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Author(s): NOAH GOYKE and PUNEET DWIVEDI

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Going South or Going Home? Trends in Concurrent Streams of African American Migrants to the US South Over Four Decades

NOAH GOYKE
University of Georgia

PUNEET DWIVEDI
University of Georgia

Since the mid-1970s, the United States (US) South has been a net destination for African American migrants. We analyzed data from 1976 to 2015 to highlight major characteristics of migrants to the US South at the Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMA) level. Grounded in neoclassical and social network migration theory, we propose there are concurrent streams of migrants—those searching for economic opportunity and those returning to homeplaces. Here, we show that the overall percentage of migrants moving to rural areas has declined from 30 percent in 1980 to 14 percent in 2015. Our results suggest the stream of migrants moving for economic opportunity has always been larger and has grown proportionally larger with time. Along with a decrease in rural-bound migration, we demonstrate an overall decrease in migration, a concentration of migrants in a shrinking number of urban centers, and an unexpected increase in the human capital of rural migrants. Our findings have forced us to reckon with assumptions that professionals leaving cities for rural communities is a uniquely white phenomenon, challenged us to consider the importance of social ties to urban areas, and raised questions about the role of technology as a deterrent to moving home.

Desde mediados de los años 70, el sureste de los EE.UU. ha sido un destino neto para los migrantes afroamericanos. Analizamos datos del 1976 al 2015 para resaltar las características importantes de los migrantes al sur estadounidense en el nivel de áreas de microdatos de uso público (PUMA). Fundamentados en la teoría neoclásica y de migración de redes sociales, proponemos que hay flujos concurrentes de migrantes, aquellos que buscan oportunidades económicas y aquellos que regresan a sus lugares de origen. Aquí, mostramos que el porcentaje total de migrantes que se mudan a áreas rurales ha disminuido del 30 por ciento en 1980 al 14 por ciento en 2015. Nuestros resultados sugieren que la corriente de migrantes en busca de oportunidades económicas siempre ha sido mayor y ha crecido proporcionalmente con el tiempo. Junto con una disminución en la migración de origen rural, demostramos una disminución general de la migración, una concentración de migrantes en un número cada vez menor de centros urbanos y un aumento inesperado en el capital humano de los migrantes rurales. Nuestros hallazgos nos obligaron a suponer que los profesionales que abandonan las ciudades para las comunidades rurales son un fenómeno exclusivamente blanco, nos desafiaron a considerar la importancia de los vínculos sociales con las áreas urbanas y plantearon dudas sobre el papel de la tecnología como elemento disuasivo para mudarse a casa.

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KEYWORDS: Urban-Rural, Primary Migration, Return Migration, Homeplace, Great Migration

PALABRAS CLAVES: Urbano-Rural; Migración primaria; migración de retorno; hogar; gran migración

INTRODUCTION

For the last four decades, the United States (US) South has been a net destination for domestic migration, including African Americans (Frey 2004; Hunt et al. 2008). There is evidence to support this claim, both from aggregate and microdata sets (Ruggles et al. 2015) and also evidence from ethnographic fieldwork (Pendergrass 2013a). One of the trends highlighted by scholars is the movement of African Americans to the rural South (Stack 1996). A particular emphasis has been placed on the importance of place ties for migrants to the rural South, whom Brown and Cromartie (2006) refer to as homeplace migrants. We would like to continue that line of inquiry, using the latest microdata available from the US Census Bureau to investigate whether African Americans are still migrating to the rural South. If so, our goal is to describe the major characteristics of this migration pattern across different age groups and their destination choices over time.

Historical Context

In 1900, to be African American was to be southern and to be rural. At the turn of the century, approximately 90 percent of African Americans lived in the South, and 77 percent were in rural areas (Logan 2009). By 1910 those numbers began to decline, marking the beginning of a Great Migration from the rural South to the industrialized northeastern, midwestern, and later western US (Berlin 2010). The Great Migration lasted until the mid-1970s and resulted in the relocation of about six million African Americans (Tolnay 2003). Motivations for moving were as diverse as the migrants themselves and included the pull of better wages and the promise of equality (Eichenlaub, Tolnay, and Alexander 2010), as well as the push of industrializing agriculture and escaping the racism of the Jim Crow South (Tolnay and Beck 1992). Social networks, particularly kin networks, facilitated migration by successive rounds of migrants (Price-Spratlen 2008).

An important point in the literature is that the Great Migration—while a net flow of African Americans from the South—was far from linear or unidirectional for individual migrants from the rural South to urban north and west (we use north and west to mean any area outside of the area defined as South by the US Census). Indeed, a large share of early migrants were not agricultural workers at all (Marks 1985). Higher levels of human capital and ready funds to pay the costs of migration are important factors in self-selection for migration. Both were more readily available in urban areas. These early migrants were either onward migrants from an earlier intra-South rural to urban movement or the descendants of such migrants. Migration to the urban north and west was often the final step in a multistage journey; southern cities like Louisville, KY were stepping stones (and at times a final destination) for migrants with rural and urban origins (Adams 2006). For other migrants, the next move was back to where they had started. For many migrants, the move north was only ever intended to be temporary, and for workers

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in fields like construction, it was intended to be both temporary and seasonal. Children too were a part of the back and forth between north and south, whether sent back to the homeplace to escape from dangerous inner cities, to work on the family farm, or to ease the burden on a parent working long hours. Back and forth migration presumably did much to maintain ties between northbound migrants, their families, and their southern homeplaces (Adelman et al. 2000).

