The New Great Migration: Reinventing Race Relations in the New South?

by

Miriam Simone Leshin
Class of 2010

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Departmental Honors in African American Studies
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements........................................................................................................3

Introduction..................................................................................................................4

Chapter 1 .....................................................................................................................16
Migration in Theory and in Practice in African American History

Chapter 2 .....................................................................................................................34
A Historiography of the Great Migration

Chapter 3 .....................................................................................................................67
Civil War to Civil Rights:
The Transformation of Race Relations in the New South

Chapter 4 .....................................................................................................................93
The New Great Migration:
Reclaiming the Past, Redefining the Present?

Chapter 5 ...................................................................................................................121
Primary Migrants in Atlanta, Georgia:
“Atlanta is very empowering for African Americans yet still very segregated”

Conclusions.................................................................................................................158

Appendices...................................................................................................................163

Bibliography.................................................................................................................175
Acknowledgments

To begin with, thank you to my thesis advisor, Professor Leah Wright. Thank you for always pushing me to think harder. Your insightful feedback and critical questions have profoundly shaped my work and my thinking. This project would not be where it is today—nor would the process have been as enjoyable—without your unwavering support.

Thank you to all the African American Studies professors who have inspired me in these last four years. To Professors Demetrius Eudell, Renee Romano, Gayle Pemberton, Melanye Price, and Ashraf Rushdy, thank you for opening up my mind to so many ways of thinking about the world. And for always maintaining a sense of humor.

Thank you to my fellow AFAM majors. Our junior colloquium last fall was one of the most engaging courses I have ever taken at Wesleyan because of what you brought to it. You are all some of the kindest and most intelligent people I know.

Thank you to my fellow teachers at Breakthrough Atlanta 2008 for inspiring me to think about ideas of the South and of Atlanta. Special thanks to Ms. Brandie and Ms. Kandice for connecting me with survey respondents.

Thank you to all the Atlantans who filled out my survey or answered questions over the phone. I very much appreciate you taking the time to openly and candidly share your experiences with a complete stranger.

Thank you to my friends, at Wesleyan and across the country. Thank you to my housemates, Christa and Yurie, for supporting me throughout this process and for always believing in me. Special thanks to Becca—that one a.m. video chat conversation saved my thesis (and my sanity). Also thanks to Matt Connolly, Emily Hoffman, Kim Segall, and Emma Zoloth for taking time out of your busy lives to edit chapters for me.

Finally, I want to thank my family. To Jonah and Rachel, thanks for your compassion, wit, and insight throughout this process (and our lives). Your loving support and ridiculous antics are always appreciated. To my parents, I can never really thank you enough for everything you have done for me. I am so lucky to have you both. I love you all.
Introduction

African Americans are now moving to the American South in large numbers in what has become known as the New Great Migration,\(^1\) beginning to reverse the Great Migration\(^2\) of the twentieth century. Not only is this movement historically significant in that it is the beginning of a geographic reversal of one of the largest mass migrations of American history, but it also serves as evidence of important regional and national developments\(^3\) that have occurred in this last century, particularly in terms of the ways in which race functions in the South as well as the spatialization of race, class, and privilege across the country. I argue that black migrants in this movement assert power through mobility, community-building, and the redefinition of southern spaces; their agency, however, remains limited within a larger nation in which space and resources are vastly unequal.\(^4\)

Growing up in a white suburb just outside of Boston, I was taught a simplified North-South dichotomy in terms of race relations. The South oppressed blacks through several systems and ideologies over several centuries. The North was the haven or “promised land” to which runaway slaves and then sharecroppers fled for opportunity and for equality. And so the textbook story went. White flight and

---

\(^1\) Terms for this movement vary. The Brookings Institution released a report in 2004 titling the movement, “The New Great Migration,” while the Schomburg Center refers to the movement as the “Return South Migration” in its “In-Motion: the African American Experience” website.

\(^2\) In the Great Migration, 6.5 million African Americans moved from the rural South to the urban North between 1910 and 1970 (Lemann 1991, 6).

\(^3\) The United States has undergone many different social, political, and economic processes in the last century. While I will occasionally refer to various political changes, a full analysis of the nation’s recent political developments is beyond the scope of this paper.

\(^4\) For a full report on current class and race disparities in this country, see the National Urban League’s “State of Black America 2009.” According to the report, blacks are currently twice as likely as whites to be unemployed, three times more likely to live in poverty, and more than six times as likely to be incarcerated.
busing issues in Boston were a footnote to what seemed an entire novel of southern oppression and ignorance.

In the summer of 2008, I crossed the Mason-Dixon line for the first time and lived in Atlanta for two months. I stayed in a black-owned inn for the first time, found myself immersed in a black professional community for the first time, and lived in a neighborhood far more integrated than the one in which I grew up. Obviously, these stark anecdotal contrasts are to an extent a function of the experiences I chose to have in both regions—in Atlanta, I was working at a non-profit devoted to ending educational inequality, which influenced the fact that many of my supervisors and colleagues were people of color. But the non-profit for which I worked had branches across the country, some of which were run by mostly white staffs. At my Atlanta branch, however, the majority of people in leadership were alumnae of Spelman College.

In researching ideas of race in the South for Professor Melanye Price’s “Politics and Prejudice” class last year, I came across the New Great Migration, which began in the 1970s and continues to this day. The migration is composed of two distinct streams: older return migrants who participated in the Great Migration and are now reversing their footsteps back to the South and younger primary migrants who were raised in the North but are now moving South. Many of my co-workers in Atlanta were black northerners who had moved to the city for college and hoped to stay after graduation. I immediately felt both an intellectual and personal connection to the movement, particularly to the experiences of primary migrants. I sought to
understand why people were moving and what this movement might tell us about the South and the nation as a whole in terms of race and class.

While there has been some coverage of the New Great Migration in the media—both in mainstream and alternative black presses—much of it romanticizes the South as a region transformed by the Civil Rights Movement. Numerous superficial features articles offer anecdote after anecdote of recent migrants to the South gushing over the region’s progress since the Civil Rights Movement. Many say the racism they currently face in the North is far worse than that in the modern South and that the South now offers them opportunities—such as connection to family or to a larger black community—that they simply could not find in their northern communities. While this media coverage importantly challenges common stereotypes of the South as an oppressive region, it reproduces a strict North-South dichotomy, asserting that the South is now more liberal than the North in a regional hierarchy of racial tolerance. Additionally, this coverage often misses the huge socioeconomic and spatial changes that both regions underwent throughout the Great Migration, which have both prompted and limited the New Great Migration.

This thesis, however, takes a different approach. It seeks to complicate this North-South dichotomy by exploring how race and space have functioned within both regions and how these spatial constraints have both encouraged and hindered the New Great Migration. There is minimal scholarly work on the movement, largely consisting of demographic studies and ethnographies of return migrants. This paper will add to this scholarship by providing an in-depth and multi-disciplinary study of

---

5 For a thorough and moving ethnography on return migrants, see Carol Stack’s *Call to Home: African Americans Reclaim the Rural South.*
the migration—its roots and its consequences—in the contexts of African American migration, ideas of race in the changing New South, and recent socioeconomic developments in both regions. Given that scholarship is particularly lacking on primary migrants, this thesis offers a case study of primary migrants in Atlanta, Georgia to further understand migrants’ motives on an individual level, as well as the extent to which migrants feel their new southern communities have met their expectations. This thesis serves as a starting point in research on the New Great Migration, laying a foundation for future work that will hopefully take stock of the movement’s larger legacies.

While a study of the New Great Migration necessitates some level of generalization of both the North and the South, I argue that both regions are composed of diverse communities, political districts, and populations. Although the modern South certainly has maintained some of its traditionally distinctive features, the regions are now converging socially, politically, and economically (Cohen 2010). Segregation is no longer confined to the South, as spatialized racial and class inequality plague metropolitan areas across the nation. This is perhaps most viscerally seen in the urban-suburban divide: decaying and politically liberal inner-cities surrounded by rings of affluent and politically conservative suburbs, which has resulted from the “fusion of class segregation and racial discrimination” (Lassiter, 2006, 2).

And yet, despite the regions’ convergence, large numbers of blacks are still actively moving to the South and this should tell us something, as all migrations do.

---

6 It should be noted that my field research—22 survey responses and four interviews—is not generalizable, but instead presents a snapshot of several migrants’ experiences.
Although this movement is diverse in terms of both generation and gender, it is socio-economically homogenous—a movement of the privileged to privileged spaces. Many move from northern cities or suburbs suffering from urban decay and deindustrialization to sprawling cities in the South that may have similar problems, but offer affluent mostly black suburbs, as well as black civic and educational institutions. Living in these spaces, wealthy primary migrants place physical and social distance between themselves and poor black neighborhoods in the area.

Sociological work offers a framework for understanding distinctly black middle class consciousnesses, which resonates with the experiences of many primary migrants. Historically, black elites have found themselves in a unique, perhaps contradictory position, as “both an aspiring social class and a racially subordinated caste” (Gaines 1996, xiv). At mid-century, however, a more pronounced black class structure emerged, ranging widely from the impoverished to the affluent and complicating scholars’ attempts to speak of a “uniform black experience” (Wilson 1978, x). Sociologist William Julius Wilson argues that in the post-civil rights period class profoundly shapes black elite perspectives and privileges, perhaps more so than does race. However, given that the black middle class still remains at a disadvantage to its white counterparts, it is difficult—and perhaps impossible—to pinpoint whether race or class predominate. In the lives of many primary migrants to

---

7 This is more often the case for primary migrants than for return migrants, who are more likely to move to rural and less affluent areas than their younger counterparts.
8 Many scholars trace the emergence of the first class of black elites to the post-Reconstruction period in which black professionals fulfilled the needs of black communities amidst segregation in the South (Wilson 1978, 141).
9 In his book The Declining Significance of Race, Wilson argues that class now trumps race in terms of access to privilege and power in the post-civil rights period; however, scholars contest this theory.
10 The persisting inequality between black and white middle classes will be further discussed in chapter four.
Atlanta, the two intersect, informing the places to which they seek to move as well as their experiences once in Atlanta.

Moving to the South for many new black migrants becomes an act of economic and social empowerment, a reclaiming of the formerly oppressive southern landscape as a “place of their own,”11 be it through connection with family or a specific homeplace as in the case of many older migrants or through connection to black communities and opportunities as in the case of many younger migrants. Inevitably, however, migrants’ choices in deciding where to live—both in terms of region and in terms of city and neighborhood—stem from and continue to be limited by decades of complex institutional and individual decisions that have defined spaces in this country by race and class. Migrants’ decisions to live in expanding wealthy black suburbs on the fringes of many southern cities—which simply do not exist in the same abundance in other regions12—are thus not singularly empowering, but also indicative of the ways in which race and class continue to shape residential spaces.

This thesis operates under the theory that history and current events have tremendous power to shape space—in terms of small-scale neighborhoods, larger-scale regions, and the nation as a whole. Sociologist Thomas Gieryn argues that places are not only material and geographic spaces, but are also “doubly constructed,” invested with meaning and value that can change as people move in and out—spaces become places when they are “filled up” by people, objects, and ideas (Gieryn 2000, 465). Places are not so much the settings in which events and changes occur, but also

---

11 Scholar Andrew Wiese, author of *Places of their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century*, uses this phrase to refer to the African American search for the American Dream through home and community ownership.

12 In 1960, 1,310,000 blacks lived in suburbs in the South, whereas 6,822,000 blacks did so in 2000. This is higher than any other region in the country (Wiese 2004, 256).
can be active agents that inform and shape that change (Gieryn 2000, 466). While places are sometimes treated in sociology as summations of various variables, Gieryn argues that they are more than this: they are based very much on the narratives, histories, and perceptions of the people who live in that place and of those who do not live in it. Migrants to the South thus have the potential to shape the region—as well as the smaller communities and neighborhoods within it—which has special resonance given the South’s historic tension between place, race, and history.

With the spatial and socioeconomic developments of the last century as an important backdrop, I argue that blacks, particularly young professionals, are moving back to the South to live and take part in affluent and successful black communities there, effectively reshaping traditional notions of race relations in parts of the modern South. In doing so, these migrants are building on the Great Migrants who preceded them, asserting black agency through mobility and community-building. Like many migrants before them, they are heavily influenced by the process of “ethnogenesis”: “the process by which ethnic and racial groups refine a sense of ‘urban place,’ by developing and refining a communal social structure and a collective ethos from the interplay between sociocultural characteristics and American social structure” (Price-Spratlen 1998, 516). Unlike participants in the Great Migration, however, primary and return migrants in the New Great Migration are overwhelmingly privileged and are thus more likely positively influenced by what they like in the destination as opposed to what they did not like in the origin (Hunt et al. 2004, 501). New Great Migrants, then, have more agency in choosing precisely in which communities they would like to engage.
Moreover, I argue that the New Great Migration does offer a redefinition of the New South, but not so much in that the region as a whole has changed; instead, select cities, suburbs, and other communities within it offer increasingly available opportunities for new black migrants. This disrupts the idea of the “Solid South”\textsuperscript{13} of red states and necessitates a more complicated image of the region as the summation of a variety of diverse spaces, as well as a reflection of the country as a whole.\textsuperscript{14} While the South may be no longer regionally distinctive in terms of oppression and discrimination, it is distinctive in terms of what it offers black migrants.

**Structure**

This paper is organized in five chapters that seek to provide both context and analysis to the migration. I begin by providing a theoretical framework for migration and African American migration in particular in the first chapter. Since the arrival of the first peoples of African descent in America (as slaves/servants), migration has shaped African American history—blacks have both been denied and have marginally attained the power of mobility. Migration, for African Americans, has simultaneously encompassed both oppression and resistance to oppression. For several centuries now, however, African Americans have used mobility as a strategy for gaining social, political, and economic opportunity and for building community—within limits. The New Great Migration both supports and diverges from this tradition.

\textsuperscript{13} This term refers to the South’s single-party political system, in which the Democratic Party dominated for most of the twentieth century. This political hegemony combined with a “public culture of white supremacy rooted in legally mandated segregation and an underdeveloped economy” to make the South regionally distinctive up until the dissolution of the “Solid South” in the post-civil rights period (Lassiter 2006, 15).

\textsuperscript{14} If broken down by county, the 2008 Presidential Election map depicts a nation with red and blue sections across every region.
The second chapter offers a historiography of the Great Migration, of which this current migration very much comes out. Comparing the two migrations and the differing historical moments in which they took place offers important insight into what exactly has changed in the last century in terms of black mobility and race relations. I argue that although scholars initially studied the Great Migration through institutional lenses, a new generation of scholars has reshaped the study of this movement and its legacy by providing a more humanistic approach. The many lenses and angles through which the Great Migration is now studied set a strong precedent for the ways in which the New Great Migration might be studied in the future. Moreover, these more recent studies of the Great Migration provide inspiration for this study’s framework, as I seek to offer both institutional and individual analysis.

Given that many demographers and journalists have heralded the New Great Migration as evidence of a profoundly “New South,” chapter three seeks to understand the history of the term, as well as its questionable resonance in the modern South. I trace race relations in the South from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement, focusing on the persisting idea of the New South. I argue that although the supposedly New South has never existed and does not exist now, the region has seen important instances of progress, namely in symbols of black economic and political power. This power, however, remains arguably symbolic, amidst the region’s persisting white prejudice and its convergence with the rest of the nation in terms of spatialized and socioeconomic inequality.

The following chapter builds on this discussion of the South’s social and economic transformation with an analysis of the North’s simultaneous transformation
as well as recent trends in black suburbanization. Taken together, these three threads offer a socioeconomic context in which to view the New Great Migration. While these social and economic forces have certainly played a role in sparking the migration, I argue that migrants are moving to take part in both collective and personal re-makings of the South. I offer a short literature review of media coverage of the movement in order to delve into the experiences of both primary and return migrants, as well as the simplified ways in which they are represented.

To move beyond the media’s generalized depictions of the movement, the final chapter is a case study of primary migrants in Atlanta, Georgia. I seek to understand exactly why people have chosen to move to the South, to Atlanta, and even to their specific neighborhoods within the city—and how their experiences have matched their expectations. I begin with a brief analysis and history of race relations in the city, known as the capital of the New South. While I touch on limitations on migrants to Atlanta in terms of uneven progress in the South (chapter three) and the emergence of unequal black suburbanization (chapter four), I argue in chapter five that the everyday experiences of primary migrants in Atlanta also inform the extent to which migrants—and black Atlantans in general—still deal with interracial and intraracial tensions. Migrants see similar patterns of spatialized racial inequality in Atlanta as they do in their non-southern hometowns; however, they also benefit greatly from access to places and institutions that are affluent and majority-black, which many situate within a distinctly middle-class narrative. Given the deterioration of race relations on a national scale, perhaps these specific southern communities offer migrants a sense of place and community that may be difficult to find.
elsewhere. Their choices for where to live in general and within Atlanta, however, are still limited by the institutions and individuals that have shaped space and privilege within the city.

**A Note on Methodology and Terminology**

Research for this project came from both primary and secondary sources. Although this thesis is grounded in African American history, it is extremely multidisciplinary. My secondary sources span many disciplines and fields: history, political science, sociology, social psychology, anthropology, journalism, geography, and demography. While this paper includes many secondary sources, I also conducted field research for chapter five, which is a case study of primary migrants in Atlanta. A full explanation of my field research can be found at the beginning of that chapter.

Throughout this thesis I use the terms “black” and “African American” interchangeably to refer to participants in both the Great Migration and the New Great Migration. While these terms certainly take on different meanings in different contexts, I use them to refer to anyone born in the United States who is of African descent. Thus, someone of African descent whose parents were born in the West Indies and then immigrated here could be just as much a part of these movements as someone whose ancestors have lived in America since slavery.

