left. This finding reflects both the outmigrants' better education levels and the higher wages and steadier employment of metro labor markets.

Results from the 2000 Census show that the higher the proportion of Blacks in nonmetro counties in 1990, the lower the average increase was in total county population during the 1990s. Among counties with Black majorities, the total population grew by just 7 percent, with many counties declining, indicative of continued net outmigration. In contrast, nonmetro counties where less than a third of the population was Black averaged 14 percent growth. This growth pattern had a regional aspect. In the Southern States west of Georgia, where Black nonmetro poverty rates have been the highest, growth was lower and the likelihood of decline higher than in the South Atlantic States. Many nonmetro Blacks in the eastern South now live in areas with conditions favoring growth—and presumably economic opportunity. But in Black-populated areas of the western South, conditions are still widely unfavorable for retention or attraction of people.