By the mid-1970s, the original African American migrants, members of their families, or both began returning to southern states faster than others were leaving, harbingering an era of southbound migration flow sometimes referred to as the "New Great Migration" (Frey 2004). Several studies have analyzed this New Great Migration. Through the 1980 census, it was reported that since the mid-1970s, two-thirds of all African American migrants had moved to urban areas (Cromartie 1989). Research using data through 1995 showed 2.5 times more urban than rural migrants (Fuguitt et al. 2001). The trend was confirmed by the research using the data through the 2000 census that also showed two-thirds of African Americans migrating to urban areas since the mid-1970s (Frey 2004). Demographics like birthplace and age have been shown to influence the rural or urban destination of migrants. For example, 44 percent of migrants returning to their birth state moved to rural areas (Falk et al. 2004) while only 38 percent of youth migrated to rural areas (Cromartie and Stack 1989). It is also reported that migrants have especially moved to states with historically and contemporarily high African American populations, especially the region known as the Black Belt (Hunt et al. 2012), with cities like Atlanta and Charlotte the top destinations for southbound migrants (Pendergrass 2013b).

Other studies have highlighted non-metro bound migrants by investigating their diverse life stories and motivations (Stack 1996; Brown and Cromartie 2006). Of interest is the greater percentage of return migrants (those born in the south) moving to the south (57 percent), the tendency of return migrants to move to areas with high density (20+ percent) of African Americans, and the tendency of return migrants to move to non-metro areas (Falk, Hunt, and Hunt 2004). Both economic and non-economic motivations have been addressed as well, including the perception of more racial integration in the south than the rest of the country (Pendergrass 2013a). Although the migrants themselves have been well-studied in terms education, gender, and household characteristics (Tolnay 1998; Adelman, Morett, and Tolnay 2000; Hunt, Hunt, and Falk 2013), there is little work that investigates the relationships among demographic, socioeconomic, and lifecycle variables and destinations.

We would be remiss to finish our discussion of rural bound migration without addressing the phenomenon of urban to rural migration. The movement of middle/upper class urban dwellers to rural areas for perceived amenity benefits is generally treated as both a western (in the regional sense) and white phenomenon (Nelson and Nelson 2011). There is no reason to believe that African Americans could not participate in this type of amenity-motivated migration to the rural south, given its cultural and historical importance and hypothetical amenities. Apart from the possibility of wealthy, well-educated African Americans directly

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migrating to the rural south for amenity reasons, the possibility has also been raised in the literature of linked migration between wealthy migrants ‘escaping’ to rural communities and the low-wage workers that will provide the services they need. In theory this phenomenon could improve employment of African Americans in the destination counties or else draw migrants looking for work to those communities. However, the current literature on the subject of migration linked to amenity-motivated migration has focused on Latino migrants (Nelson and Nelson 2011). There is no empirical evidence to suggest that a Latino presence in ‘new’ rural destinations has a detrimental impact on African Americans, which is to say they are not taking jobs held by African Americans, only filling new ones as they are created (Crowley et al. 2015).

Theoretical Context

We consider the migration of African Americans to the US South not as a single stream, but instead two parallel streams: one of the opportunity migrants and the other of homeplace migrants, with the actors in each stream driven by different motivations.

Opportunity migrants are those whose decision to migrate is made to take advantage of real or perceived increase in utility. We lean heavily on the disequilibrium perspective of neoclassical migration theory (Greenwood 1997) while recognizing the role that amenities play in the decision to migrate. For each individual migrant the value of utility can be modeled:

$$U = \frac{(E_B - E_C)_t + (A_B - A_C)_t}{(1+r)^t}$$

Here, *E* represents economic benefits and costs, most typically in the form of wages but also capital, and *A* represents amenity benefits and costs. We consider amenity benefits to include mild climate, opportunities for recreation or cultural engagement, and in the case of African American migrants, the presence of an existing African American population. The *t* represents time and *r* a discount rate, time being important because initially migration is typically followed by an immediate economic downturn (Greenwood 1997), and a discount rate because individual migrants will have varying ideas about how much more beneficial migration must be to make it worthwhile.

The migrants in this stream should tend to be relatively young, as young will have lower costs of migrating. For example, young people are less likely to have to face the cost of abandoning an established career, to have a mortgage, or having children in school. They will have relatively high levels of human capital (i.e., education), and this trend will strengthen with time, as a college education becomes increasingly important for upward economic mobility. Opportunity migrants will tend not to have families because of the costs associated with moving a family, although those with families will tend to migrate with their families. Additionally, we expect opportunity migrants to behave as predicted by a modified gravity model (Greenwood 1997), which is supported by empirical research demonstrating that in the South the fastest growth is taking place in the largest urban centers; one of the assumptions of our analysis is that opportunity migrants are moving primarily to urban areas.