Given that this paper relies heavily on regional entities, it is important to make these definitions clear as well. I use the generic term “the North” to refer to New England—Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island—as well as the Mid-Atlantic states—New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and
New Jersey. I should state outright, however, that I also include several midwestern and western cities in this definition, which has been the precedent set in much of the literature on the Great Migration. I use the generic term “the South” to refer to the former Confederate states—Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, Arkansas, and Texas—as well as Kentucky, West Virginia, Maryland, and Oklahoma, in keeping with the Census Bureau definition. I also distinguish between the Deep South (Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Georgia) and the Upper South (Florida, Texas, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas). I capitalize “North” and “South” to make clear that I am referring to the northern and southern regions of the United States of America, as opposed to the directional north and south. I mean to refer to spaces that are distinct not only geographically but also historically, politically, and socially; spaces between which people of all races have moved throughout this country’s history, but particularly between which many African Americans have moved.

If anything, the New Great Migration signifies a changing perception of the South among African Americans. This thesis aims to understand what it means for members of a group to return to a region from which other group members so recently fled because of group-based oppression. While I look at changing circumstances in both regions and in the nation as a whole, ultimately this movement is based in a profound redefinition of the South in the minds of many African Americans—an important contribution to contemporary African American Studies.

Interestingly, Atlanta, Georgia is largely seen as an exception to the Deep South, given its political and demographic resonance to the Upper South (Black and Black 1987, 12-14).
Chapter One
Migration in Theory and in Practice in African American History

Migration has played and continues to play a powerful role in the African American experience, as well as in the global human experience. Daniel Johnson and Rex Campbell write, “Man, by his very nature, appears to be a migratory animal” (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 3). But while migration may be a universal phenomenon, it has special resonance in the United States—a nation formed by and now composed of migrants. Since their forced migration to this country, African Americans have continued to migrate both within and between regions, using geographic mobility as a strategy to improve living conditions and to build community (Tolnay 2003, 227). The African American experience is, in a sense, “intrinsically linked” to migration (Tolnay 2003, 228).

This chapter begins with an introduction to migration theory—an important framework through which we can understand African American migration. Building on these migration frameworks, the following section explores migration throughout African American history up to the Great Migration in order to posit a theory of African American migration. Taken together, these sections seek to provide both a theoretical and historical context for the New Great Migration.

16 The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture explores this connection in its interactive website: “In Motion: the African American Migration Experience” (http://www.inmotionaame.org/home.cfm).
Migration Theory

Renowned migration scholar Everett Lee defines migration as, “a permanent or semipermanent change of residence” (Lee 1966, 49). This definition in no way defines migration by the distance of the move or whether the move is voluntary or involuntary, but instead focuses on the impact of the move on the migrant’s life, i.e. the extent to which the move is permanent. Migration is thus distinguished from more local moves, as it tends to be “more disruptive, often entailing many other types of changes, like job relocations and alterations in networks of friends” (Long 1988, 9). This allows for a more flexible definition that includes anything from the forced, cross-continent movement of the Atlantic slave trade to the voluntary, cross-country movement of the New Great Migration. While it is important to distinguish between involuntary and voluntary forms of migration, it is also valuable to understand both as producing movement as well as consequences that come out of that movement.

To this end, migration scholar William Petersen identifies five broad classes of migration, which are especially helpful in examining African American migrations because they are determined by how much (or how little) agency migrants have in the process. The most restrictive are “primitive” migrations, in which there is an ecological or natural push for people to move\(^\text{17}\) (Petersen 1958, 259). In “forced” and “impelled” migrations, social institutions or the state exert pressure on migrants in order to force them to move (Petersen 1958, 261). In “impelled” migrations, migrants retain some decision-making power, while in “forced” migrations—such as the Atlantic slave trade—they do not (Petersen 1958, 261). Additionally, people may

\[^{17}\text{Such a category applies most often to earlier and perhaps even ancient migrations.}\]
choose to migrate in “free” migrations, in which the migrant’s will to move is the
decisive element (Petersen 1958, 263). When “free” migrations become an
established pattern among a particular subgroup, they are then called “mass”
migrations, such as the Great Migration at its peak (Petersen 1958, 263). The African
American experience encompasses all of these five migrations, providing an
important framework in which to understand the diversity and inter-connectedness of
African American migration.

Scholars also differentiate among three patterns of migration. While
migration is traditionally conceptualized as a singular movement from an origin to a
destination—in a “well-defined stream” that is often based on transportation
availability—it is often far more complex in reality (Lee 1988, 54-55). Demographer
Larry Long identifies “step migrations,” in which migration takes place as a sequence
of moves or stages (Long 1988, 151). For example, many participants in the Great
Migration first moved from a plantation to a southern city before ultimately moving
to the urban North—and even once arriving there, some then moved to smaller towns.
Sociologist Lyonel Florant identifies a third migration pattern, “displacement
migration,” which resembles “step migrations,” except that each individual migrant
takes one step as opposed to several, culminating in a virtually never-ending cycle
(Florant 1944, 786). For example, when one group of people moves from a
plantation to a southern city, this may cause residents of that southern city to then
move to a northern urban center (where others then move because of displacement).
This framework offers a more fluid definition of migration, as it is “much more than a
one-time, once-and-for-all event” (Long 1988, 100).
Regardless of where a migration fits in either of these frameworks, all migrants are influenced by a variety of factors, which Lee famously classified under the framework of “push-pull.” In exploring the forces that drive people to migrate, Lee outlines four influencing factors: those associated with the origin, those associated with the destination, “intervening obstacles,” and “personal factors” (Lee 1966, 50). Factors associated with the origin and with the destination can be further divided into positive and negative factors, as well as neutral ones to which migrants are indifferent. Migrants thus weigh positive and negative factors from both areas; when they decide to migrate, they focus on the negatives that push them from the origin and the positives that pull them to the destination. An important caveat to Lee’s push-pull framework is that migrants’ perceptions of factors in the origin are likely to be closer to reality, given that they are based in experience, while their perceptions of factors in the destination are inevitably based in information from other sources, stereotypes, and stories (Lee 1966, 51). Moreover, migrants’ perceptions of factors at both origin and destination are inherently subjective, as they are based on individual experiences, thus complicating the construction of a generalized push-pull framework for any given migration stream (Florant 1944, 788). The push-pull framework also includes intervening obstacles—such as physical barriers, immigration laws, distance, cost of moving—and personal factors that affect individual migrants at various times in their lives18 (Lee 1966, 51).

Although migration is sometimes viewed through an economic lens as “labor reallocation in response to market needs,” there are certain non-economic factors that

---

18 The limits of Lee’s push/pull framework will be further discussed in chapter two, in the context of the Great Migration.
exist within the generalized push-pull framework, regardless of the particular
migration (Ritchey 1976, 364). These are: the presence of relatives and friends, the
quality of amenities and services (i.e. climate, housing, crime, etc.), the availability of
public assistance, and the presence of racial inequity (Ritchey 1976, 375-377). If
friends and relatives live in a potential migrant’s current community, this can
discourage migration; however, if friends and relatives live in a potential destination,
this can encourage migration, providing new migrants with information on housing
and jobs, and facilitating a smooth adjustment upon migrants’ arrival (Ritchey 1976,
389-390). The correlation between black migration and the presence of family and
friends may stem from a need for “support in the face of racial discrimination” (Ritchey 1976, 375).

Similarly, migration scholars have explored whether “minority group status”
affects motives for migration (Ritchey 1976, 393). In particular, scholar P. Neal
Ritchey summarizes two possible theories. In the assimilationist perspective, social,
economic, and demographic factors influence minority groups in the same way as
majority groups, so any differences between minority and majority migration patterns
can be accounted for by differences in the composition of these groups (Ritchey 1976,
393). The minority group status effect, however, posits that the minority group status
itself exerts a unique influence on minority migration, independent of the social,
economic, and demographic factors (Ritchey 1976, 393). Ritchey notes that
demographic research has more often supported the latter theory, as seen in the lower
migration rates for minority groups, as well as the existence of a “directional bias” in

---

19 This correlation will come up again as migrants seek to join black communities in both the Great
Migration and the New Great Migration.
minority migration that produces well-defined migration streams (Ritchey 1976, 394). Thus in our examination of African American migration it is important to note the ways in which these patterns may differ from dominant migration narratives.

Given that the New Great Migration is a geographic reversal of the Great Migration, it is relevant to explore the existence of counter-streams, which occur for every major migration stream (Lee 1966, 55). Often a fraction of the size of the initial stream, counter-streams develop when the destination’s positive factors do not meet migrants’ expectations, the origin’s negative factors begin to diminish, or migrants return home after acquiring wealth, which they may have intended to do all along (Lee 1966, 55). Regardless of the reason, a migration stream initiates a relationship and a system of contacts between origin and destination, which make reverse migration a possibility for migrants (Lee 1966, 55). In the context of the New Great Migration, diminishing conditions in the North have combined with improving conditions in the South to produce both a counter-stream of return migrants as well as a new movement of primary migrants.

While it is difficult to ascertain just why any given individual may choose to migrate, demographers point to certain migrant characteristics (i.e. age, education, socioeconomic class) that have predominated throughout history. Generally, migration is selective and thus the migrant population is in no way a random sample of the population at the origin (Lee 1966, 56; Johnson and Campbell 1981, 3). Since migration is heightened at certain stages in the life cycle—such as entering the labor market or getting married—these ages are overrepresented among migrants. The “classic age profile” of migrants in the United States involves high rates among
young kids (as they move with young parents), lower rates among high school kids, a peak among people in their early 20s, then a rapid decline among middle-aged adults, and finally a slight rise at retirement ages (Long 1988, 130).

Additionally, migrants responding to positive factors at the destination tend to be positively selected and thus more educated, while migrants responding to negative factors at the origin tend to be negatively selected and thus less educated (Lee 1966, 56). The more intervening obstacles to the migration, the more positively selected migrants will be, as only those with the resources to overcome such obstacles—which likely means a higher level of education—will be able to migrate (Lee 1966, 57). Accordingly, the average socioeconomic and education statuses of a migrant population usually fall somewhere between the average characteristics of the population in the origin and the population in the destination—with destination characteristics being the highest, then that of the migration population, and finally origin characteristics being the lowest (Lee 1966, 57). Interestingly, migrations can thus result in lowering the average levels of such statuses of both origin and destination populations (Lee 1966, 57). In the common rural-urban migration stream, for example, scholars argue that rural counties lose some of their “best” people, meaning those who are “most highly educated, most intelligent, or with greatest leadership potential” (Long, 1988, 15). Additionally, since people of reproductive

---

20 Perhaps this is why New Great Migrants are far more educated than their counterparts that participated in the Great Migration. While the latter moved North in part to escape Jim Crow, the former often already lead privileged lives in the North but seek greater opportunity and community in the South.

21 In the case of the New Great Migration, however, the migrant population is more educated than the stationary black populations in both the North and the South, resulting in a serious “brain drain” for the former and a “brain gain” for the latter.
age often dominate migration streams, their migration can offset age distributions in both populations.

Migration thus profoundly impacts not just the population in transit but also the origin, the destination, and the larger national or global community in which it occurs. For African Americans, migration has functioned as both a somewhat effective tool for advancement and as a sobering reminder that movement more often offers only relative improvement of one’s circumstances, as opposed to an elimination of the structures that have created those circumstances. Migration scholar James Grossman writes: “As a symbolic theme and social process, migration has epitomized the place of Afro-Americans in American society” (Grossman 1989, 19). Throughout African American history, we can see that mobility has both been used against blacks as a form of oppression and by blacks as an escape from oppression and as a strategy for opportunity. Migration, then, becomes a lens through which we might see both the larger structures that have constrained African Americans and the ways in which African Americans have sought to resist those structures and redefine the African American experience through new communities and opportunities.

**Migration throughout African American History**

Africans first arrived in the Americas as the slaves and servants of European explorers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—the beginning of a long trajectory of migration throughout African American history\(^{22}\) (Jackson 1991, xi). Scholars

\(^{22}\) Within the larger context of the African Diaspora, the Atlantic slave trade and subsequent resettlements thereafter constitute the two streams of the modern African Diaspora. The pre-modern African Diaspora, then, consists of three streams that occurred within and outside of Africa, beginning 100,000 years ago. Diasporas are a product of several migration streams and the distinction between the two can be confusing: “while diasporas involve movement of a particular people to several places at once, over time, a migration is usually of a more limited scope and duration and is, essentially, the
traditionally assign precise starting and ending points to migration patterns; however, many scholars of African American migration assert that black mobility “must be viewed as an ongoing, continuing phenomenon,” given that migration has “always characterized a sizable portion of the black population” (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 5). Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the various streams—as well as their defining differences—within this larger trajectory: the Atlantic and domestic slave trades, runaway migrations, Civil War and turn of the century migrations, the First and Second Great Migrations, and finally the New Great Migration. While the slave trades tore apart black communities and families in Africa and America, Africans Americans would later use movement both to preserve and create community.

*The Atlantic and Domestic Slave Trades*

Up until the nineteenth century, black migration in and to America was characterized by force. Beginning in the sixteenth century, Europeans forcibly removed and enslaved people from the African continent, via slave markets along the west coast of Africa\(^\text{23}\) (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 12). It is not known exactly how many Africans were taken to the Americas during this 400-year-trade, but average estimates range from 15 to 20 million total, with a half-million—or five to six percent—going to the United States, while the majority went to Brazil and the Caribbean\(^\text{24}\) (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 9; Schomburg 2009). Because many

---

\(^{23}\) Many slaves were West African, but others hailed from parts of East and Central Africa, having been forcibly transported to West African markets (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 12).

\(^{24}\) Africans were forcibly transported to the Americas along the Middle Passage. These overcrowded and unsanitary ships presented the perfect environment for the spread of disease, from which many slaves died before ever getting to America. Others died of starvation or committed suicide. For a full
records of the trade were destroyed, it is difficult to gather information about the forced migrants’ origins and characteristics. Slaves’ ethnic backgrounds, for example, differed greatly; their ages, however were concentrated between the ages of 15 and 25, similar to the predominance of young adults in voluntary migration today (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 13).

In addition to causing major social, political, economic, and demographic damage in Africa, the Atlantic slave trade had powerful consequences for American society and its emerging African American population. While the establishment of slavery in the South offered short-term economic prosperity for the region, the system ultimately led to political trauma for the country as a whole (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 19). Obviously, that prosperity was confined to the white planter elite, who profited both monetarily and psychologically from the subjugation of Africans as slaves. Moreover, slavery served as a formal structure of social and economic subordination that did not disappear completely but instead transformed into more implicit, informal structures of subordination that continue to function within our racially heterogeneous society today (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 19).

In addition to embedding racism and conflict in the larger American society, the Atlantic slave trade initiated the forced assimilation of Africans into American society.²⁵ Those that survived the Middle Passage and arrived in the United States as slaves were, “resocialized to fill their new roles and to meet their owners’ expectations” (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 20). Because these forced migrants were

---

²⁵ Or, as Nell Irvin Painter writes: “Black peoples in British North America came to terms with the conditions of their new worlds and over time forged a new identity as African Americans” (Painter 2006, 43).
thrown into slavery and spread out across the entire American South, it was almost impossible for them to preserve their diverse languages, traditions, and ways of knowing (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 20). While scholars have found traces of various African languages and religions in America, on the whole there is minimal evidence that forms of African social organization were able to survive due to the complete resocialization of slaves and the destruction of their families through slavery (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 20). Not only were Africans forced to leave communities and families at home, but their customs, cultures, and whole ways of life were forced to change amidst the oppression of slavery.

Upon arriving in the United States, Africans continued to be forcefully dispersed throughout the country through the domestic slave trade. The trade was the “largest systematic, forced redistribution of people in American history” (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 22). Although the trade ran for approximately 200 years, it peaked from 1815 to 1860, following the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade in America in 1808 (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 22-23). In response to the expanding plantation system, the domestic slave trade redistributed the slave population from the Southeastern colonies to the emerging Southwest, towards the Gulf states and the Mississippi valley (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 25). This forced migration operated along a well-defined stream, as over one million slaves were forced to leave plantations in the original slave states of the upper South to move to developing plantations in the Deep South and Southwest (Grossman 1989, 20).

Given that slave society in the Upper South had been relatively stable prior to this mass redistribution, the trade destroyed family and community ties that had
developed. Moreover, because slave owners could get higher prices for individual
slaves than for families, slaves were often sold individually (Johnson and Campbell
1981, 31). This economic incentive acted as justification for slave traders to divide
families, which not only continued to detach slaves from their African roots, but also
destabilized family structure within emerging African American communities. The
trade undoubtedly contributed to rapid agricultural development in the Southwest and
an important new economic base in the mid-South Atlantic states; however, it
forcibly redistributed the African American population, perpetuating its exploitation
(Johnson and Campbell 1981, 31).

*Runaway Migrations*

While the Atlantic and domestic slave trades were systems of forced
migration, the movement of runaway slaves from the South to the North via the
underground railroad\(^{26}\) functioned as impelled migration. Although these migrants
were not actively forced to move—as they were rebelling against a system that
exerted control over every aspect of their lives—their movement was still both
prompted and limited by the oppressive institution of slavery. Runaway slaves may
have had the power to decide whether to leave or to stay, but many felt that slavery
did not give them much of a choice. Moreover, the constant threat of re-capture into
slavery functioned as a limiting factor during runaway slaves’ journeys and
throughout the rest of their lives. Despite these obstacles, however, these migrants
began a long tradition throughout African American history of using mobility as a
way of gaining opportunity, albeit under certain limitations.

\(^{26}\) The Underground Railroad is a symbolic term that refers to a “clandestine network that helped runaways escape to free territory” (Schomburg 2009).
Scholars argue that slaves began escaping slavery virtually upon arrival in America (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 32). These impelled migrants took a variety of routes: some formed clandestine communities in the brush of the Deep South, some found refuge and employment in free black communities in southern cities and towns, others joined isolated Native American communities, and still others made the journey North to New England and/or Canada or further Southwest to Mexico (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 32; Schomburg 2009). Although runaway migration began simultaneously with slavery, it did not become widespread until the nineteenth century, when it is estimated that approximately 50,000 slaves attempted to run away per year27 (Schomburg 2009).

The vast majority of these runaway slaves, however, were re-captured—only a few thousand per year actually made it to freedom (Schomburg 2009). Accordingly, while the characteristics of runaway slaves mirrored those of the larger slave population, the sub-group of runaway slaves who actually succeeded in making it to freedom was highly selected in terms of resourcefulness, determination, and self-confidence (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 35; Schomburg 2009). Their movement not only disadvantaged southern planters, but it also reduced the black population in the South and increased it in the North—a demographic shift to which the Great Migration would later contribute.

Many of these successful migrants joined communities of freeborn blacks that had existed as early as the eighteenth century but increased in volume by the early

---

27 The gradual abolition of slavery in the North in the beginning of the nineteenth century coincided with the American Revolution and the War of 1812 to disrupt the plantation system, increasing runaway migration in this period (Schomburg 2009).
nineteenth century (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 38). Ironically, freeborn blacks in both the North and the South had similarly limited mobility, as they were always in danger of being mistaken for an escaped slave and thus captured into bondage (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 38). Despite this, freeborn blacks living in the South also participated in migrations North and West (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 41). Although the North was not yet seen as a “promised land,” freeborn blacks and runaway slaves alike overcame obstacles to migrate there, laying the foundation for the Great Migration.

*Migration During the Civil War and at the Turn of the Century*

The movement of slaves during the Civil War was chaotic, consisting of two opposite streams. Hoping to protect their “property,” slave owners desperately and forcibly relocated their slaves to both the Southwest and the rural interior, as Union troops advanced into Confederate territory (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 43). At the same time, slaves moved in the opposite direction towards the Union forces, in search of refuge and protection, in a similarly desperate, but impelled migration (John and Campbell 1981, 43). Movement after the war was also chaotic, as ex-slaves sought to assert their newfound freedom through migration, moving extensively throughout the South, mostly from one agricultural region to the next, pushing Southwest (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 45, 63). Through this movement, blacks not only implemented their freedom as individuals, but they also redefined mobility as a force that could be used for constructing—as opposed to destructing—black community and family life: “Migration, even if only local, permitted ex-slaves to prove to themselves and their former masters that they now controlled their own labor and their own family life”
Some freed people moved to cities and towns within the South, while others moved North, following the same routes that runaway slaves had taken North before and during the Civil War (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 45).

But just as many African Americans were emigrating out of the South, a small percentage was immigrating to the South. After the Civil War, a portion of runaway slaves living in the North decided to return home, ostensibly to reunite with recently freed friends and family (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 47). Towards an entirely different end, blacks who had taken advantage of educational and political opportunities in the North traveled to the South to play a role in Reconstruction (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 47). Similar to the New Great Migration, both groups of migrants were “motivated to return by a sense of adventure and expected opportunities” (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 47). Although this North-South migration was not large, it did result in the decline of several northern black communities after 1865 (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 47).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the various migrations of the post-Civil War period began to coalesce into larger more defined streams, as freed people sought to migrate with and to newly forged communities, in order to escape post-Reconstruction Jim Crow. Many African Americans in the Southeast began moving Southwest, West, and North (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 60-61). Migration rates fluctuated throughout this period, increasing in times and places of economic expansion and decreasing in times and places of economic recession and depression, as people moved where they could find jobs (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 64). While streams to non-northern destinations such as Arkansas (also known as
“Arkansas fever”) and Oklahoma did develop, many migrants moved to northern urban areas that would later become popular destinations for First Great Migrants just several decades later (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 63-64). Chicago, in particular, developed a reputation as a “mecca” for blacks in the post-Civil War period, which it would build upon during the Great Migration (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 65).

Like many African American migrations, this movement encompassed both oppression and resistance to oppression. Labor agents played an important role in stimulating movement, recruiting African Americans to migrate for job opportunities in developing areas throughout the country; many agents, however, took advantage of migrants, offering romanticized reports of the conditions migrants would supposedly find at the destination (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 61). Blacks and their communities pushed back against labor agent efforts, however, forming emigration societies—in which members paid dues and met regularly to discuss possible plans to migrate as a group—to send their own representatives to potential destinations to more accurately evaluate conditions there (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 62). Perhaps the most famous and well-organized grassroots emigration was the Kansas Exodus of 1879, which relied heavily on emigration societies and constituted the “first general migration of black people after the Civil War” (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 51). The emergence of emigration societies at the turn of the century thus began to transform black mobility into a mass migration heavily rooted in migrants’ home communities and committed to building new communities in migrants’ destinations, which would be further evident in the Great Migration.

28 For more on the movement to Kansas, see Nell Irvin Painter’s Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction.
Emigration societies also played a large role in increased black interest in emigration to Africa, particularly to Liberia. Prior to the Civil War, the white-dominated American Colonization Society had sent 12,000 black colonists to Liberia, despite opposition from black leaders who saw this colonization as deportation (Grossman 1989, 25). In the post-Civil War period, however, a significant portion of African Americans became increasingly convinced that emigration was a legitimate alternative to oppressive conditions in the United States—successive low points in American race relations only increased interest. While only 1,000 black southerners actually moved to Liberia between 1890 and 1910—largely due to financial constraints—many more took part in the movement, joining emigration clubs and buying shares in joint stock companies that promised passage to Liberia (Grossman 1989, 25). Although migration to Liberia was a comparatively small stream, the movement galvanized African Americans throughout the South, further reinventing migration as a way of escaping oppression by returning to an ancestral homeland.29

Although most black migration patterns at the turn of the century involved movement out of the South, several streams of black northerners and westerners chose to relocate to the South, where many felt there was “greater opportunity for a black person to pursue a career in teaching, medicine, or business” (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 70). The idea that the South offers black professionals increased opportunity resonates over a century later with many of the experiences of current participants in the New Great Migration. But regardless of the region to which they

29 Scholar Colin Palmer, however, argues that African Americans’ connection to and interest in moving to Africa has “waned over time” since this period (Palmer 2000, 30).
moved, black migrants soon found that second-class citizenship was a harsh reality throughout the country (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 63).

While black movement leading up to the Great Migration may not have achieved equality on a local, regional, or national scale, these migration patterns established important precedents for future black migration, particularly the Great Migration. Moreover, migration has operated as a recurring theme throughout African American history, characterized by both “‘racial’ oppression and resistance [to that oppression]” (Palmer 2000, 28). The African American experience illuminates the connection between mobility and power, as African Americans have both asserted and been deprived of the right to migrate (as well as the right not to migrate). These conflicting forces continue to shape African American migration today, as it is simultaneously both a celebrated act of resistance and agency as well as a movement that remains profoundly limited by larger societal structures. This precarious balance is especially evident in the Great Migration—for which many of these early migrations have set both a spatial and ideological precedent—as blacks continued to use mobility not only to escape oppression, but also to attain opportunity and to build community as well.
Between 1910 and 1970, approximately 6.5 million African Americans migrated from the rural South to the urban North in the Great Migration—or, more specifically, in the First Great Migration from 1910-1940 and the Second Great Migration from 1940-1970 (Lemann 1991, 6). The First Great Migration brought one-tenth of the black population to the North, while the Second Great Migration brought an additional one-seventh of the black population North (Schomburg 2009). The proportion of the African American population living in the South decreased from 78 percent in 1900 to 43 percent in 1975 (Time 1976). Several bodies of literature on the topic have emerged since, as scholars have speculated on this event’s causes and consequences. Traditionally, historians have studied the trend within the classical migration theory of push and pull, examining what forces in the South pushed African Americans to leave and what forces in the North simultaneously pulled them to move there.

Within the theory of push/pull, scholars have identified a variety of social, economic, and political push factors that drove African Americans to participate in the Great Migration. In rural parts of the South, blacks found themselves economically dependent on whites in an oppressive sharecropping system,\textsuperscript{30} which allowed them no means for land ownership or economic advancement of any kind.

\textsuperscript{30} In sharecropping, field hands—many of whom were former slaves—worked land that they did not own and extracted earnings based on their landowners’ (often biased) calculations. This resulted in a system of perpetual debt that prevented sharecroppers from accumulating wealth and owning their own land.
Economic oppression persisted in the urban South as well, as men were confined to unskilled jobs and women to domestic service (Tolnay 2003, 214). These systems were compounded by a myriad of social and political forces that worked to keep blacks relegated to second-class citizenship: Jim Crow segregation laws, political disenfranchisement, inferior educational opportunities, and lynching\textsuperscript{31} (Tolnay 2003, 215).

Under these conditions, the North thus represented social, economic, and political opportunity for potential migrants. Economic pulls came in the form of higher-paying jobs in factories, which opened up to blacks at the beginning of World War I when industries expanded to meet wartime production needs and the U.S. adopted more restrictive immigration policies that limited the number of European immigrants available for factory work (Tolnay 2003, 215). Additionally, the promises of a better education, the right to vote, and a strong black community with a voice (such as an NAACP branch or a black-owned newspaper) constituted social and political pulls for potential migrants to the North (Price-Spratlen 1998, 517).

But while this traditional migration narrative highlights the oppressive institutions that have for so long shaped African American lives, it neglects the role of the individual and of human agency in the migration process. Thus far, literature on the Great Migration has struggled to find a balance between recognizing the institutional forces that may have pushed/pulled migrants to various destinations and emphasizing the individual choices which the migrants made for themselves and

\textsuperscript{31} Lynching was “a too common method of punishment for blacks who committed criminal acts, or who simply violated the rules of acceptable behavior for members of their caste.” Between 1882 and 1930, 1,663 blacks were victims of lynch mobs within the Cotton South alone (Tolnay and Beck 1991, 26).
which affirmed their agency. Other tensions have emerged within the field as well: between the migrants’ origins in the South and their experiences in the North, between social, economic, and political influences from both regions, and between local and national lenses of study.

Recently, scholars have sought to balance these competing influences and synthesize them into more complex analyses. Not only do these writers flesh out the above tensions, but they also add new angles of class, gender, labor, psychology, and anecdotal stories in to the fold. As scholarship on the New Great Migration expands in the next few decades, hopefully scholars will utilize similarly innovative approaches. Delving deeper into the Great Migration, this emerging field of study views the movement as part of a larger historical process, in which African Americans continually search for full rights of citizenship. But while these works are important in informing our understanding of the Great Migration, a truly inclusive analysis of this movement as a larger historical process would include the New Great Migration, which further reshapes our image of the Great Migration and of the South in general.

**Early Scholarship: Three Models**

Writing on the Great Migration began in the early twentieth century, as the movement itself was just beginning to progress. In his introduction to the essay collection “The Great Migration in Historical Perspective,” Joe William Trotter Jr. surveys literature on the Great Migration, examining the holes that these works have left in our understanding of this movement. Trotter identifies three distinct models of study on the Great Migration—the race relations model, the ghetto model, and the
proletarian model—and analyzes how they have evolved out of each other and out of the unique historical moments in which they were written. Ultimately, Trotter hopes these older bodies of literature will evolve into more critical analyses as part of a migration studies subfield of black urban history.

Race Relations Model

From the beginning of the Great Migration in 1910 up to the 1950s, scholars functioned within what Trotter calls the race relations model. These writings synthesized existing knowledge on the Great Migration and also elaborated on specific cities through case studies. While the work in this period is important in its analysis of the social and economic push/pull factors that influenced migrants, Trotter laments that in doing so these studies have neglected the role that individual agency and choice inevitably played in the Great Migration. Moreover, much of the work in this period examines the Great Migration with the ultimate intention of remedying the northern urban race relations issues that came out of this movement, which not only obscures the role of the South—and rural southern culture more precisely—in shaping this trend, but also neglects to analyze the Great Migration as an important “historical phenomenon” (Trotter 1991, 1).

According to Trotter, W.E.B. Du Bois’ *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899) exemplifies many of the flaws in the race relations model. Commissioned by the University of Pennsylvania’s Sociology Department, this case study sought to “use research as a tool for social reform” (Trotter 1991, 3). Du Bois focused his research on new black migrants in Philadelphia, whom he called the “criminal class,” problematically treating them “in largely pathological terms as a social problem”
Moreover, Du Bois attributed migrants’ supposedly criminal behavior to their status as migrants, asserting that “ignorance, and immigration to the temptations of city life, are responsible for much of this crime” (Du Bois 1899, 259). Du Bois’ misguided emphasis on social disorganization in new migrant communities in Philadelphia obscured these new migrants’ southern origins and the impact of southern rural culture on their lives, as well as their own agency as individuals. Other writers in this period, such as John Daniels, went further, stereotyping migrants as ignorant and attributing any economic failures to race (Trotter 1991, 3).

Although the race relations model continued into World War I, the work in this period evolved as well. Unlike Du Bois’ report, the studies completed between World War I and the 1930s did not make pathological assumptions about an entire population’s character, according to Trotter. Instead, these studies elaborated on the changing nature of the Great Migration—which was in full swing at this time—incorporating more nuanced theories of push/pull. Push/pull theory, however, still focused largely on economic and structural—not social or individual—forces. This privileging of external forces minimized the active role migrants took in deciding to migrate. Scholar Emmett Scott wrote of powerless migrants with migration “fever,” who “scrambled aboard the trains for the North without notifying their employers or their families” (Scott 1969, 38). Ultimately, Trotter contends that this section of scholarly literature still utilized the “race relations imperative,” offering “inadequate

---

32 In 1914, Daniels published *In Freedom’s Birthplace: A Study of the Boston Negro*, which focused on late nineteenth and early twentieth century black communities in Boston, including migration both into and out of Boston.
attention” to the role of black kin, friend, and communal networks in this historical process (Trotter 1991, 5).

This model of scholarship linked black migration to issues of urban poverty, as well as the recent rise in racial violence. Following the Chicago Race Riot of 1919, the Chicago Commission on Race Relations released a report, *The Negro in Chicago*, arguing that black migration was a factor in the riot (Trotter 1991, 10). Reports like this one, Trotter argues, sought to resolve race relations in the interest of national unity, not in the interest of constructing a just society (Trotter 1991, 10). Equally problematic was the commission’s assertion that resolving race relations in Chicago necessitated a condescending form of racial uplift: “The Negro must develop, as all races have developed, from lower to higher planes of living; and must base its progress upon industry, efficiency, and moral character” (Chicago Commission on Race Relations 1922, xxiv). While the commission made a strong effort to give voice to migrants’ experiences—conducting and publishing one-on-one interviews with migrants—ultimately it viewed these experiences through a lens of black inferiority that undermined any sense of migrant empowerment or humanity.

Additionally, studies at this time were able to more precisely pinpoint places of out-migration, such as sociologist R. R. Wright’s work in the pre-war period, which outlined several migration streams from various southern departure points to various northern destinations. The idea of secondary migration soon emerged, as R.H. Leavell’s study of black migration from Mississippi emphasized that migrants often left the rural South for southern towns before moving to northern urban centers,
which they sometimes then left for suburbs—a point on which Andrew Wiese would elaborate in more contemporary work (Trotter 1991, 6).

The final phase of the race relations model, Trotter notes, spanned the mid-1930s to the 1950s. These studies applied a more anthropological and less sociological approach, utilizing caste-class narratives for the first time. In his book *The Negro Family in the United States* (1948), E. Franklin Frazier developed the idea of a black industrial proletariat with a distinct race and class identity shaped by “competition and conflict with whites” (Frazier 1948, 230). Additionally, Frazier incorporated the perspectives of the black migrants themselves, utilizing migrants’ letters to the *Chicago Defender* to capture their individual voices and emphasizing blues songs as forms of expression relevant to this movement. But despite this increasingly complex analysis of migrants as individuals and as a class, Trotter notes that Frazier still ignored the very important role that black families and kinship networks played in the Great Migration—in migrants’ experiences in the South, in their journey, and in their arrival to the North. Instead, Frazier only mentioned these networks in reference to their apparent disintegration upon arrival in the North, as migrants “are freed from the control exercised by the church and other forms of neighborhood organizations in the South” (Frazier 1948, 229).

Several case studies of northern cities were published at this time as well, though many ignored the changing nature of the Great Migration over time, such as its lessened, but still significant, presence during the Great Depression (Trotter 1991, 11). Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944), however, did examine how and why black migration changed
over time, both in terms of migration streams and migration rates. Moreover, Myrdal identified World War I as something of a tipping point for migrants, after which “a new pattern of behavior was set…lines of communication between North and South were established” and the Great Migration became self-perpetuating through kinship networks that were now anchored in both the North and the South (Myrdal 1944, 193). While Trotter argues that Myrdal’s work neglects a larger historical context—as he focuses largely on generalized theories of push/pull and the exact numbers of migrants who moved to certain places at certain times—he still sees it as an important model for interdisciplinary research and a useful resource for comprehensive statistics.

Despite its eventual progress towards broader themes, the race relations model remained largely constricted by its reform-minded approach, seeking to solve urban issues relating to race purely in the interest of national unity. Ultimately this model’s over-emphasis on race relations in the northern city obscures our understanding of the Great Migration as just that—a migration rooted in a specific origin and shaped by the diverse individuals who participated in it.