To be a homeplace migrant, we consider migrating for reasons other than to maximize utility a necessary condition, but not a sufficient one. In addition,

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homeplace migrants are those who migrate due to a personal connection to a locale of destination or a person present at that destination. In some ways homeplace migrants behave as expected in social network theory of migration in that they can afford lower returns for migrating because they have lower capital and information costs (Massey et al. 1993). At the same time, we consider homeplace migration with an eye toward blending the new economics of migration (Massey et al. 1993) with ideas of kinship and networks most frequently addressed in anthropology (Brettell 2000). We find that it is often a household decision based on kinship obligation rather than economic calculus. We consider migrants that are returning to a childhood home, moving to take care of elderly parents, or accompanying a partner all to be homeplace migrants (Brown and Cromartie 2006). Unlike with opportunity migrants, we do not assume that homeplace migrants are moving to primarily urban or rural areas, as there a multitude of ways in which people connect to both. We do, however, hypothesize that rural migrants are primarily homeplace migrants.

We expect that migrants in the homeplace stream will be older than opportunity migrants, as there is nothing driving migration of young people in this stream. They will have lower human capital as a group. For one, homeplace migrants may be those returning after 'failed' migration elsewhere, an event related to lower levels of human capital. Alternatively, homeplace migrants may be moving to adopt the role of caregiver. We might expect that an individual willing to move to take on this role has already sacrificed opportunities to develop their own human capital to fulfill other family obligations. Regarding youth, we expect that a greater share of young homeplace migrants will be living with someone other than their parents. For example, working parents may send children back to the idealized environment of their own childhood, away from perceived dangers in their current location. We expect that homeplace migrants will move to both urban and rural areas and given the generally bleak economic prospects of the rural south, we expect most rural-bound migrants to be a part of the homeplace stream.

We do not expect the two migrant streams to be completely independent of one another. Instead, they represent a continuum along which type of migrants fall. All things being roughly equal, opportunity migrants may migrate to areas where they have strong ties, and the stronger the ties, the more unequal two destinations may be. Homeplace migrants may, in turn, be influenced by the presence of opportunity at their destination. In fact, the number of individuals with ties to places yet do not migrate suggests that there is a threshold of utility decrease that homeplace migrants are willing to accept, a threshold that varies with relative and absolute utility decline, as well as the strength and urgency of the place or interpersonal bonds.

METHODS

We selected eight southern states (Alabama, Louisiana, Georgia, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia) and District of Columbia for this analysis. These states are considered "high" African American density states

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based on the threshold of 20 percent African American established by Hunt et al. (2012). As of the 2010 census, these states account for 36 percent of all African Americans in the United States, and 16 percent of total population (Winkler et al. 2013).

Our analysis is based on data from the 1980, 1990, and 2000 decennial censuses, and the 2006–2010 and 2011–2015 five-year American Community Survey (ACS), available through the University of Minnesota's Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (Ruggles et al. 2015). We analyzed the destination choice of southbound African American migrants over four decades. The destination was defined as either urban or rural, and the definition was based on the US Census Bureau definition of 50+ percent population living in rural areas for a given county. The lowest geographic region available in the Public Use Microdata Series (PUMS) is the Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA), collections of counties or fractional counties with a population of at least 100,000. For PUMAs containing more than one county, we weighted the rurality of each county inside the PUMA to determine whether the area met the 50 percent rural population threshold. For example, Autauga County in Alabama is within PUMA 2100 and represents 31 percent of the population of that PUMA (which also includes Elmore, Lowndes, and Montgomery counties). Autauga County is 42 percent rural, and so contributes 13 percent weighted rurality to the PUMA. The other three counties contribute a combined 32 percent for a total of 45 percent rural population, which falls below the 50 percent threshold—any movers to PUMA 2100 in 2010 are considered to have an urban destination. Total migration to each PUMA was based on the person weight assigned to an individual. The boundary of each 2015 PUMA, with number migrants for the 2011–2015 period is shown in Figure 1.

Our research question concerns migration to the South, so our sample frame consists of only migrants with a non-southern migration origin. Aside from destination, we considered several other variables in our analysis. First, the demographic variables of age and sex. Migrants were broken into three categories based on age: youth (0–18 years), adults (19–64 years) and elderly (65+ years), the categories are the same as those used by Stack and Cromartie (1989) in their work on African American migration to the South. Youth typically do not have control of their migration, and the elderly (generally retired) have different motivations than working adults. Family variables of marital status and children were also of interest, assuming they are two of the variables that can be used to separate opportunity and homeplace migrants. Workforce participation and education were also included, with the education attainment variable used as a proxy for human capital. Finally, relationship to head of household and birthplace were used to help measure the incidence of return migration and homeplace migration, with those born in their destination state considered returners and those born elsewhere considered primary migrants.