_Ghetto Model_

The Civil Rights Movement ushered in Trotter’s second model of scholarship, the ghetto model, in the 1960s and 1970s. Through interdisciplinary techniques, these scholars discussed the Great Migration as a historical process, linking it to the development of all-black ghettos in many northern cities. Although the work at this time did focus on northern cities more so than migrants’ southern origins just as in the race relations model, the emphasis on urban issues here shifted from race relations to
the development of the ghetto as an institutionalized form of segregation. While this model importantly critiques the rise of structural racism in the North, it inadvertently overshadows the role black migrants played in shaping their own migrant experiences, instead viewing them largely as victims of this new system of oppression. Several historians, however, emphasized black agency and the interconnectedness between working-class life and black migration (Trotter 1991, 13). Additionally, given the later appearance of this model, scholars were able in hindsight to qualify earlier studies’ possible exaggeration of the migration during World War I, as the majority of migration actually took place after 1940 (Lemann 1991, 6).

Proletarian Model

The late 1970s and the early 1980s saw the emergence of the proletarian model, in which scholars employed an alternative class analysis. While this model analyzed the Great Migration as a historical process that directly contributed to the development of a black urban industrial working class, it neglected to fully incorporate the role of southern culture in shaping migrants’ experiences (Trotter 1991, 14). Several PhD dissertations at this time illustrated the connection between the emerging black proletariat and black migration, undermining the ghetto model’s emphasis on the institutional forces that shaped black working class life in the urban North.

Nell Irvin Painter’s *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction* (1977), which tracks African American migration to Kansas in 1879, contributed to the proletarian model. Not only does Painter expand the Great
Migration in both time period and geographic location, but she also offers class analysis, defining the “Exodusters” as “ordinary, un-educated former slaves” (Trotter 1991, 14). Painter describes the movement as grassroots and a force of the people: “Rather than being deluded by false leaders, the Exodusters rejected leadership altogether…[they] refused to hear out prominent Blacks who contradicted their beliefs” (Painter 1977, 188).

But despite these important steps, Trotter reasons, the proletarian model’s emphasis on the black urban working class still obscured this class’ southern origins, especially the impact of black kinship networks on black migration.

*A New Subfield?*

Accordingly, Trotter proposes a new subfield of migration, which would correct the faults of the three above models and also move forward with further research. Ideally this new subfield would still utilize the race relations, ghetto, and proletariat models, as old scholarship would be synthesized in a culmination of almost a century of research on black migration. Trotter proposes that new research approaches be explored as well, as scholars continually re-think these issues. For example, given the over-emphasis on the northern city in much of the work on the Great Migration, Trotter envisions a subfield of black migration in which analysis of southern black rural life is incorporated as well, in order to “illuminate the complex interrelationship between changes in southern black rural life and subsequent patterns of community change in Southern, Northern, and western cities” (Trotter 1991, 15). Ultimately, this new subfield would employ creative research techniques that allow scholars to emphasize the institution and the individual, the social and the economic,
the national and the local, and the North and the South, as well as issues of gender and class, in order to construct a “historical synthesis of black migration” (Trotter 1991, 152).

**Recent Scholarship**

Over the last 20 years, many scholars have answered Trotter’s call for incisive and critical writing on the Great Migration. In this new body of work, writers reinvent old theories of the Great Migration and also add new arguments. While these scholars examine the Great Migration through somewhat different lenses, they all characterize black migrants as empowered individuals in this process, emphasizing the psychological effects of migrants’ interactions with oppressive systems in both the North and the South.

**New Attention to Gender**

Published in 1985, Jacqueline Jones’ *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* examines the role gender has played throughout African American history, as well as during the Great Migration and in the post-Reconstruction South more specifically. In her analysis of black women and the family in the Great Migration, Jones draws important parallels between female migrants’ conditions and communities in both the North and the South, affirming the perseverance of human (and female) agency amidst systems of oppression.

Jones’ sharp analysis of the sharecropping system in the South values both the agency of the sharecroppers and the power of the oppressive sharecropping institution in which they found themselves. Jones sees sharecropping as an extension of slavery,
noting that black women performed virtually the same domestic chores under both systems—the only difference was the promise of freedom of which these women hoped their kids would be able to take advantage (Jones 1985, 80). Just as the substance of work carried over from slavery to sharecropping, so too did the economic dependency that sharecroppers felt on their white landlords, as corrupt systems of credit kept sharecroppers ignorant of their financial standing (Jones 1985, 83).

These harsh economic realities had important social consequences, as Jones explores the connection between economic dependency and the destruction of the family. Because sharecropping families were forced to rely on white landlords for their annual earnings—which white landowners often falsified for their own profit—it was difficult for sharecropping men to provide for their families with a reliable income as breadwinners, which forced many women to work in the field as well as the house (Jones 1985, 85). Women sometimes had to balance both domestic and agricultural responsibilities, which in turn led to the development of enlarged community networks to assist with childcare and other household favors (Jones 1985, 84). Jones draws important parallels between family fragmentation and the emergence of kinship support networks on sharecropping plantations and similar developments that later took place in northern ghettos out of similarly restrictive financial and social constraints (Jones 1985, 84).

While Jones certainly indicts sharecropping as a system of oppression for black women and their families, she does not victimize them. Citing the Washerwoman’s Association of Atlanta’s 1881 strike for higher wages, Jones argues
that black women across the South asserted themselves against their oppression (Jones 1985, 148). Further, Jones explains the Great Migration as a self-selective process, in which young and often educated women strove to move North for opportunity. She questions the myth of black men impulsively jumping on Northbound trains, explaining that the decision to move was often calculated both for economic reasons and to escape the white man’s persistent violation of the black woman in the South (Jones 1985, 155). Additionally, Jones emphasizes the role that black migrants played not only in shaping their own destinies but also in building a movement, as upon return to the South for holidays, many migrants persuaded family and friends to join them up North (Jones 1985, 157).

Jones’ incorporation of both the institutional and individual, through a gendered lens, extends to her discussion of migrants’ life in the North. She details institutional barriers to housing and job discrimination that set new black migrants apart from their recent European immigrant counterparts, though both groups utilized family and kinship networks for support amidst similarly deteriorating conditions (Jones 1985, 153). Jones examines the prevalence of racial discrimination—as well as the changing conception of whiteness—in the North, pointing out that recent black migrants often had more education than their European immigrant counterparts, but more limited job opportunities (Jones 1985, 1953). Moreover, Jones breaks job discrimination down by gender, explaining that both black men and women were concentrated in domestic service, as men were excluded from the factory and women from sales/clerical work (Jones 1985, 154). Ultimately, Jones’ North is one of many
dreams deferred, in which migrants struggled with cramped living spaces, new urban
dangers of crime and drugs, and limited financial resources.

But while Jones emphasizes the systematic economic and social exclusion that
many migrants faced in the North, this in no way precludes a discussion of migrants’
individual choices to move. Jones argues that despite the region’s false promises and
emerging systems of oppression, migrants continued to actively seek opportunity in
the North, strategically reasoning that conditions there were still an improvement
from conditions in the South. In particular, black women continued to come North
for the opportunity to vote and participate in politics (after 1920) and to offer their
children a better education (Jones 1985, 155). Thus the migrants in Jones’ narrative
assert themselves against race and gender oppression in both the South and the
North—through their decisions to migrate and to then develop communities in the
North—re-informing our image of migrants as self-determining individuals.

The Anecdotal Case Study

Nicholas Lemann furthers this emphasis on the individual with his 1991
national bestseller *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it
Changed America*. Lemann weaves together many migrants’ stories in a historical
and human-centered narrative of the Great Migration. Like the earlier works of Du
Bois in the race relations model and many others since, Lemann employs the case
study method, focusing on migrants who traveled from the Mississippi Delta to
Chicago. This narrower lens allows Lemann to analyze the specific institutions and
individuals that characterized this particular migration stream. In Lemann’s work—
which has since been turned into a BBC documentary directed by Edmund Coulthard
and Nick Godwin—the humanity of migrants as individuals with individual stories is paramount.

Like Jones, Lemann offers a scathing critique of the sharecropping system, while still emphasizing the little bit of agency that sharecroppers could find within it. Lemann explains the sharecropping system as a new form of slavery that controlled sharecroppers’ lives, effectively isolating them from the rest of society (Lemann 1991, 11). The system made sharecroppers socially, economically, and politically powerless, seeping into every vein of their lives. Parents performed physically damaging labor while children toiled away in backwards schools (Coulthard and Godwin 1995). White landowners used political measures such as vagrancy laws—which allowed them to arrest and then employ seemingly unemployed blacks—to solidify economic control (Coulthard and Godwin 1995).

But while previous scholars have explored these systems of oppression, Lemann uncovers the impact these systems had on sharecroppers’ daily lives, especially their psychological health and self-image. He highlights the false promise aspect of sharecropping, in which sharecroppers awaited a tallying of their annual earnings each Christmas, only to be told by landowners year after year that they were in debt due to a falsified system of credit (Lemann 1991, 20). This annual event often sparked a migration between plantations, as many sharecropping families left their current plantation in hopes of finding a landowner who would not cheat them out of their earnings (Coulthard and Godwin 1995). In order to justify cheating sharecroppers out of their yearly earnings, white landowners created myths of black laziness and inferiority, blaming sharecroppers’ perpetuated poverty on themselves—
inevitably, some sharecroppers internalized these myths (Lemann 1991, 25).

Moreover, the system produced destructive social ills in sharecropping communities: illegitimate childbearing, female-headed families, bad public education systems, high dropout rates, illiteracy, violent crime—including much black-on-black murder that often went unpunished—STDs, and substance abuse ranging from home brew whiskey to cocaine (Lemann 1991, 31).

In addition to exploring the interaction between sharecroppers and the sharecropping system, Lemann also looks at the communities that sharecroppers created amongst themselves, in the form of the juke joint and the church. These spaces offered sharecroppers thriving social lives based in spirituality and the emerging Mississippi blues culture, as well as strong support networks (Coulthard and Godwin 1995). The emphasis on black-centered spaces reinforces Lemann’s goal of painting migrants not just as sharecroppers or second class citizens, but as people enmeshed in a variety of social, recreational, and familial networks despite the oppression constraining them.

Accordingly, the agency that migrants did cultivate—though limited—extended to the process of deciding to move North. For the individuals in Lemann’s work, the decision to go North becomes one of reclaiming pride and restoring positive self-image. One migrant interviewed in the BBC documentary adaptation of Lemann’s book said he went North to reclaim his manhood because in the North “a man is a man”—presumably in direct opposition to the widespread white practice of calling black men of all ages “boy” in the South (Coulthard and Godwin 1995). Moreover, Lemann laments the sorrow with which many young migrants left their
families and homes behind (Coulthard and Godwin 1995). Thus migrants are faced with the choice of either moving for their own personal well-being and safety or staying for their family and their home. Many tried to remain in the South, moving first to southern cities—such as Clarksdale, Mississippi—in hopes of improving their lives, only to find similarly limited opportunities, increased residential and public segregation, and curfews, among other daily restrictions (Lemann 1991, 42).

But while Lemann allows his characters to speak for themselves in their personal decisions to migrate, he also provides a larger context of the external circumstances that inevitably affected their lives. Of the many social, political, and economic forces that shaped migrants’ lives at this time, Lemann cites the 1944 introduction of the mechanized cotton picker as the single most influential. This invention effectively abolished the sharecropping system, as sharecroppers were no longer needed to pick cotton (Lemann 1991, 6). Moreover, of the six and a half million people who participated in the Great Migration, five million of them migrated after 1940 (Lemann 1991, 6). In addition to the pull of industrial jobs facilitated by World War II, the end of the sharecropping system pushed many sharecroppers North (Lemann 1991, 6).

Along with institutional pushes and pulls, Lemann also explores the role white southerners played in the Great Migration. Prior to World War II, white planters, politicians, and press organizations teamed up to discourage blacks from moving North. They utilized various methods, such as vagrancy laws that allowed for the arrest of potential migrants, licensing fees on northern labor agents seeking to recruit southern blacks to move North for employment, and general newspaper propaganda.
The perseverance of the migrants in Lemann’s book, despite these formal and informal barriers, further emphasizes the agency with which migrants sought better futures.

Lemann reaffirms his human-centered approach in his discussion of the import of the black community in the Great Migration. Within the Mississippi Delta-Chicago stream, Lemann identifies the Illinois Central Railroad as the most popular—and perhaps most accessible—form of transportation among migrants (Lemann 1991, 15). To potential migrants, the train became romanticized as a gateway to “freedom,” reinforcing the image of the North as a “promised land” through two important contributions: Pullman Porters and the Chicago Defender (Lemann 1991, 15). Given their respectable position and strong sense of unity, the Pullman Porters represented to migrants the opportunities for fair and honest work for blacks in the North that could afford them some sense of status and agency (Coulthard and Godwin 1995). The agency of the Pullman Porters is reasserted in their willingness (and mere ability) to do special favors for black passengers, such as their physical transportation of Chicago’s leading black newspaper, the Chicago Defender, to the South (Coulthard and Godwin 1995).

The Chicago Defender advertised not only job and housing opportunities to migrants, but also the opportunity to speak out—especially against racism—without the consequence of threats, intimidation, or violence, as was the case for blacks in the South33 (Coulthard and Godwin 1995). Thus Lemann asserts that freedom of speech

---

33 For more on the racial order of the post-Reconstruction South, see chapter three.
and black empowerment acted as powerful draws for migrants to the North, which reaffirms migrants’ active role in this decision-making process.

Like Jones, Lemann paints migrants’ arrival in the North as a dream deferred, both psychologically and financially. He notes the psychological gains that many migrants experienced, such as being able to choose their seats in electric streetcars; however, this is not without the psychological loss of not seeing any blacks in authority positions such as policemen or firemen (Lemann 1991, 65). These barriers to higher-paying, skilled work limited migrants’ employment opportunities and their earnings, which contributed to many migrants residing in slums (Lemann 1991, 65). While all-black neighborhoods such as the South Side of Chicago facilitated the development of strong black community institutions—such as the NAACP, the Defender, and various churches—these confined and overcrowded spaces created some of the same social ills that had existed on rural southern plantations (Lemann 1991, 66).

Ironically, while many migrants had left the South to escape oppressive institutions, they found plenty in the North, though in a different form, according to Lemann. Many migrants had come North for better educational opportunities for their kids, but they soon found themselves enrolling their children in the “urban equivalent of the inferior rural black school systems of the South” (Lemann 1991, 91). There was no de jure Jim Crow, but informal segregation persisted in the form of “members only” signs (Lemann 1991, 67). Real estate organizations constructed Codes of Ethics that instituted residential covenants in order to ban the selling of certain properties to blacks (Lemann 1991, 67). Public aid and public housing offices
were notorious for their discrimination against unwed mothers, whom they assumed to be promiscuous (Lemann 1991, 68). Met with these similarly oppressive institutional forces, however, most migrants stayed, reaffirming the initial choice they had made for themselves and for their families. After all, as Lemann described one migrant’s thought process: “She had moved North to make money, not to be around white people” (Lemann 1991, 67).

In devoting time and space to these migrants’ stories, Lemann simultaneously affirms their humanity and their individuality, painting a diverse portrait of the Great Migration. But while Lemann’s work functions largely on the micro-level of human interaction, he consistently brings his anecdotal angle into the larger world with macro analysis. Much like Trotter, he views the Great Migration as a historical process, which, though shaped by individuals, had national consequences. In particular, Lemann notes that the Great Migration elevated the role of race relations from a largely regional (or southern) problem to a national issue (Lemann 1991, 7). He writes that the huge demographic shift caused by the Great Migration impacted a wide range of national issues, including education, popular culture, presidential politics, urban geography, social welfare, and justice (Lemann 1991, 7). Lemann constructs a simultaneously humanistic and historical approach to the Great Migration by effectively weaving together not only the individual stories of a diverse group of migrants, but also the larger contexts—both South and North—in which these migrants found themselves.
**Exploration of the South**

While Lemann’s work offers unique insight on both the North and the South, Alferdteen Harrison’s collection of essays *Black Exodus: The Great Migration from the American South* (1991) focuses on the South, as if to answer Trotter’s call for increased analysis of migrants’ southern origins. Harrison recognizes this void in work on the Great Migration, explaining that scholarship on the topic often cites the forces of southern racial oppression as a cause, but does not analyze these forces (Harrison 1991, vii). Harrison, however, emphasizes the primacy of southern oppression in pushing migrants to leave: “The immediate conditions for the ‘Great Migration’ were created after the Civil War when African-Americans were not given ‘forty acres and a mule,’ the means of economic survival at that time” (Harrison 1991, vii).

Accordingly, the essays in this book unpack and analyze the various social and economic forces in the South that sparked the Great Migration. In particular, essays on the impacts of racial violence and industrialization in the South illustrate the ways in which social and economic forces in the South combined to push migrants North. Although these writers’ emphasis on southern conditions and push factors obscure the role of migrant agency in this process, ultimately they succeed in extending the Great Migration narrative to more adequately reflect the movement’s southern origins.

In their essay, “Rethinking the Role of Racial Violence in the Great Migration” (1991), Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck explore a possible reciprocal relationship between racial violence and black migration. Given that rates of out-
migration from the South vary by county—with the highest rates occurring out of the Black Belt from the middle of Georgia to South Carolina—Tolnay and Beck reason that local social and economic circumstances may play a direct role in pushing certain communities to migrate at faster rates than others (Tolnay and Beck 1991, 23). The authors argue that past scholarship has stressed the primacy of economic factors—the push of the oppressive sharecropping system of the South and the pull of the higher-paying factory jobs of the North—and relegated social forces to secondary status. Tolnay and Beck, however, contend that social forces profoundly impacted the lives of migrants and their decision to move.

While the authors identify several oppressive social forces at play in the South at this time—such as unequal funding for black and white schools, restrictive voting statutes, and black codes—\(^\text{34}\)—they specifically emphasize the prevalence of both legal and extralegal forms of racial violence. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the authors write, “blacks were exposed to truly incredible levels of lethal violence, both at the hands of white mobs and within the white criminal justice system” (Tolnay and Beck 1991, 26). Between 1882 and 1930, 1,663 blacks were lynched and 1,299 blacks were legally executed in the South (Tolnay and Beck 1991, 27). While lynching was an explicit form of racial violence, discrimination within the criminal justice system—stemming from the pervasive Jim Crow mentality as well as limited access to defense lawyers and the prevalence of summary trials—allowed for the nominally legal execution of innocent blacks (Tolnay and Beck 1991, 27).

-----

\(^{34}\) Black codes mandated separate (and largely unequal) public facilities for blacks and whites (Tolnay and Beck 1991, 25).

Thus, racial violence was a strong push factor for blacks participating in the Great Migration. *The Atlanta Constitution* speculated in 1916 that the “heaviest migration of Negroes has been from those counties in which there have been the worst outbreaks against Negroes” (Chicago Commission on Race Relations 1922, 84). Similarly, Tolnay and Beck argue that there exists an important reciprocal relationship between black migration and racial violence (both lynching and supposedly legal execution), in which blacks are more likely to leave an area with high rates of racial violence and their exodus then motivates the whites in their area to reduce those levels of violence\(^{35}\) (Tolnay and Beck 1991, 31). While the former may be somewhat obvious, the latter is based in the authors’ theories of white reactions to black migration.

The authors contend that the exodus of black migrants caused labor shortages, as the South’s early twentieth century economy relied heavily on cheap black labor (Tolnay and Beck 1991, 29). This upset local white elites, who would use both coercive measures—such as intimidation, threats, and abuse—or enticement measures—such as better schools, higher wages, or increased monitoring of the criminal justice system—to try to persuade potential migrants to stay (Tolnay and Beck 1991, 29). Tolnay and Beck expand this theory to vary by class, explaining that while local white elites may have wanted black migrants to stay, white laborers were

\(^{35}\) Tolnay and Beck later conducted a study that examined the effect of racial violence on migration from counties in 10 southern states between 1910-1920 and 1920-1930, which proved that “black out migration was significantly higher in counties that had experienced more black lynchings” (Tolnay 2003, 215).
likely to feel differently, as a black exodus could be advantageous to their opportunities for employment (Tolnay and Beck 1991, 30). Interestingly, while the authors are careful not to treat whites as a monolithic population, they portray migrants as a singular community affected identically by the same powerful external forces.

While Tolnay and Beck expand on the social conditions in the South that helped to bring about the Great Migration, Carole Marks explores the economic conditions from which migrants supposedly fled in her essay, “The Social and Economic Life of Southern Blacks During the Migration” (1991). Marks notes that literature on the Great Migration has largely ignored, “the subtler economic changes that the South was facing in the time period leading up to the Great Migration” (Marks 1991, 37). According to Marks, the South at this time was just beginning to industrialize, after coming out of the Civil War as the poorest region in the country (Marks 1991, 38). But while the South lacked wealth, Marks argues, the region boasted an abundance of raw materials, which, with the help of northern investors, allowed for the emergence of new industry (Marks 1991, 40). Unfortunately, Marks laments, the South’s lack of ownership and control over its new industries initiated a relationship of dependence on the North, which further exacerbated the region’s already low wages and overall lack of opportunity (Marks 1991, 40).

The South’s emerging industrial order did not prove advantageous to blacks, according to Marks, as job training actually declined for blacks in the South at the beginning of the twentieth century (Marks 1991, 37). While jobs in the South had always been “defined along the color line, with the most ‘dirty work’ ones reserved
for blacks at the bottom,” the introduction of new technology and industry redefined the job hierarchy, eliminating the stigma of the bottom positions traditionally reserved for blacks, thus opening them up to whites for the first time (Marks 1991, 40).

Industrialization only exacerbated conditions for southern blacks, who struggled with low wages and job dislocation, both of which are characteristic of economic transformations (Marks 1991, 43). Ironically, industrialization in the North offered migrants higher wages, partially because of the regional disparity in wages (Marks 1991, 43). Like many Great Migration scholars, Marks acknowledges the poor health, bad working conditions, and overcrowding with which migrants were confronted in the North: “The great expectations with which migrants left the South from 1916 onward were never matched by the reality of the life they found in the North” (Marks 1991, 47).

But while Marks emphasizes the systems of control on migrants’ lives in both the South and the North, she also stresses migrant agency—unlike Tolnay and Beck—in spite of these systems: “[Migrants] are well aware that they are pawns caught between economic systems which exploit them for profit and social systems which cast them aside like handfuls of sand” (Marks 1991, 49). Moreover, Marks celebrates migrant survival amidst obstacles in both regions: “That migrants, acutely aware of both their vulnerability and their exploitation, nonetheless attempted to survive in the face of so much conflict is really what is great about this migration, as it is also part of its complexity” (Marks 1991, 49). Marks also analyzes the migration’s macro consequences, as she notes that the movement offered the North a
new supply of cheap labor from which it could profit, while it in turn impoverished the South (Marks 1991, 48)

Both of these articles analyze the impact of the South on the Great Migration and thus succeed in expanding recent work on the movement. While these authors’ analyses fall somewhat short in their over-emphasis of institutional forces and under-emphasis of the effects of these institutions on individual migrants, their exploration of both economic and social conditions at the outset of the Great Migration are valuable in our understanding of the movement. Additionally, in studying the New Great Migration it becomes important to contrast the South to which migrants are now returning to the one from which migrants originally fled at the beginning of the twentieth century.

*Race, Class, and Labor in the Urban North*

Although many scholars have studied the obstacles that migrants faced upon arrival in the North, James R. Grossman does so through a nuanced and migrant-centered lens. In his article “The White Man’s Union: The Great Migration and the Resonance of Race and Class in Chicago, 1916-1922” (1991), Grossman focuses on labor disputes in the Chicago stockyards, highlighting the active roles migrants took in their decisions to join (or, more often, not to join) unions. Grossman reasons that though migrants were influenced by conflicting forces, ultimately they made their own decisions based on their own perceptions, goals, and experiences (Grossman 1991, 86). Thus Grossman refutes the assumption of past writings that migrants did not join unions because of ignorance and/or powerlessness, or that black community institutions and leaders persuaded migrants not to join (Grossman 1991, 87).
In his analysis of the intersection of race, class, and unions in early twentieth century Chicago stockyards, Grossman incorporates both institutional and individual influences on migrants. Although the Stockyards Labor Council made some effort to recruit black union members, it ultimately failed to attract black members both because of formal and informal discrimination (Grossman 1991, 87). Union publications and speeches used racist language, despite the organization’s small black membership (Grossman 1991, 96). Discrimination came not only from leadership, but also from many white packinghouse workers as well, who verbally and physically attacked black laborers during strikes, as they tended to associate strikebreaking with blackness (Grossman 1991, 96).

But Grossman’s depiction of this conflict is multi-layered and is in no way limited to discussions of white discrimination. He explains that a significant portion of migrants did join Chicago unions initially, but eventually left them, evidently not pleased with the results (Grossman 1991, 87). Grossman interprets migrants’ decisions not to join or to quit after joining as based in the union’s racist practices, not in migrants’ alleged ignorance. Moreover, Grossman emphasizes that migrants “understood the value of collective action,” as evidenced by their participation in various labor strikes throughout the South prior to moving North (Grossman 1991, 89). Migrants’ active search for support is also seen in their overwhelming utilization of black community institutions, from informal migration networks to the more formal Chicago Urban League (Grossman 1991, 94). Ironically, the Chicago Urban League’s employment and labor services may have rendered union membership unnecessary for black workers, as they could get similar services—and with proper
attention paid to incidents of racial discrimination—from the Chicago Urban League (Grossman 1991, 94). Moreover, Grossman refutes the myth that migrants blindly followed anti-union advice from black community institutions like the Chicago Urban League or the Chicago Defender, as these institutions advocated diverse and often shifting views on whether or not blacks should join unions in the first place (Grossman 1991, 92).

Ultimately, Grossman reasons, the failure of the Chicago Stockyard Union to organize black workers was largely an inevitable result of the “cultural distance between white and black workers,” which union leaders failed to bridge (Grossman 1991, 95). Located primarily in white neighborhoods—a striking reminder of the residential segregation rampant in Chicago at this time—and run by white leaders, unions functioned largely as “white institutions” (Grossman 1991, 97). The labor conflict then, in Grossman’s view, exemplifies the myriad issues migrants faced in the North: segregation, social inequality, and institutional and individual discrimination—all larger problems that created and then perpetuated the many “white institutions” that migrants encountered. Earlier work from Trotter’s race relations model, such as that of E. Franklin Frazier, also explored the many social forces that acted on the emerging black industrial proletariat; Grossman, however, offers a more critical analysis of the industrial system’s exploitation of black workers and the ways in which it converged with broader institutional racism to further complicate and exacerbate inequality in the North. Even within these systems, Grossman emphasizes the agency of migrants to shape their lives socially and economically. Regardless of the conditions they found in the North, “[migrants] had
already taken a step that indicated that they had no intention of permitting other people to control their lives” (Grossman 1991, 87).

Racialization of Space

Andrew Wiese further emphasizes migrant agency in his book *Places of Their Own* (2004), which explores African American suburbanization in the twentieth century, emphasizing the intersection of race, space, and resources. In his chapter on the Great Migration, “‘Who Set You Flowin’?’ The Great Migration, Race, and Work in the Suburbs,” Wiese looks at the arrival of migrants to suburbs in the North and the spatial, gendered, and psychological origins and consequences of this movement. In his exploration of suburban destinations in the North, Wiese challenges the mainstream narrative of the Great Migration as a journey strictly from the rural South to the urban North. Moreover, his work examines the Great Migration’s profound impact on the division of space—and thus of resources, as well—in the North.

Like many writers before him, Wiese conceptualizes African American migration as a function of both individual and institutional influences, emphasizing the “interplay between human agency and social structures that marks the history of African American migrations” (Wiese 2004, 35). Within this framework, Wiese expands the study of the Great Migration to include the development of African American suburbs. According to Wiese, during the 1910s and 1920s, one in six African Americans leaving the South for the North at this time moved to suburbs—“an important but largely ignored component of the Great Migration” (Wiese 2004, 37). Wiese notes that these were a diverse group of people, who were largely working class and distinctly devoted to a “Southern black culture characterized by a
‘helping ethic,’ the centrality of kinship, and the insatiable desire for economic independence” (Wiese 2004, 37). These migrants moved North for reasons similar to those of the general Great Migration population, though they were often drawn to specific suburbs because of familial ties (Wiese 2004, 39).

The specific suburbs to which African American migrants moved fit into two distinct types of communities—industrial suburbs and domestic service suburbs—and were largely shaped by local (and restrictive) job opportunities (Wiese 2004, 43). Industrial suburbs, such as Detroit’s Downriver District, attracted African American male migrants with manufacturing jobs, which made these suburbs largely male-dominated spaces (Wiese 2004, 54). These suburbs were composed of black migrants and European immigrants, both working-class populations. Domestic service suburbs, such as Evanston, Illinois, were largely female, because of employment opportunities as well as the increased safety that suburbs offered single women. These were affluent white communities that utilized a domestic service population. In 1940, two-thirds of affluent communities surveyed reported having separate African American neighborhoods, in which “service workers constituted between 10 and 25 percent of the working population” (Wiese 2004, 55). While men occasionally found work as waiters or butlers, domestic service more often came in the form of governesses, laundresses, and maids—all jobs restricted to African American women, who were in turn restricted from other employment opportunities (Wiese 2004, 60). The emergence of these very distinctive communities illustrates the profound impact migrants’ race and gender had on where they settled. Because race and gender shaped their employment opportunities, and their employment
opportunities shaped where they settled, ultimately migrants’ race and gender shaped where they settled.

While both of these suburban communities may have begun as racially integrated, as more black migrants moved in from the South, neighborhoods within suburbs became increasingly segregated, just as urban neighborhoods did. White institutions adopted exclusionary policies—which was easier to do in local suburban governments than in larger urban governments—such as re-drawing school district lines and segregating public spaces including parks, beaches, pools, hospitals, schools, and community centers (Wiese 2004, 63; 49). Local governments used new initiatives in land-use planning, education, and public space “designed to secure black inequality and white privilege” (Wiese 2004, 40). This ranged from informal and formal racial zoning patterns on the part of municipal governments, to the creation of realtors’ Code of Ethics that encouraged the use of real estate covenants and deed restrictions, to individual acts of discrimination from local white citizens (Wiese 2004, 40-41). All of these methods combined to racialize space in a way that perpetuated and exacerbated inequality, “to link specific places to an evolving racial hierarchy, limiting access, cementing advantage and disadvantage, and defining locations and their residents in separate and unequal terms” (Wiese 2004, 41-42).

In domestic service suburbs, black women responded to these racially segregated spaces by creating their own communities and mutual aid societies, reaffirming their role in the Great Migration as “pioneer migrants,” as well as “anchors for continuing chains of migration” (Wiese 2004, 59). In both types of suburbs, African American communities sprang up through the establishment of
churches, choirs, and various local groups, “building on networks of kin and friends that had facilitated their migration to the area” (Wiese 2004, 49). Here we see migrants’ determination to shape their own lives and build their own civic and community institutions, despite the race and gender constraints on their employment opportunities as well as their access to resources.

According to Wiese, “the Great Migration initiated an unrelenting struggle to use, control, and define metropolitan space that would shape American life for the remainder of the century” (Wiese 2004, 41). While many Great Migration narratives often conclude with the notion of the migrants’ dreams deferred, Wiese’s analysis is more long-term and far-reaching. He acknowledges the Great Migration’s lasting and direct impact on urban and suburban space and the continuing, unequal distribution of resources. Similarly, the spatialization of race and class both guide and limit the choices of New Great Migrants when deciding where to live, both regionally and locally.

Towards An Extended Great Migration Narrative

In his conclusion to “The Great Migration in Historical Perspective,” Trotter writes: “Distributed almost equally between the South on the one hand and the North and West on the other, by the 1970s the black urban migration had run its course” (Trotter 1991, 151). While migration from the South to the North did end in the 1970s, “black urban migration” did not—it just switched directions. The movement’s recent turning on itself necessitates an expansion of scholarship on black migration, which would treat both the Great Migration and the New Great Migration as part of the same historical process in which individuals continue to search for opportunity
amidst systems of oppression. Migrants in both movements utilize mobility as power, seeking to reclaim a sense of pride and of self through the building of community in new places. The two migrations are also intrinsically linked through history—the Great Migration serves as a starting point for several regional developments to which the New Great Migration offers an ending point. These regional transformations will be discussed in the following chapters as both consequences of the Great Migration and roots of the New Great Migration.
Chapter 3

Civil War to Civil Rights:

The Transformation of Race Relations in the New South

“The New South] vaguely sets apart those whose faith lies in the future from those whose heart is with the past.”

Ironically, the South from which many African Americans fled during the Great Migration was supposed to be a “New South,” re-titled optimistically in the aftermath of the Civil War (Woodward 1974, 4). As discussed in chapter two, however, the New South was new only in the systems of oppression it employed—sharecropping and segregation simply replaced chattel slavery. But while the New South of the post-Civil War period did not fulfill its promises of freedom and equality, the dream, illusion, and idea of a truly new South persisted. Nearly every generation since Reconstruction has declared a New South, culminating in the recent idea of a post-civil rights New South (Time 1976). Quite remarkably, the term—which was founded on specific southern historical narratives that were designed to maintain a strict racial order—has attempted to describe the region for the approximately 100-year period from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement and beyond.

In reporting on the New Great Migration, many media sources now suggest that the South is beginning to fulfill its promise of improved race relations—that it is, precisely, a “New South.” Accordingly, this chapter explores the origins and transformation of the New South from Civil War to Civil Rights, in order to evaluate in what ways the New Great Migration reinvents our image of race relations in this
most recent New South, which I will refer to as the modern South for the sake of clarity.

**A Note on Terminology: “Race Relations”**

The terminology and parameters of “race relations” as a concept have varied over time. W.E.B. Du Bois famously wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk*: “The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line” (Du Bois 1903, 3). Scholars have used the term “the color line” throughout the twentieth century—though many have used the term “race relations” as well—to refer to changing relations and statuses between African Americans (blacks) and European Americans (whites). 36 Scholar Herbert Blumer defined the color line as: “a line which separates whites and Negroes, assigning to each a different position in the social order and attaching to each position a differential set of rights, privileges, and arenas of action” (Blumer 1965, 322). The color line, Blumer writes, is based in the assumption by whites that blacks as a group do not qualify for equal status37 (Blumer 1965, 322).

Today, scholars, journalists, and sociologists more often use the term “race relations,” with the assumption that the *de jure* color line no longer exists. In the post-civil rights period, “race relations” is intended to encompass the complex and myriad relations between whites and blacks. It refers to many factors: institutional and individual interactions between races, social and spatial segregation, racial (in)equality along social, economic, and political lines, and overall racial

36 Admittedly this analysis constructs a black/white racial binary; however, as we will see later in this chapter, southern demographics have functioned largely within this binary, until very recently.