RESULTS

Overall Trends

For the five periods of analysis over four-decades, about 1,039,864 African

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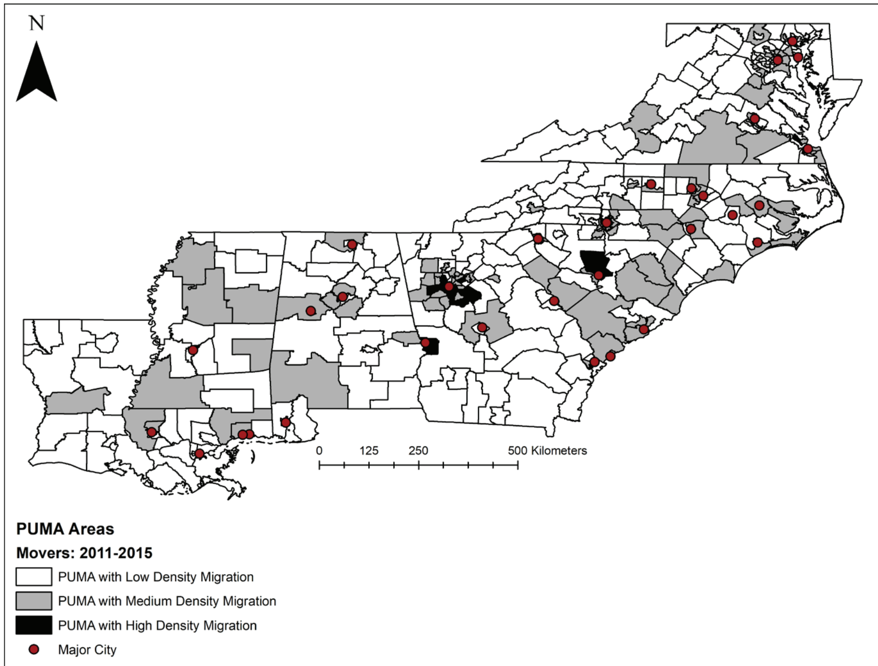

Figure 1. PUMA boundaries in the study area for 2015. The white areas represent PUMAs with low migration and account for approximately 25 percent of total migrants. The dark shaded area represents PUMAs with high migration and also account for approximately 25 percent of total migrants. Notice the relatively low number of dark areas and their concentration around urban centers like Atlanta GA, Columbia SC, and Charlotte NC.

Americans migrated to the US South (Table 1). Of those migrants, 20 percent moved to rural destinations. Return migrants comprised 22 percent and 44 percent of rural and urban migrants, respectively. The number of African American migrants moving to rural areas follows the general trend of total migration, increasing in absolute numbers, before declining and falling off precipitously at the turn of the 21st century (Figure 2). However, the relative share of rural migrants declined by approximately 3 percent per decade, from 30 percent of all migrants to 14 percent only. Among rural migrants, the portion of return migrants fell by 5 percent per decade, from 50 percent to only 31 percent.

Among all migrants, adults comprise approximately 70 percent, youth 25 percent, and the elderly 5 percent. All three age groups mimic the overall trend of rising and then falling in absolute numbers (Figure 3A). For all three age categories, primary urban migration as a share of total migration has risen steadily, with a slight downturn from 2011-2015 (Figure 3B). This trend has been most noticeable for elderly migrants, where the portion of primary urban migrants has risen by almost 7 percent per decade. For all three age

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Table 1. Number of migrants for five Census/ACS Periods

		Urban		Rural	
	All	Primary	Return	Primary	Return
1976–1980	135,600	67,160	28,180	20,080	20,180
1986–1990	340,989	206,574	60,884	39,828	33,703
1996–2000	306,207	192,223	52,298	35,503	26,183
2006–2010	138,131	98,232	23,283	10,087	6,529
2011–2015	118,937	83,553	18,955	10,868	5,561
Total	1,039,864	649,742	183,600	116,366	92,156

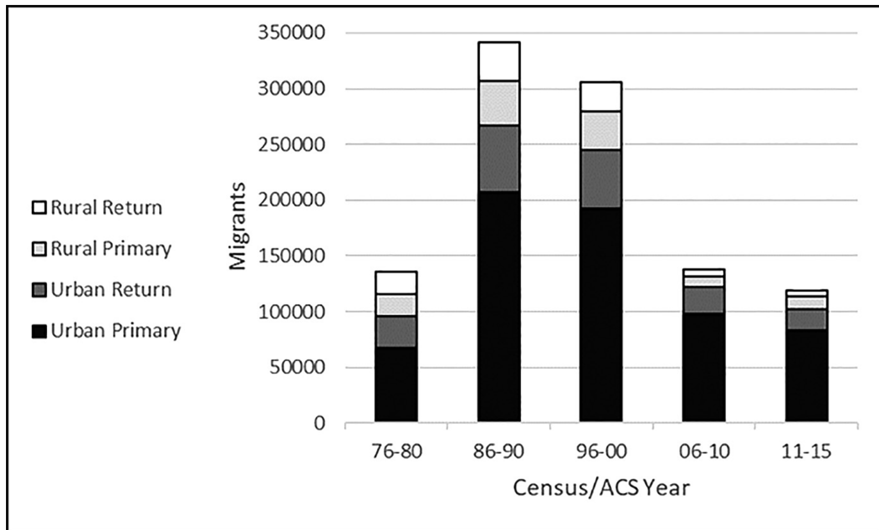

Figure 2. Migration of African Americans to the study area. Each Census/ACS period represents migration over the five preceding years – for example, the 1980 Census counts individuals who migrated between 1976 and 1980. The decennial census asked respondents if they had moved in the last five years, while the ACS reports migration at the one-year interval. The literature shows that many migrants either move back or move shortly after their initial migration, which would suggest that the estimates for the 76–80, 86–90 and 96–00 periods are all underestimates.

groups, return migration to rural areas has fallen steadily, again most dramatically for the elderly population, where the share of total migrants returning to rural areas has fallen nearly 7 percent per decade. Among youth, return urban migration has declined while primary rural migration has risen correspondingly. Among adults, both return urban and primary rural migration has declined as a share of total migration, while among the elderly population rates have remained steady.

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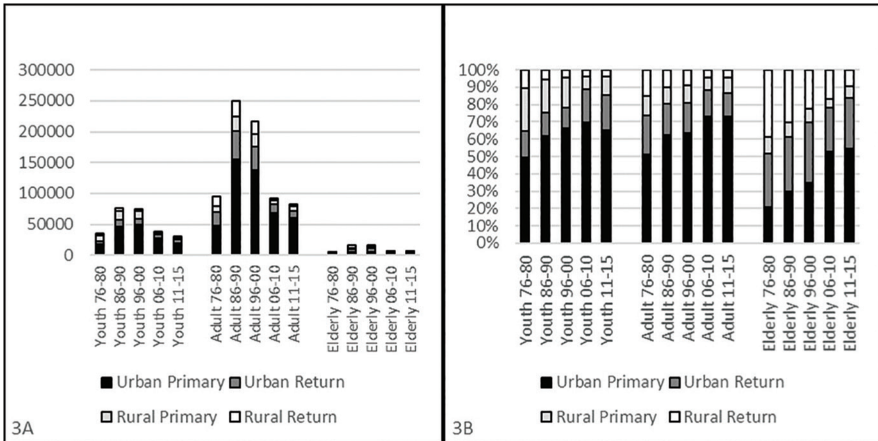

Figure 3. Absolute number (3A) and Proportion (3B) of migrants by destination in three age categories. Migration by each age group reflects the overall trend in migration over the time frame – an increase through 2000 and then a sharp decline after the turn of the 21st century. For all age groups, primary urban migrants made up a larger portion of migrants in 2011–2015 compared to 1976–1980. Only youth saw an increase in the proportion of any other migrant type, with a small boost in percent of return urban migrants. Of the three groups the elderly experience the most dramatic rise in the share of primary urban migrants, with a corresponding large drop in return rural migration.

We also found that migrants are concentrating in urban clusters and that the concentration is both intensifying and shifting south. In 1980, the top 10 percent (19 of 192) most popular destination PUMAs represented 9 different metro areas, included all states, and 37 percent of all migrants; only 1 rural area (South Carolina) was included among the 19 most popular destinations. By 2015, the top 10 percent (37 of 31) most popular PUMAs represented thirteen metro areas in just six states and 33 percent of all migrants. Of those 37 PUMAs, only three represented rural areas – two in Georgia and one in Mississippi. At the beginning of the 40-year period, the Baltimore-DC metro was the most popular destination, as was the Norfolk, Virginia metro area. By 2015 Atlanta, Georgia was the most popular destination, and Charlotte, North Carolina was the second most popular, after not even appearing in the top 10 in 1980. Neither Alabama, Louisiana, nor Mississippi contained a top ten destination by 2015.

Youth

The characteristics of young migrants have held largely steady over the last four decades, with fractionally more boys than girls moving south and urban-destined children more typically living with their parents (Table 2). Two noteworthy trends are the decline in the share of rural (especially return) youth living with their parents after the turn of the 21st century, and the trend toward younger migrants (Figure 4).

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Table 2. Percent of youth living with parents

		Urban		Rural	
	All	Primary	Return	Primary	Return
1976–1980	79.4	82.9	83.5	81.2	73.0
1986–1990	80.3	81.8	81.8	82.0	75.4
1996–2000	81.3	83.1	84.4	75.3	74.9
2006–2010	79.4	81.9	81.4	83.6	59.3
2011–2015	77.0	79.2	80.2	76.0	64.2

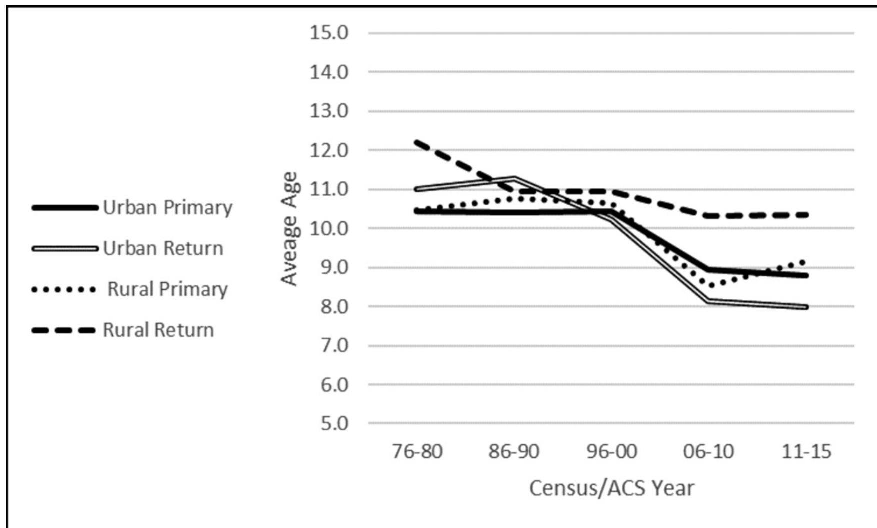

Figure 4. Average age (in years) of youth migrants. Regardless of destination, the average age of youth migrants has decreased of the forty-year time frame of interest.