37 Moreover, Blumer writes that the color line stems from a collective white belief that “because of their racial difference Negroes have no claim to being accepted socially.” The color line thus refers not “to all of the ways in which Negroes and whites meet,” but to “a dimension along which the ‘racial problem’ lies and is formed,” standing “fundamentally for a denigration of Negroes as inferior and a rejection of them as alien” (Blumer 1965, 322-323).
environment. Accordingly, the term is fluid and can be used as a framework for different periods. For this reason—as well as that of convenience—I use the term “race relations” to refer to any or all relations between African Americans and whites throughout the ever-changing New South, with the acknowledgement that class differences must be taken into account as well given the inter-connectedness of race and class in twentieth century America.

It is important to note, however, that “race relations” as a term is sometimes called “the language of the oppressor” as it obscures the hierarchical relationship between these two racial groups (Steinberg 2007, 16). Since “the race relations model assumes that racial prejudice arises out of a natural antipathy between groups on the basis of difference,” “racial oppression” is seen as a more desirable term, as it “locates the source of the problem within the structure of society” (Steinberg 2007, 17). Still, given that this paper examines a substantial time period in which systems of oppression have taken many different forms, race relations—a more fluid term—seems more applicable.

Origins of the New South: The Lost Cause

The New South was born out of the Civil War and based in the emerging white supremacist narrative of the Lost Cause. The Civil War not only divided the nation in conflict but in the memory of that conflict. Three versions of the Civil War circulated in American memory, dividing the country along racial and regional lines: the southern white supremacist vision, the northern reconciliationist vision, and the African American emancipationist vision (Blight 2001, 3). While the reconciliationist vision may have triumphed on a national scale as the Confederacy
was forced to rejoin the Union in the aftermath of the Civil War, the South was able to reclaim its white supremacist narrative at the end of Reconstruction—laying the foundation for a thoroughly mythologized and white supremacist New South.

At the close of the Civil War, African Americans and whites had very different expectations for the newly unified Union. While whites from both regions sought healing and national reconciliation, blacks sought basic human rights and freedoms, including education, access to land, and protection of the law (Blight 2001, 3). In the emancipationist narrative, African Americans remembered the war as a liberation conflict for their freedom and remembered Reconstruction as a radical reinvention of the republic (Blight 2001, 3). The reconciliationist vision, however, emphasized political reunification and a reinvigoration of nationalism (Blight 2001, 2). This tension between race and reunion was ultimately resolved through the prioritizing of the latter, as race “never fit well into a developing narrative in which the Old and New South were romanticized and welcomed back to a new nationalism” (Blight 2001, 4). The country’s successful social and political re-unification thus required a national memory of the war that erased emancipation and resubjugated African Americans (Blight 2001, 5). Just as race had been central to the conflict itself, it remained prominent in the aftermath of that conflict, shaping what people chose to remember—and what they chose to forget—about the war (Blight 2001, 2).

In the South, selective memory shaped a very specific perception of the Civil War among many whites. The Lost Cause narrative viewed the Civil War as the War of Northern Aggression, in which white southerners were the victims of northern industrial might (Blight 2001, 38). The end of the Civil War was a tragic and
profound destruction of the antebellum world in which most white southerners had lived. Physically, many of their farms and homes were burnt or destroyed. Psychologically, white southerners felt loss and despair in the destruction of their primary economic and social institution—slavery—and its accompanying system of white supremacy, which offered white southerners an important psychological boost (Blight 2001, 39; Black and Black 1987, 76). The Lost Cause emerged as a way to remedy these immense losses, to re-instill “pride, honor and moral superiority in so many whites” (Shirley and Sims 2007, 3).

The Lost Cause didn’t just offer a narrow interpretation of the Civil War—it also utilized myths of the past to inform the region’s future. In the aftermath of the Civil War, many white southerners romanticized life on plantations of the Old South, remembering slavery as a happy time, in which African Americans were content to be slaves (Sokol 2006, 6). To them, the War of Northern Aggression was an unjust obliteration of the Old South, in which “heroic” Confederate soldiers fought to preserve their cherished way of life (Sokol 2006, 6). Reconstruction was “tragic” and its end in 1877 through Redemption was a just reinstatement of white supremacy in a supposedly New South (Sokol 2006, 6). And so went southern pre and post Civil War history—this white supremacist narrative persisted for decades, until the Civil Rights Movement finally shattered it nearly 100 years later (Sokol 2006, 6). The Lost Cause narrative was predicated on mythologized images of the antebellum South, which it used to perpetuate white supremacy in the post-Civil War New South.

This specific version of history helped to shape a distinctive and romanticized image of the South in relation to the rest of the country (Shirley and Sims 2007, 6;
Reed 1972, 1). Immediately after the Civil War, the idea emerged of “a defeated South with an exotic and romantic niche in the American popular imagination” (Blight 2001, 33). White America seemed to simultaneously admonish and celebrate the region in the post-Civil War period. On one hand, the South was “remade in the North’s image” after the war and harshly punished through Reconstruction (Blight 2001, 32). On the other hand, however, northerners reporting on the region at the time circulated images of a tragically destroyed South that had courageously fought an oppressive North (Blight 2001, 37).

The Lost Cause narrative was thus powerful in reinstating and then sustaining white rule for so many decades. In a sense, “white southerners often lived under the spell of their own collective history—or a certain interpretation of it” (Sokol 2006, 6). The Lost Cause version of history was passed down in many realms of white society, from the private sphere of the family to the public arena of school history textbooks—embedded in political institutions, civic ideologies, Civil War memorials and museums, and the hearts and minds of individuals (Sokol 2006, 6; Blight 2001, 38). This heightened sense of history was perhaps more regional than it was racial, as “Southerners of both races, more so than other Americans, possess a sharp sense of history and the power of the past over the present” (Shirley and Sims 2007, 2). Moreover, the Civil War and Reconstruction continue to shape southerners’ perceptions of their history and of themselves as southerners even today (Shirley and Sims 2007, 2).
The Persistence of the New South: Jim Crow and the Racial Order

The Lost Cause served to justify a new post-Civil War racial order. After Reconstruction, white southerners “redeemed” the South, taking back power and inaugurating a New South38 (Shirley and Sims 2007, 2). Backed by the Lost Cause interpretation of the Civil War, white southerners reinstated white supremacy in the New South, despite the legal prohibition of slavery. Through new but similarly oppressive institutions, white southerners in the New South essentially attempted to recreate the Old South under new conditions (Shirley and Sims 2007, 2).

Race ruled all in the New South, just as it had in the Old South (Black and Black 1987, 75). White Democrats were able to pass Jim Crow laws in the post-Reconstruction period, given their political power and the federal government’s physical and political withdrawal from the South in 1877. Blumer outlines a framework for understanding race relations in the New South—a color line that pervaded the three major levels of society. The outer color line limited blacks’ civil rights through the segregation of public facilities, the restricting of access to public accommodations and institutions, and the systematic disenfranchisement of newly enfranchised black men (Black and Black 1987, 77). States passed Jim Crow laws and restrictive voting laws—such as grandfather clauses, poll taxes, and literacy tests—to solidify these measures. The intermediate color line restricted blacks’ opportunities for education and for employment, subjecting them to economic

---

38 By 1875, Southern “redeemers”—white Democrats—had overthrown many state Republican parties across the South, restoring Democrats to statehouses and governorships in every Southern state but three. Capitalizing on white fears of “an imagined racial inequality” as well as increasing economic insecurity, the Redeemers used terror and skewed elections to rise to power (Blight 2001, 130). The U.S. government’s withdrawal of federal troops from the South in 1877 formally ended Reconstruction.
subordination (Black and Black 1987, 78). Sharecropping and crop lien systems accomplished this in rural areas, while blacks in urban areas were often relegated to domestic or lower-level industrial positions. The innermost color line made difficult interracial friendships (not to mention romantic relationships) and also blocked black admission to private white associations (Black and Black 1987, 78). Although this last category was sometimes slated into law, individual whites very much enforced it as well (Black and Black 1987, 78). Taken together, these systems of oppression combined to restrict blacks politically, socially, economically, and civilly, in addition to violating their basic human rights. The peculiar institution of slavery—not without its own complexities of course—had transformed into a new but still oppressive, multi-layered white supremacist regime.

Blumer’s color line, however, only gets at the laws and social norms that governed life in the New South. The threat of violence and the institutionalizing of a racial creed that denied blacks full human dignity were necessary to enforce such laws and norms on a daily basis (Black and Black 1987, 76). As seen in the previous chapter, both legal and extralegal (i.e. lynching) modes of violence were used as punishments for African Americans who violated the system or for those who did nothing at all. The prevalence of violence against blacks in the New South created a violent culture in which black life was thought to be cheap. Whites justified grotesquely violent acts with a strong belief in the racial creed, which said that whites were culturally and biologically superior to blacks and thus the color line was the natural southern way of life (Black and Black 1987, 76). This belief was only reinforced by the overwhelming class gap between the races, which whites interpreted
as yet another natural feature of the order. Southerners of both races were schooled in the racial creed from birth to death, as it was embedded both psychologically and politically in the New South: “Whites could not make African Americans be inferior so instead they made blacks perform all the thousands of ritualized everyday encounters of the segregated South, from waiting for service in a store to yielding the sidewalk to getting a drink of water” (Hale 2001, 22).

Practically every aspect of life in the New South reinforced the racial creed in the minds of both blacks and whites. Racist philosophy was continually perpetuated through the socialization of black and white children, as members of the subordinate and superordinate groups, respectively (Black and Black 1987, 78). In the generation immediately following slavery, children of both races had limited experiences with each other and thus formed their perceptions of the other group based largely on their group’s interpretation of history (Litwack 1998, 198). Education was also used as a tool to reinforce hierarchy among children of both races—through both inferior school facilities for black children and biased curriculums that favored white southern narratives of history (Litwack 1998, 69, 76, 90). Segregation of all public facilities reminded blacks daily of their inferior status in the southern racial order, causing feelings of alienation, fear, and estrangement (Black and Black 1987, 80). As a psychological defense to this conditioning, many blacks disguised their true feelings in public 39 (Black and Black 1987, 80). Many whites then read black public

---

39 Many blacks practiced the technique of “wearing the mask”: appearing to follow the racial creed in public, but developing strong individual identities outside of the creed and expressing discontent in private.
acquiescence as support of the system, which fueled the collective white illusion that the racial creed was natural, proper, and even sacred (Black and Black 1987, 81, 78).

But what gave this racial creed such power was its ability to impact not only individuals but also institutions. During the reign of Jim Crow, race relations molded political institutions, as the racial creed informed white politicians’ campaigns and policies (Black and Black 1987, 76). Southern politics revolved around two primary goals: to keep blacks relegated to second-class citizenship and to prevent any national intervention that could interfere with that objective (Black and Black 1987, 79). Political unity among whites—especially in black belt counties in which blacks were in the majority and could have gained office had they not been disenfranchised—was necessary in order to accomplish both of these goals, as two-party competition would have split the white vote (Key 1949, 8-9). The Democratic Party thus remained firmly entrenched in both local and national politics in the South in the first half of the twentieth century. Ironically, although whites controlled politics and thus made the rules in the New South, they remained economically dependent on cheap black labor (Litwack 1998, 204). The racial creed demonized blacks and elevated whites, and yet each paradoxically relied on the other for basic economic needs and survival.

Like the Old South, life in the supposedly New South was full of contradictions, as race relations functioned as a constant tug back-and-forth. To many blacks, the line between justice and injustice was blurry, as civil servants like the police—which theoretically exist in order to protect citizens—more often than not

---

40 The South’s attachment to the Democratic Party was further reinforced through white social pressure against those who dared affiliate themselves with the Republicans under Populist leaders (Key 1949, 9).
did the opposite, abusing blacks and silently supporting (or even engaging in) lynchings (Litwack 1998, 15). Parents often couldn’t protect their children from white individuals or the white government, and children’s self-images and dreams for a bright future were greatly limited by the symbols of inferiority with which they met everyday (Litwack 1998, 7, 25). Not only was black economic success greatly limited by myriad forms of discrimination, but it was also dangerous, as many whites saw it as a threat to their racial order (Litwack 1998, 28). This system of punishment for success also minimized black incentive to work hard, as blacks remained trapped in an economic order in which they could not advance without facing potentially fatal consequences (Litwack 1998, 115).

Despite these setbacks, a small percentage of blacks in the New South did prosper, which highlights not only the diversity of the African American experience in the New South but also the persistence of black agency amidst systems of oppression.\textsuperscript{41} In the post-Civil War period, a black middle class emerged, initiating income and wealth gaps in the black community, as well as conflicting philosophies of uplift (Litwack 1998, 138, 151). Some of this new wealth was predicated on new black land ownership, which was generally more feasible in less conservative parts of the Upper South (Litwack 1998, 122). While the racial creed may have defined life in nearly all of the New South, it is important to note that various states and communities within the region differed in implementations of this creed, resulting in regional and class-based diversity in the African American experience. Diversity in

\textsuperscript{41} Although oppressed by several interlocking systems, blacks in the New South found a range of ways to assert their humanity—from daily acts of resistance, such as instilling within their children a sense of black history and heritage, to larger acts, such as migrating North or fighting back with armed resistance in race riots (Litwack 1998, 41-43).
white perspectives on race inevitably existed as well, as historians now study the
ways in which the idea of a “Solid South” firmly committed to the racial creed may
have been used as a tool to enforce conformity among white southerners (Shirley and
Sims 2007, 5).

Still, the New South largely continued the oppression of the Old South,
though through different means. Institutionalized through law and perpetuated
through psychology and socialization, the New South’s strict racial order would be
difficult to defeat (Sokol 2006, 15).

**Destruction (or Rebirth?) of the New South: Civil Rights and Change**

Ironically, the Lost Cause narrative was itself a lost cause, as the way of life it
justified was ultimately destroyed (Shirley and Sims 2007, 3). The post-
Reconstruction New South was built on several myths—the Lost Cause that
romanticized the antebellum South, the racial creed that believed blacks to be inferior,
and the pervasive white perception that blacks were content with all of the above. In
order to achieve lasting change in the New South—to destroy the current New South
in hopes of (re)building a truly New South—these myths would have to be shattered.
After nearly a century of Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Movement finally initiated “the
death of one world and the birth of another” (Sokol 2006, 7). Given that both creed
and law had upheld Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Movement would attempt to change
not only the rules of society but also predominant ways of thinking across the South.

Several important national and international developments in the post-World
War II period helped to transform the political world in which the Civil Rights
Movement was able to take place. Great Migrants had become an important political
base for Democratic candidates seeking election in northern cities—Democratic candidates had to at least offer a pretense that they were pro-civil rights (Hale 2001, 20). The Cold War, as well as African and Asian decolonization, had begun to make African American rights an international issue, as the Soviet Union sought to expose American racism as inconsistent with the nation’s supposed democracy (Hale 2001, 20). Moreover, the development of the television—first marketed in 1946—helped black southerners to broadcast southern racism across the nation (Hale 2001, 20).

Beginning with *Guinn vs. the United States* in 1915, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) engaged in legal battles against the outer and intermediate color lines throughout the twentieth century (Black and Black 1987, 83). While the organization won several victories—such as *Brown vs. the Board of Education* (1954), which struck down the “separate but equal” decision of *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896)—these victories did not translate directly into changes in daily life (Black and Black 1987, 96). Ultimately it took over a decade of mass marches, sit-ins, boycotts, Freedom Rides, and grassroots organization from many sectors of the black population to finally bring about legal change in the form of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The former extended voting rights and outlawed racial segregation in public accommodations; when this didn’t result in an appreciable improvement in enfranchisement, the Voting Rights Act was passed to explicitly abolish “tests or devices” as a means of qualifying voters, in addition to setting up criteria by which certain states and counties came

---

42 *Guinn v. the United States* struck down the “grandfather clause” of Oklahoma’s Voter Registration Act of 1910 as a violation of the fifteenth amendment. This statute had required all voters to pass a reading test, but exempted voters—and their descendents—who were able to vote on Jan. 1, 1866, just after the Civil War. This effectively allowed illiterate whites to vote, while discriminating against blacks (Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture).
under the supervision of federal officials in the administration of registration
procedures (Black and Black 1987, 124).

The Civil Rights Movement struck at the very foundations of white southern
life: the racial order on which the New South was built (Sokol 2006, 4). While the
majority of white southerners were neither civil rights advocates nor violent resisters,
they had still been raised in the Lost Cause narrative and schooled in the racial creed
(Sokol 2006, 4). As we have seen in the previous section, these myriad myths were
embedded in white southern culture, in white southern minds, and in white southern
institutions—all part of a “cherished way of life” (Sokol 2006, 6). These practices
were so ingrained that white supremacy trumped even economic incentive. Many
southern communities supported two separate school systems for decades—an
economic waste—in order to uphold segregation (Black and Black 1987, 92).
Moreover, white southerners stood by Jim Crow, even though it “impeded the growth
of natural markets” and even though their resistance to the Civil Rights Movement
caus{ed} social unrest that hurt local economies (Black and Black 1987, 111).

Although nearly all white southerners were socialized in this racial hierarchy,
their reactions to the unfolding of the Civil Rights Movement varied. Many white
southerners clung to the principles of white supremacy and segregation on the basis
of tradition, resisting the Civil Rights Movement in hopes of preserving a sense of
normalcy43 (Sokol 2006, 4). Some white southerners, however, were very much
affected by the Movement, allowing it to alter their racial attitudes and beliefs.

43 For more on the “progressive mystique”—in which white Southerners sought to avoid conflict while
still remaining open to new ideas, maintaining a paternalistic sense of responsibility towards blacks,
and upholding a commitment to civility between all people—see William H. Chafe’s Civilities and
Civil Rights (Chafe 1980, 6-8).
Witnessing black protest—often in their hometowns—whites were forced to realize that their myth of “good race relations,” was just that, a myth (Sokol 2006, 12). Still other whites simply found new ways to resist racial equality (Sokol 2006, 12).