Adults

Over the last 40 years, several trends have emerged: migrants have on average gotten older, return migrants are older than primary migrants, and those returning to rural areas are the oldest (Table 3). Primary urban and return rural migrants have effectively switched gender divisions over time, with more females becoming primary urban migrants and more males becoming return rural migrants. There is also a trend of a larger share of adult migrants living with their parents, with the share of return migrants living with their parents about twice that of primary migrants. Across all migrants, those living with their parents are on average younger than their cohort.

In terms of life cycle characteristics, the share of married migrants decreased, with a corresponding increase in never-married migrants, while the share of

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Table 3. Demographic characteristics of primary (PRI) and return (RET) adult migrants

	Average Age (Years)				**Gender (% Male)**				**% of Adults Living with Parent**			
	Urban		**Rural**		**Urban**		**Rural**		**Urban**		**Rural**	
	PRI	**RET**	**PRI**	**RET**	**PRI**	**RET**	**PRI**	**RET**	**PRI**	**RET**	**PRI**	**RET**
1976–1980	28.0	34.0	27.7	37.0	53.8	47.5	58.7	45.9	5.4	17.0	8.3	19.5
1986–1990	30.1	36.5	31.3	39.1	49.1	46.0	47.7	45.7	6.5	18.0	12.0	21.4
1996–2000	32.5	39.0	33.8	43.5	46.9	49.8	49.1	52.7	6.9	12.1	13.0	12.0
2006–2010	33.1	37.2	33.0	39.7	45.3	46.9	56.1	53.7	7.5	19.5	12.4	23.7
2011–2015	33.4	36.3	34.7	40.2	47.3	50.8	55.8	56.5	10.9	25.4	14.7	17.0

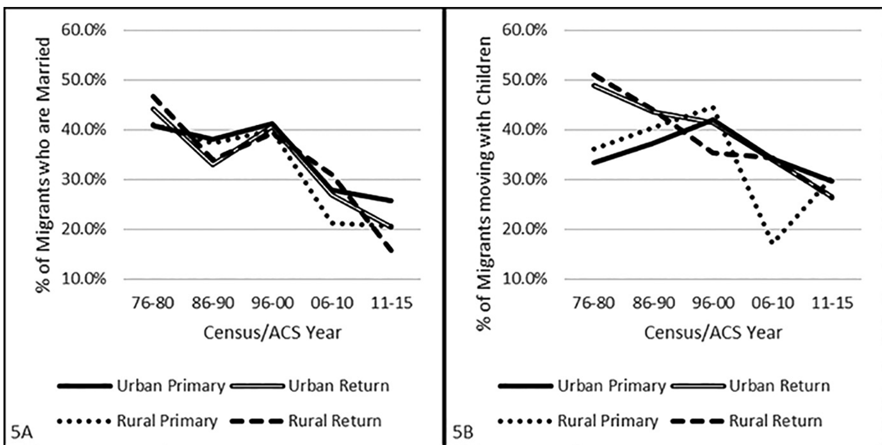

Figure 5. Percentage of married migrants (5A) and migrants with children (5B) over time. The trend regardless of destination is a decrease both in married migrants and migrants with children.

separated (widowed, divorced, etc.) migrants remained steady (Figure 5A). Return migrants experienced the largest decrease in percent married, from nearly half to less than one in five and the largest corresponding increase in the percent of migrants who have never married. Return migrants, regardless of destination, are about twice as likely to be separated, although the gap between primary and return migrants in that regard is narrowing. The share of migrants moving with children has also declined with time, with primary migrants overtaking return migrants as more likely to move with children at the turn of the 21st century (Figure 5B).

Socioeconomic indicators (education attainment and workforce participation) show the greatest differences among migrant groups (Table 4). For all migrants, educational attainment has risen, particularly among primary rural migrants, so

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Table 4. Socioeconomic indicators of primary (PRI) and return (RET) adult migrants

	Education (% > High School)				Percent Employment				Percent in Workforce			
	Urban		Rural		Urban		Rural		Urban		Rural	
	PRI	RET	PRI	RET	PRI	RET	PRI	RET	PRI	RET	PRI	RET
1976–1980	46.1	32.9	29.6	20.2	91.0	84.8	89.5	81.3	79.3	73.9	68.5	64.5
1986–1990	60.7	44.8	43.5	29.0	91.6	85.7	81.5	79.0	81.1	70.5	65.0	60.5
1996–2000	55.6	42.7	36.8	23.6	90.3	87.0	82.9	83.9	79.3	68.6	64.9	49.1
2006–2010	51.5	43.7	30.2	26.7	82.1	77.4	72.3	71.7	71.6	67.6	47.2	53.0
2011–2015	52.2	50.8	51.2	31.7	81.0	79.4	71.1	71.1	71.3	69.3	64.0	49.0

that those with greater than a high school education made up half of the urban and primary rural migrants by 2015. Return rural migrants lag significantly behind, in 2015 only reaching levels of educational attainment the other groups passed in 1980. For all migrants, the percent unemployment has increased over time, with a roughly 10 percent increase and a particularly dramatic fall among primary rural migrants. Unemployment for urban migrants has remained about 10 percent lower for the entire 40-year period. The greatest disparity among adult migrants is workforce participation. Nonworking individuals, as opposed to the unemployed, are not seeking work and include individuals with a disability, primary caregivers, and the retired. Workforce participation has declined across the board since 1980. However, it is consistently higher for primary migrants, and also consistently higher for urban migrants—a full 71 percent of primary urban migrants participate in the workforce, while a mere 49 percent of migrants returning to rural areas do. High unemployment combined with low workforce participation means only 35 percent of adult return migrants to rural areas are working.

Elderly

There are several strong trends among elderly migrants over time. Across all destinations, they are older, more female, and less likely to be married (Table 5). Return migrants are less likely to be married than primary migrants. There is also an increasing trend of elderly migrants to move in with their children, particularly among primary urban migrants (Figure 6), and those migrants tend to be slightly older than other than other migrants in their cohort.

DISCUSSION

Our analysis agrees with the literature, which is important considering we have included recent data not previously analyzed in the literature. For example, we found 20 percent of migrants moving to rural areas compared with the range of 20 percent to 35 percent in the literature (Falk, Hunt, and Hunt 2004). Our study also confirms the trend, reported largely through anecdotes, that youth were historically a large part of rural bound migration (Cromartie 1989; Stack 1996). Our analysis also confirms predictions made by the literature: rural bound migration

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Table 5. Demographic and life cycle characteristics of primary (PRI) and return (RET) elderly migrants

	Average Age (Years)				Sex (% Male)				Civil Status (% Married)			
	Urban		Rural		Urban		Rural		Urban		Rural	
	PRI	RET	PRI	RET	PRI	RET	PRI	RET	PRI	RET	PRI	RET
1976–1980	72.5	71.3	70.7	71.5	43.1	42.0	50.0	47.7	34.5	42.0	46.2	42.2
1986–1990	72.6	73.3	71.0	71.8	40.9	38.2	62.9	36.4	39.6	29.6	56.8	32.0
1996–2000	74.0	74.2	73.5	73.5	36.1	38.5	60.5	33.8	32.3	36.2	59.8	31.7
2006–2010	72.0	73.7	72.8	71.5	35.6	32.4	42.7	49.5	31.6	24.4	38.2	29.3
2011–2015	74.6	71.3	75.5	74.6	37.7	39.9	38.9	30.9	31.6	15.6	39.3	10.2

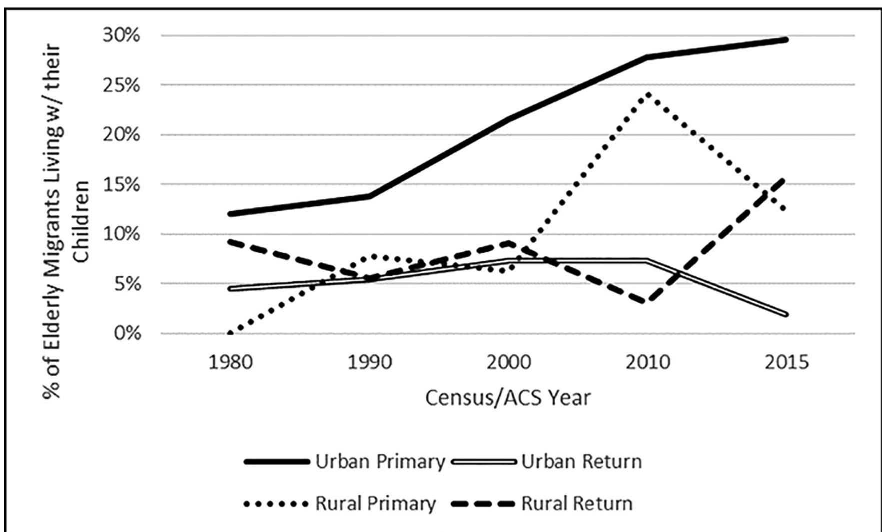

Figure 6. Percentage of elderly migrants living with their children We theorize that elderly migrants moving to live with adult children are homeplace migrants, either moving concurrently with adult children or else joining them after retirement.

will decrease over time (Lloyd 2012); return migrants are more likely to go to rural areas than primary migrants (Falk, Hunt, and Hunt 2004); and migrants are concentrating in specific metro areas (Frey 2004), a trend is becoming more acute with time. Finally, across the United States mobility has sharply declined since the turn of the 21st century. Our findings confirm this trend among African Americans moving to the South, irrespective of whether they are opportunity or homeplace migrants.

The data also seem to support the theoretical foundation that there are two separate migration streams. Furthermore,

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it seems that the stream of opportunity migrants has grown larger (or the opportunity end of the spectrum is more heavily weighted) at the expense of the homeplace migrant stream. Several factors support this conclusion. First, the number of primary migrants (not homeplace) moving to urban areas, and the shift toward single, childless migrants with high human capital are all in accordance with what disequilibrium perspective of neoclassical theory would predict. Additionally, an increasing concentration of urban-bound migrants in fewer, larger urban centers is what a modified gravity model would predict. We suspect that the increased proportion of female migrants to urban areas is related to the concentration of migration in large urban centers. Women have an increasingly large share of college degrees and are better prepared for the economies of cities. Second, over the four-decade period, return migrants to urban areas and primary migrants to rural areas experienced sharp increases in their human capital, as well as an increase in age and lowered incidence of marriage and having children. Both cases point to an increase in opportunity migration. Contrary to our expectations, the data are indicative of a degree of amenity-motivated migration to the rural south by African American migrants (corroborated by an enormous increase in college-educated elderly migrants moving to rural areas), despite the fact that empirical work generally considered amenity migration a white phenomenon mostly linked to Latino rather than African American opportunity migration (Nelson and Nelson 2011).