Whites responded to black nonviolent protest and legal victories with both violence and abuses of power, desperate attempts to resist the region’s impending change. Early legal victories like Brown, continued protests such as those organized by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and even federal civil rights legislation were all met with resistance. Although mandated by law through Brown, school desegregation was met with “massive resistance” from whites in Little Rock, AK in 1957 and in other places across the South (Black and Black 1987, 95). Massive resistance in Little Rock consisted of unruly white mobs; in Norfolk, VA, however, white community leaders closed public schools for the academic year of 1958-1959 to avoid desegregation (Black and Black 1987, 95). Resistance occurred not only to oppose the implementation of legal civil rights victories, but also to quell the potential impact of grassroots protests. In 1963, three-quarters of communities in which black protests were occurring still blocked reform (Black and Black 1987, 109).

Blacks, however, found ways to use white resistance to their advantage. Aware that they were up against not only white power but white commitment to a powerful racial creed, black organizers knew that they had to force, not necessarily convince, white southerners to change. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)—of which Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. served as president—realized that it would be impossible to change “the hearts and minds of one’s
opponents,” and instead emphasized “nonviolent coercion” (Black and Black 1987, 107). Thus in their quest for federal legislation that would end segregation and protect black civil rights, the SCLC used national public opinion and the national news media in their favor. Images of Bloody Sunday in Birmingham dramatized police brutality, framing whites as “savages” and blacks as “saints” (Black and Black 1987, 108). Broadcasted all over the country, these images painted an extremely negative portrait of the white South, furthering isolating the region from the rest of the nation (Black and Black 1987, 111).

The New South had already been distinctive in its strong emphasis on the southern historical narrative and its commitment to institutionalized white supremacy—now the nation not only recognized the existence of these structures, but also actively reprimanded the New South for maintaining them for so long. According to a 1964 National Opinion Research Center study, anti-black prejudice—as measured by participants’ professed support of stereotypic beliefs about blacks and discriminatory practices against blacks—in the South exceeded that in the non-South, further evidence that the region remained divergent from the remainder of the country (Middleton 1976, 94).

Public opinion shifts in the non-South, however, helped to propel the landmark federal legislation of the 1960s that brought the Civil Rights Movement to a close.44 Together, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965 “established new legal principles that put racially conservative white southerners on the defensive” (Black and Black 1987, 125). The nation no longer implicitly

44 Admittedly, I refer here to the end of the classical Civil Rights Movement; a full rendering of the Movement in its entirety is beyond the scope of this paper.
condoned southern racial oppression, as the South’s formerly legalized systems were now illegal both regionally and nationally. Moreover, the national conversation on race had changed forever, resulting in a regional other-ing of the New South: “Thus revealed, the South of old-fashioned, raw white supremacy found itself effectively isolated among non-southerners and repudiated by the President and Congress” (Black and Black 1987, 125). Additionally, these acts profoundly altered the New South’s uniquely oppressive landscape, as the end of segregation called for the tearing down of a plethora of “whites only” and “coloreds only” signs across the South, eliminating “the most obvious markers of regional distinctiveness in traditional race relations” (Black and Black 1987, 112).

The Civil Rights Movement’s impact was uneven across the South. In general, change came faster to the Upper South than it did to the Deep South, and to larger cities than it did to small towns (Black and Black 1987, 103). As late as the 1970s, some areas of the South had yet to offer African Americans skilled work or the chance to serve on a jury, leading one scholar to declare that “the 1960s came to different places at different times” (Sokol 2006, 353). Laws attempted to force change, but laws often “could not touch the recesses of hearts and minds,” and old beliefs inevitably endured despite legal and institutional progress (Sokol 2006, 15). In this sense, the Civil Rights period—and its aftermath—was largely a struggle between change and continuity. The battle between the two was primarily fought not in the courts, but all throughout the South—in public spaces on a daily basis between

---

45 Change is difficult—not to mention subjective—to define in the New South. Some historians define it concretely, such as at least partially evidenced by the number of African Americans in political office (Sokol 2006, 353). Others, like C. Vann Woodward, however, use abstract, relative comparisons: “[The New South] vaguely sets apart those whose faith lies in the future from those whose heart is with the past” (Time 1976).
black and white individuals (Sokol 2006, 341). During and after the Civil Rights
Movement, both blacks and whites had to figure out how to interact with each other
in a new social order, in yet another New South.

**The Modern South: Contemporary Race Relations and Progress**

While it is disputed just how much the New South actually changed as a result
of the Civil Rights Movement, it is clear that the Movement ushered in a new phase
of southern history, a new New South. Renowned Southern historian C. Vann
Woodward declared that the Civil Rights Movement “defined the end of an era of
Southern history” (Woodward 1974, 10). In the 1970s, new images of the South
emerged, highlighting its recent changes. Some called the region at this time “the
Sun Belt,” “the Americanization of Dixie,” or, yet again, “the New South” (Sokol
2006, 352). The region continued to struggle between change and continuity
throughout the second half of the twentieth century, as some areas changed and others
stayed the same. Recent studies on white racial attitudes and black political and
economic achievement suggest, however, that this modern South is a profoundly
different place than the preceding New South in terms of race relations and is perhaps
a center of black empowerment. Moreover, the Sun Belt has experienced significant
economic expansion, in contrast to the deteriorating Rust Belt cities of the North and
Midwest. But while race relations in the modern South may be relatively better than

---

46 In her article “‘Of the Meaning of Progress’: A Century of Southern Race Relations,” historian
Grace Hale presents two opposing interpretations of the Civil Rights Movement: a narrative of uplift
and progress that says integration is possible and a narrative of oppression and continuity that says that
integration is impossible.

47 In its “Special Section: The South Today,” *Time* magazine offers this lyrical description of the post-
civil rights South: “In what had long been the nation’s poorest, most backward-looking region, business
booms and economic, social and political opportunities abound. Cities thrust ever outward and upward.
Racial integration proceeds with surprising smoothness” (Time 1976).
they were in the New South, we will see later from the experiences of New Great Migrants that progress has been uneven in this newest South.

In addition to the Civil Rights Movement, other changes impacted the South at this time as well, further closing the gap between the region and the rest of the country. The advent of a mass society culture in the United States—predicated on mass technology systems—connected the region both physically and culturally to the rest of the country, as did widespread industrialization and urbanization across the region (Reed 1972, 2). Visually, the modern South now resembles the larger United States more closely, as farmland and plantations have given way to suburbs and highways (Shirley and Sims 2007, 10). The region has diversified demographically as well, experiencing a recent influx of immigrants—particularly of Caribbean, Asian, and Hispanic descent—though the South still remains primarily comprised of southern-born blacks and whites (Ambrose 1996, 9).

Both the North and the South experienced white flight in the postwar period,\textsuperscript{48} resulting in the deterioration of the urban tax base and the privatization of resources in newly emerging suburbs on the fringes of urban centers (Kruse 2005, 8). While white flight in the North peaked in the 1970s and 1980s, southern cities began experiencing it almost a full decade earlier, in response to urban decay and desegregation. Interestingly, white resistance to desegregation in southern cities was often less violent than in northern cities, as white segregationists in the South faced larger and often stronger black communities than did their counterparts in the North\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{48} For more on white flight in the North, see chapter four.

\textsuperscript{49} De facto racial segregation is now lower in the South than other major regions of the United States (Hunt et al. 2008, 97).
Similarly, while desegregation in the South was initially mandated by federal order, the region has desegregated dramatically in the period since—which offers an interesting contrast to the controversial and failed busing attempts in the North in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{50} Despite these differing processes, both regions now exhibit arguably similar racial and socioeconomic residential patterns.

The postwar period was also a time of huge economic advancement for the Sun Belt. Many factories from the North and Midwest relocated in rural and suburban areas throughout the South, employing entire communities in factory work.\textsuperscript{51} The region’s economic expansion was more than industrial, however, as its economy rapidly restructured itself two and a half decades after World War II, eventually adding new jobs at a faster rate than did the North (Long 1988, 150). A new non-agricultural, urban middle class emerged as companies opened branches in the formerly economically isolated region (Black and Black 1987, 50). The black/white wage gap also markedly declined in the region, due in part to improved access to education (Smith and Welch 1989, 543). Moreover, after decades of lagging behind the rest of the country in educational statistics, in 1969 the average southerner was just as likely as any other American to have had at least some college education (Reed 1972, 1-2). These changing socioeconomic conditions have

\textsuperscript{50}In its “Special Section: The South Today,” \textit{Time} writes: “Integration has a way to go in the South, but the ugly confrontations of the ’50s and ’60s, the bombings and Klan revivals, the school riots and statehouse harangues seem as remote as the Dred Scott decision. It is up North, in staid Boston, that the races clash and skirmish. Little Rock, Ark., scene of former Governor Orval Faubus’ strident segregationist harangues, has thoroughly integrated its schools” (Time 1974).

\textsuperscript{51}Given that many of these factories moved primarily to low-wage communities with limited union presence in order to maximize their profits, their presence has not exactly improved the debilitating rural poverty that still plagues much of the South (Schomburg 2009).
contributed to the South’s convergence with the rest of the country, diminishing its pre-civil rights regional isolation.

These economic changes had political consequences as well. Urbanization shifted the balance of political power away from rural-based county politicians to a new urban and suburban-based electorate (Ambrose 1996, 19). Additionally, the Democratic Party’s “Solid South” began to erode, as the region shifted its political preference towards the Republican Party (Ambrose 1996, 20). While the Republican Party’s constituency and platform very much resembled that of the previous Democratic Party, the enfranchisement of black voters offered some southern support for the now-liberal Democratic Party, creating political diversity in local and national representation (Ambrose 1996, 20).

This so-called Americanization of the South translated into race relations as well. Recent studies show that white racial attitudes in the North and South are converging, though there still persists a regional gap (Glaser and Gilens 1997, 75). While public opinion polls in 1942 indicated that 98 percent of white southerners favored segregation of public schools, similar polls in 1980 show that only 5 percent of white southerners did so (Reed 1993, 114). Additionally, while regional differences still remain in terms of whites’ likeliness to vote for a black presidential candidate\(^{52}\) and whites’ views on intermarriage, these differences are “smaller than they have been at any time in the recent past, and they are getting smaller still” (Reed

\(^{52}\) In 2008, Barack Obama was elected the first African American president, with the support of North Carolina, Virginia, and Florida, suggesting that parts of the white South no longer harbor this prejudice (New York Times 2008).
1993, 115). These studies would suggest that there has been significant improvement in white racial attitudes in the South.

Scholars offer several different explanations for the persisting regional gap in prejudice, however. Realistic group conflict theory suggests that higher levels of anti-black prejudice exist in areas of the country—and of the South—with higher black populations, as the whites in those areas perceive their black counterparts as threats to white economic, political, and social power (Glaser 1994, 27). An analysis of data from the 1980s National Election Studies corroborates this theory, though it proves that racial environment affects whites’ (implicit) racial political attitudes—such as if they would vote for Democratic presidential candidate Jesse Jackson—as opposed to explicit anti-black prejudices (Glaser 1994, 21). Given that the African American population is more concentrated in the South than in any other region, realistic group conflict theory could perhaps explain the region’s previous anti-black prejudice and its current racial political attitudes.

In contrast, some argue that a special southern regional subculture has shaped white southerners’ racial attitudes, as “cultural factors and historical traditions” have over the years been transmitted as societal norms through the “normal socialization process” (Middleton 1976, 111). In this way, the Lost Cause and the racial creed of the New South will inevitably outlive the systems of segregation and oppression that they once supported, still solidified and ingrained by cultural norms.53 Taken together, realistic group conflict theory and a subculture of ingrained white

---

53 Southern historian Grace Hale offers this analysis: “[Segregation is] of course formidable when codified in laws and enforced by governments but segregation once started can, as the post-civil rights era has proved, continue to exist in some important ways without such weapons” (Hale 2001, 27).
supremacy have the potential to sustain the racial creed into the modern South era, without any explicit legal support.

In the post-civil rights period, however, measuring prejudice has become increasingly complicated. Given that explicit racial segregation and discrimination are no longer legal—nor nationally or regionally condoned—many people are now hesitant to admit if they harbor prejudices. Social desirability can motivate participants to choose the “right answer” to questions about their prejudices, thus obscuring the truth (Kuklinski, Cobbs, Gilens 1997, 323). Prejudice thus masks itself and is more often implicit, communicated through recognizable, but subtle, racial references (Mendelberg 2001, 11). While a plethora of studies over the last 30 years show that the generation born after the Civil Rights Movement brought about a significant improvement in white southern racial attitudes, many of these studies are flawed in that they don’t account for social desirability’s potential to stifle results (Kuklinski, Cobbs, Gilens 1997, 326). Using unobtrusive methods to measure prejudice, social psychologists found that whites in the modern South still harbored significantly more intense prejudice than their counterparts in the North (Kuklinski, Cobbs, Gilens 1997, 329). Interestingly, when these methods centered on racial political questions—such as affirmative action—as opposed to explicit anti-black

---

54 For more on implicit racial prejudice, especially in the context of racial appeals in political campaigns, see Tali Mendelberg’s *The Race Card.*

55 In the 1991 Race and Politics Survey, social psychologists read a list of items to two groups of participants, in order to gauge a reaction. One group of participants was presented with three items not related to race—such as, “large corporations polluting the environment”—while the other group was presented with these three items plus the hypothetical situation of “a black family moving in next door.” Both groups were asked how many of these items upset them, not which specific ones. Through a series of computations, the researchers were able to gauge approximately how many participants were angered by the idea of a black family moving in next door (Kuklinski, Cobbs, Gilens 1997, 328).
prejudice, both regions were more anti-black, but the same gap between the regions persisted (Kuklinski, Cobbs, Gilens 1997, 330). Even as prejudice in post-civil rights America has become far more implicit and difficult to detect, the South still remains distinctly more prejudiced from the North both implicitly and explicitly (Kuklinski, Cobbs, Gilens 1997, 347). In this way, white racial attitudes in the modern South thus exemplify the region’s tensions between continuity and change—while the region’s prejudice has decreased, it still lags behind that of the rest of the nation.

Not only have white racial attitudes improved since civil rights, but blacks have also gained substantial economic and political power in the modern South. In the 1960s, the South was the region of greatest black economic advancement, as two-thirds of the total national growth in black status during this decade occurred in this region (Heckman 1990, 243). In 1970 southern blacks were still poorer on average than blacks in the non-South; by 1982, however, this was no longer the case due to modest increases in southern blacks’ socioeconomic statuses as well as decreases in non-southern blacks’ socioeconomic statuses (Reed 1993, 110). Additionally, the South’s black middle-class has expanded, due primarily to the region’s expanding economy and weak support of unions (Reed 1993, 111). The southern black middle class is very much supported by a large network of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), whose student bodies and faculties were central to the emergence of a strong southern black elite in the late nineteenth century (Wiese 2004, 169). These schools offer employment and education, as well as intellectual, social, and cultural programming to the region’s black population.
Southern blacks have also gained political power, further complicating our revised image of the modern South. While blacks remain politically underrepresented in all regions, there are now more black U.S. elected officials in the South than in any other region (Moland 1991, 189). Even when controlling for the South’s larger black population, the ratio of black elected officials to black population is still highest—though less than that for whites—in the South (Moland 1991, 194). In the 1980s, 22 of every 100,000 black southerners were elected public officials; in the Northeast, however, 12 of every 100,000 black northerners were elected public officials (Reed 1993, 112). Given that these statistics only get at these officials’ races—as opposed to the ways in which their policies actually affect black citizens—it is difficult to discern what this new generation of black leadership means in actuality for the modern South. It is evident, however, that this expansion of black political representation represents a tangible move away from the New South’s system of black disenfranchisement.

The modern South thus remains distinctive as it continues to struggle between continuity and change, between white prejudice and black political and economic empowerment. Some argue that the region is still distinctive demographically, as it entered the post-civil rights period poorer, less educated, and less urban in the aggregate than did the North (Reed 1972, 11). According to one scholar, the modern South’s persisting norms still line up with America’s stereotypic perceptions of southerners: that they are conventionally religious, accept the private use of force, and are anchored in their homeplace (Reed 1972, 83). These trends are self-perpetuating, as a strong sense of regional—or perhaps a southern white ethnic—identity still
pervades the modern South: “White Southerners continue to display surprisingly strong feelings of attachment to ‘their people’” (Reed 1972, 83). In this way non-racialized elements that characterized the New South continue to characterize the modern South, despite the immense changes that have recently swept over the region.

As one scholar writes, “the region’s essential character persists,” through its quirky and eccentric history, defined by irony, paradox, and contradiction (Shirley and Sims 2007, 6). The modern South’s recent tumultuous history continues to influence the region. Conflicts like the Civil War, Reconstruction, and daily battles under Jim Crow were followed by very specific interpretations of these events, which in turn shaped the New South’s culture and norms—which were then perpetuated long after these conflicts officially ended. The modern South persists as a unique product of distinctive racial orders and beliefs, in addition to a recent, powerful racial transformation and accompanying cultural Americanization. In this way, perhaps the South is ironically the “most American” of all the regions of the United States in that it has embodied the best and worst of American history throughout its evolution: “The region might be a mirror on the nation by which Americans might see much that they recognize in themselves, even if they are reticent in admitting all they see” (Shirley and Sims 2007, 6).
Chapter 4
The New Great Migration:
Reclaiming the Past, Redefining the Present?

“The answer to the question ‘Why are so many young Black people moving South today?’ is that the American South sings a siren song to all Black Americans. The melody may be ignored, despised or ridiculed, but we all hear it.”
-Maya Angelou, Ebony, April 1990.