At the same time, the data seem to show a drop in homeplace migration, as well as a divergence of homeplace migration away from the rural South and into urban areas. Regarding the first conclusion, over time there is a drop in the relative and an absolute number of return migrants to rural areas, as well as a drop in an absolute number of return migrants to urban areas. One of the striking trends is the relative rise of males as a portion of return rural migrants. However, the real story is not an increase in male migration but a sharp decline in female migration. Historically, many women moved back to rural communities to care for elderly relatives, and the relative decline in female return migration could signal a growing disconnect to rural communities, perhaps as elderly rural residents move to be with their children or into care centers. For the second conclusion, an increase in the number of adults living with their parents and a decrease in workforce participation by adults in urban areas (despite a sharp increase in overall educational attainment) suggests an increase in migration to urban areas not motivated purely by the search of economic opportunity.

Returning to our original question, we can definitively say that of African Americans are moving to the rural South but not like they were four decades ago. With that answer in hand, what remains is speculation as to why. First, inter-division migration across the US has plummeted since the year 2000. Cooke's (2018) essay on the cohort effect on migration offers several possible causes. While the causes are laid out from the perspective of disequilibrium as the driver of migration, with a bit of modification, we can explain the decreased homeplace migration to the rural South. First, from a disequilibrium perspective, the country may be approaching equilibrium, in the sense that there is less opportunity to increase utility

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through migration. For homeplace migrants, utility increase is not the primary factor in migration; nothing better emphasizes this than the fact that only 35 percent of rural retun migratns are working. We suspect that many of the migrants not working are serving as full time caregivers to an aging parent or grandparent. Still, the economic situation in the rural South is bleak enough that it probably dissuades many potential homeplace migrants. Second, we theorize that the rise of information and communication technology improves ties among individuals over great distances so that the personal ties remain strong yet ties to places weaken. For example, video call applications help maintain strong ties between individuals without the necessity of visiting, which diminishes the connection to the place. Third, going back to the rural South was for many African Americans literally a return to the homeplace, land that had been in the family for generations. However, persistent land loss among African Americans (Gilbert et al. 2002), exacerbated by heirs' property issues (Johnson-Gaither 2016), means that for many African Americans there is no homeplace to go back to. Related is the fact that with ever-growing populations in the urban South, many African American migrants have urban roots. Going home means going back to Atlanta, Charlotte, or Baltimore, and with the large share of single, childless migrants moving to urban centers, it seems likely that they will establish families and lay down the roots of the next generation in those same urban centers.

The New Great Migration of African Americans from the North and West to the South has been smaller in scope than the Great Migration of the last century and is seemingly slowing down, completing in some senses a cycle begun at the turn of the turn of the 20th century. Yet the migration has not been circular. In the beginning, African Americans emigrated from the rural south to the industrial North, following family and money and the promise of a better life. For some migrants, moving south meant moving back to the rural South, returning to where things started a hundred years ago. Never a majority, those returning to the homeplaces and farms and woods held for generations have seen their ranks fall from one in three to one in six. For some, the lure of rural life remains strong, for the southern born returning to their roots and for the northern born returning to rural places they are connected to by the sagas of families that can trace their ties to a piece of land dating to Reconstruction, antebellum, or even colonial times. Yet for the clear majority, migration to the South has been just that, a reverse in direction from decaying northern cities to vibrant southern ones. African American migrants are moving south, but they are not returning home.

This research offers more than an answer to our question about African American migration to the South. The influx of African American migrants could influence politics at all levels. In urban centers, African Americans will have a potentially larger voice, while the influx of men and women with northern upbringing may result in division, coalition, or transformation of the African American political identity. It is also possible that migrants with high levels of human capital could gentrify urban centers, historically a white phenomenon and the real or perceived conception of migrants 'getting ahead' of historic residents could lead to intra-racial

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tension, not unlike that witnessed in some urban centers during the successive waves of the Great Migration. In rural areas, where migrants are often elderly, and adult migrants are not working, the outlook is often grim. With declining populations (and declining tax bases), rural counties are increasingly hard pressed to provide educational, medical, and other services. For these municipalities, attracting amenity-motivated migrants may be a way to revitalize stagnant economies, although the risk is that investment in attracting migrants may not pay dividends and could stretch limited resources to the breaking point.

In addition, it opens the door to new lines of inquiry. One area worth further investigation is the urban homeplace and what role urban places play in attracting migration as the US population and African American populations both increasingly urbanize. Another important question involves investigating the role of personal communication technology in influencing migration decisions. The movement of wealthy urban dwellers to rural areas has been to a degree facilitated by the ability of professionals to work from anywhere via improved information and communication technology; however, increased personal communication options might act as a barrier to migration back home.

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