“The enchantment of the North as a Promised Land is gone. The reality is that there is no heaven anywhere in this white man’s world—we must build our own.”
-Dr. John Cashin, chairman of the National Democratic Party of Alabama, 1971.

In September of 1971, Dr. John Cashin, chairman of the National Democratic Party in Alabama, urged blacks to migrate to the South. Speaking at the Eastern Regional Conference of the Congress of African People, held in Newark, Dr. Cashin called for a mass “reverse migration” from the North to the South, for the purpose of strengthening black political control in the South and therefore in the nation as a whole (Johnson 1971). He said that many blacks had become disillusioned with the idea that the North is any better than the South, and that some, but not enough, were beginning to consider moving to the South.

Many African Americans have answered Dr. Cashin’s call for a reverse migration. In the early 1970s, the Great Migration’s counter-stream began to exceed the initial South-North stream. African Americans began migrating from the North and the West to the South, in what demographers call the New Great Migration or the Return South Migration.56 Between 1970 and 1990, half a million African Americans left the North for the South (Stack 1996, xiv). The movement only increased

---

56 It should be noted, however, that migration in the United States has fallen in the last few years: in 2007-2008 it reached its lowest point since World War II (Frey 2009, 1).
throughout the 1990s, as 368,000 more blacks moved South between 1990 and 1995—during which time 233,600 black lefts the Northeast, 106,500 blacks left the Midwest, and 28,700 left the West (Schomburg 2009; New York Times 1998). An additional 350,000 moved South between 1995 and 2000\(^57\) (Schomburg 2009). The connection between the Great Migration and the New Great Migration is evident, as many current migrants are moving from former Great Migration destinations like San Francisco, New York and Chicago to up-and-coming southern cities like Atlanta, Charlotte, and Dallas\(^58\) (Hocker 2005, 40).

The New Great Migration both builds on and diverges from the African American migration tradition, particularly the Great Migration. In both migrations, blacks used mobility to gain opportunity, despite continuing limitations on their movement. But while the Great Migration was largely a movement of the masses, the New Great Migration is predominantly middle class (Schomburg 2009). Moreover, the New Great Migration is composed of two distinct streams, with distinct motivations. Demographers compartmentalize these groups’ motivations, suggesting that primary migrants who have never lived in the South seek to “reclaim a land of promise” and take advantage of black opportunities and communities, while return migrants often move South to “come home” (Hunt et al. 2004, 490). For both groups, however, there is a sense of a personal and collective black identity and black empowerment enmeshed in the South, regardless of whether one has ever lived there (Franklin 1994, 17). There is a sense of “coming home”—whether it be literally or

\(^{57}\) See Appendix E for charts from the Brookings Institution that illustrate these trends.

\(^{58}\) From 1995 to 2000, New York experienced the largest net loss of blacks, California the second largest (Frey 2004, 3).
figuratively—and of being able to reshape that home (Stack 1996, xv). This chapter explores the roots, streams, and consequences of this powerful yet arguably limited movement to the modern South.

**Roots of the New Great Migration: Race and Space in Postwar America**

Throughout the duration of the Great Migration, both the North and the South underwent fundamental changes. At the beginning of the migration, these regions differed in terms of social policies, economic structures, and political alignments; towards the movement’s end in 1970, however, the two had begun to converge in many of these same respects. As discussed in chapter three, many Southern historians now argue that the South—once a region of several peculiar institutions—is no longer regionally distinctive (Cohen 2007). Although both regions are now characterized by similar spatial patterns of residence—via white flight and increasing suburbanization—these patterns stem from different processes. While the South was undergoing desegregation and economic revitalization in the postwar period, the North was grappling with deindustrialization. The urban crisis of the North—as well as the emergence of black suburban enclaves and a larger black middle class—reinvented both regional and local spaces, laying the foundation for the New Great Migration.

**Urban Crisis in the Rust Belt**

The northern and midwestern cities to which many Great Migrants moved did not exactly deliver socially, economically, or politically. Not only did these cities fail to meet Great Migrants’ expectations of a promised land, but they actually declined economically during this period. Racial strife, deindustrialization, and economic
restructuring combined in the second half of the twentieth century to facilitate a painful transition from “urban heyday to urban crisis” and “from magnets of opportunity to reservations for the poor” (Sugrue 1996, 3-4). While many of these urban centers had boomed during World War II through increased manufacturing, the decades following the war saw increased rates of unemployment, devastation of urban infrastructure, and the development of concentrated pockets of poverty. These sites of destruction had a particularly adverse effect on African American residents, many of whom were confined spatially to emerging ghettos replete with crime, gangs, drugs, and unemployment—the makings of a newly isolated and racially defined urban underclass59 (Sugrue 1996, 3). The urban crisis of the latter half of the twentieth century offered both a disappointing conclusion to the Great Migration as well as a powerful incentive for blacks to leave the North, thus sparking the New Great Migration.

Urban studies scholar Thomas Sugrue traces the origins of the urban crisis to the immediate postwar period (Sugrue 1996, 6). World War II called for increased production in many Northeast and Midwest cities such as Detroit, New York, Chicago, Newark, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis, which now comprise the Rust Belt. As a country, the United States reached an economic peak at mid-century, with exceptionally high aggregate rates of economic growth as well as the emergence of affluent suburbia and a powerful culture of consumerism (Sugrue 1996, 6). This “unprecedented prosperity,” however, was distinctively uneven regionally and only

59 In his introduction to the essay collection, The “Underclass” Debate: Views from History, editor Michael B. Katz writes: “Conditions within inner cities are unprecedented; they cannot be reduced to a single factor; and they menace the rest of us. The idea of an underclass is a metaphor for the social transformation embedded in these perceptions” (Katz 1993, 3).
exacerbated present inequalities (Sugrue 1996, 6). Beginning in the 1950s with an industrial scale-back from World War II, Rust Belt cities lost thousands of entry-level manufacturing jobs (Sugrue 1996, 6). Major companies reduced work forces, speeding up production through the elimination of many middle-income assembly line positions (Wiese 2004, 259). Industries such as textiles, electric appliances, and military hardware automated production and relocated their plants in low-wage labor markets—such as suburban and rural areas, as well as underdeveloped regions like the American South and the Caribbean—to reduce costs (Sugrue 1996, 6). Ironically, this steady loss of manufacturing employment occurred just as the Second Great Migration—in which 5 million African Americans moved North between 1940 and 1970—was under way. The good factory jobs migrants had hoped for simply were not there.

This economic restructuring polarized incomes and wealth, exacerbating class differences. The nation transitioned from a manufacturing-based economy to a service-sector economy, marked by job growth in education, government, health care, personal services and professional fields such as financial services and business consulting (Wiese 2004, 259). While the previous economy was characterized by middle-income, unionized jobs along the assembly line, the emerging service economy called for financial extremes, from high-salaried, well-educated managerial and professional work to a growing class of low-waged “pink collar” occupations (Wiese 2004, 259). Visually, this transformation could be seen quite strikingly in the abandonment of factories in manufacturing districts amidst the corresponding boom

---

60 “Pink collar” work refers to employment that has been traditionally considered “women’s work.”
of office construction, retail expansion, and upscale housing development elsewhere in the very same Rust Belt cities (Wiese 2004, 259-260).

This growing socioeconomic gap was reinforced both racially and spatially, through the twin processes of ghettoization and suburbanization. The loss of manufacturing jobs combined with racial discrimination\(^61\) and the arrival of millions of African Americans seeking work during the Second Great Migration to fuel black poverty, which rose from the 1950s to the 1980s\(^62\) (Sugrue 1996, 270). Moreover, the expanding black poor became increasingly confined spatially into ghettos. These “high-poverty” tracts—in which at least 40 percent of the population lived below the poverty line—doubled from 1970 to 1980 in Detroit (Sugrue 1996, 270). Residents of these areas became increasingly detached from the larger labor market, as the removal of “middle-range” occupations from Rust Belt cities necessitated an increase in “deviant occupations”—such as prostitution and drug dealing—in order to make a living (Sugrue 1996, 261). In 1950, one in five black adults in Detroit was either unattached to the labor market or involved in the “informal economy;” in 1980, nearly half of the adult population had only tenuous connections to the labor market (Sugrue 1996, 262). In the mid-1980s, one-third of the national black population was in poverty (Wiese 2004, 260). Involvement in the informal economy gave way to crime and violence, further complicating the situation. Although urban poverty had always been a central feature of American life, this postwar poverty took a powerful new form, in that it was both racialized and spatialized.

\(^61\) Blacks were already excluded from many roles in the industrial economy of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to begin with, prior to deindustrialization (Sugrue 1993, 99).

\(^62\) Interestingly, the black middle class experienced unprecedented growth at this time as well, which will be discussed further in the following subsection.
A complicated and self-perpetuating dialectic emerged between race, space, and economics amidst the urban crisis. When companies moved out of Rust Belt cities, this not only left many urban residents unemployed and unable to find new work, but also reduced the amount of urban tax dollars that could be used for public services, thus adversely affecting urban infrastructure (Sugrue 1996, 8). The emergence of inner-city ghettos along with a decaying urban infrastructure sparked massive white flight across the Rust Belt, in which thousands of middle-class and affluent white urban residents fled cities, taking their tax dollars with them (Kruse 2005, 610). Beginning in the 1950s and continuing throughout the remainder of the twentieth century, they settled on the fringes of metropolitan areas in suburban communities, where they created their own private facilities in place of the decaying public accommodations of the city (Kruse 2005, 610). This “tax revolt” resulted in the withdrawal of wealthy white financial, social, and political support for the city, further exacerbating the urban crisis (Kruse 2005, 610).

Accordingly, several very different worlds emerged in the second half of the twentieth century: majority-black inner-city ghettos in which residents were trapped in a world of crime and affluent majority-white (and some majority-black) suburbs in which residents sought to live a safe distance from those ghettos. This northern brand of segregation actually worsened into the 1970s and 1980s, precisely when the South was undergoing massive desegregation (Sugrue 1996, 269). Municipal governments built public housing in already poor urban areas, exacerbating de facto segregation. Moreover, racial discrimination persisted in housing and in labor, despite successful court challenges to housing discrimination (Sugrue 1996, 8-9). Racial ideology
emerged as an important backdrop to race relations in the postwar city, as
constructions of whiteness and blackness—in which blacks were conceptualized as
economically dependent and lazy, while whites were thought to be economically
independent and hard-working—were projected as opposing entities through popular
culture, socialization, and spatial reinforcement (Sugrue 1996, 9). Many whites thus
came to see ghettoization as a natural cause of profound racial differences—as
opposed to evidence of structural inequalities—which allowed them to
psychologically justify racial inequality as inevitable, limiting policy discussions
intended to reduce urban poverty (Sugrue 1996, 9).

Government attempts to ameliorate inequality were greatly constrained by the
larger racist society within which they were implemented, such as in the case of both
the G.I. Bill in 1944 and Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society 20 years later.
Racial tensions reached a height in race riots throughout the 1960s—from Watts in
Los Angeles in 1965 to Newark and Detroit in 1967, black urban residents put anger
into action, expressing frustration with decades of segregation and discrimination in

---

63 The postwar period was an important time in the development of whiteness, in that “not-yet-white-ethnics” (such as European immigrants) were beginning to assimilate into mainstream whiteness, so that “to be fully American was to be white” (Sugrue 1996, 9).
64 Although the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act, as the G.I. Bill was technically known, did not discriminate by race officially, blacks encountered racial restrictions when trying to claim unemployment benefits from the Veteran’s Administration (VA), which was staffed largely by whites. If black veterans refused to take the low-paying jobs that were predominantly being offered to them, the VA terminated unemployment benefits. Additionally, although veterans of both races were theoretically granted the same tuition aid benefits, these institutions’ exclusive admission policies—combined with persisting black poverty that required many veterans to bring in an income instead of attend school—prevented many black veterans from earning college degrees (Herbold 1994, 105-107).
65 Among Johnson’s programs were the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964—which created the Office of Economic Opportunity to administer local anti-poverty programs—and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Model Cities Program, Medicare, Job Corps, Head Start, Food Stamps, and many others. The Schomburg Center criticizes many of these programs as ineffective (Schomburg 2009).
labor and housing (Schomburg 2009). In response to these incidents, Johnson appointed a National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, which released a report in 1967, crystallizing much of the race/space/class Rust Belt tension of the postwar period: “What white Americans have never fully understood but what the Negro can never forget—is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it” (Kerner Commission 1967). The Commission’s report called for massive government aid to cities—in employment, schools, housing, and welfare reform—to eradicate urban poverty. Johnson, however, dismissed the Commission’s suggestions. Despite the federal government’s supposed commitment to a pluralist and integrated nation post-World War II—characterized as a fight against fascism and racialist ideologies—nominal liberal politicians governed with an ambivalence about race (Sugrue 1996, 11). This political conformity converged with racial transformation and deindustrialization to facilitate northern urban decay in the postwar period, prompting many migrants to leave (Sugrue 1996, 11).

Black Suburbanization

While many blacks left the North for the South in the wake of the Rust Belt urban crisis, others simply moved to northern suburbs and still others moved to southern suburbs. Although black suburbanization began during the Great Migration in the development of working-class black suburbs in the North, it has more recently

---

66 The failures of the Civil Rights Movement—and the assassinations of Malcolm X in 1965 and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968—contributed to this tension as well.

67 The commission was also known as the Kerner Commission, after its chair, Illinois Governor Otto Kerner.
consisted of the emergence of affluent black suburbs throughout the country, but particularly in the South, in what scholar Andrew Wiese now calls “The Next Great Migration” (Wiese 2004, 68, 255). In the past two decades, the black suburban population has jumped from 6.1 million to just under 12 million, or from one-quarter of the black population to one-third (Wiese 2004, 255). These new suburbanites are largely middle-class, earning 55 percent more than African Americans in central cities as of 1990 (Wiese 2004, 256). In one sense, black suburbanites have greater mobility than their predecessors, as they are able to build their own affluent communities; however, black migrants to suburbs—including those involved in the New Great Migration—continue to struggle to find safe and equitable communities in which to live.

Like their white middle-class counterparts, many blacks left the city to escape the urban crises of the last several decades. The development of a large black underclass in cities across the country was paradoxically accompanied by the birth of a large black middle class, capitalizing on the gains of the recent Civil Rights Movement, especially increased access to higher education (Wiese 2004, 260). By 1998, more than one-third of black households earned more than the national median of $35,000 (Wiese 2004, 260). Many sought to move to suburbs for similar reasons as their white counterparts: for safety from crime, access to better public and private accommodations, better school systems, and better value for money in terms of housing (Wiese 2004, 265). Given that many black suburbanites had participated in

---

68 In the late 1980s and early 1990s urban crime reached new heights, prompting new and larger waves of black urban residents to seek solace in the suburbs, where they placed a particularly strong emphasis on cultivating a sense of personal safety (Wiese 2004, 266).
black urban communities prior to relocating to the suburbs, however, their departure removed important social and political players from local city affairs and community institutions, which some scholars argue has led to further isolation of poor African American neighborhoods in central cities (Wiese 2004, 265; Pattillo-McCoy 1999, 24).

In addition to the widening spatial and social distance between upper and lower class blacks, there are important distinctions between black and white middle-class suburbanites as well—namely that they are vastly separate and unequal. Many black suburbanites “remain physically and psychically close to the poor neighborhoods they leave behind,” as working-class communities—with higher rates of crime and gang activity—often remain close by, so that black suburbs become buffers between white suburbs and black inner-city neighborhoods (Pattillo-McCoy 1999, 23). In the 1980s and 1990s, the majority of black suburbanites lived in communities “simply not equal to the suburbs where most whites lived,” due to higher taxation and public debt, lower median incomes and home values, slower property appreciation, and financially challenged public schools (Wiese 2004, 285). These issues of inequality stemmed from persistent discrimination in housing—from banks, insurance companies, real estate brokers, and/or urban planners—as well as the continuing racialization of metropolitan space (Pattillo-McCoy 1990, 25).

Taken together, these complex social forces not only undermined the black middle

---

69 Journalists and historians alike, however, have heralded the recent explosion of the black middle-class and suburbia as proof of the supposedly declining significance of race and class in contemporary American society (Wiese 2004, 257).

70 In a 1991 study, the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development found that more than half of blacks buying or renting homes suffered some form of discrimination (Wiese 2004, 267).
class’ ability to accumulate wealth but also greatly confined blacks of every class to limited geographic spaces (Pattillo-McCoy 1990, 25).

This left blacks seeking the suburban life with two options: move to black suburbs where it costs more to live a suburban life that delivered less, or move to predominantly white suburbs where they risked alienation or even violence. Those who made the latter decision often made extra efforts to strengthen ties to black community institutions, attempting to minimize a sense of racial and social isolation (Wiese 2004, 259). Many chose to settle in suburbs in which friends, family, or a substantial amount of other blacks already lived, in order to ensure their family’s safety (Wiese 2004, 268). Both external and internal factors shaped black movement patterns to spatially restricted, mostly-black suburbs, making it increasingly difficult for blacks to translate economic achievement into spatial privilege as many of their white counterparts had done.

Nevertheless, black suburbs persisted as empowered spaces that asserted a distinctly black middle-class identity. Similar to the Great Migration, the movement to the suburbs was simultaneously shaped and limited by kinship networks and opportunities for housing and employment, as well as discrimination in both areas. Black suburbanization departs from the Great Migration, however, in its creation of decidedly middle-class spaces, which many blacks chose to move to as an affirmation of both race and class identity. Black suburbs grew throughout the country in the last few decades, but they have thrived particularly in the South, as potential destinations for many participants in the New Great Migration. Although southern

71 In 1960, 1,310,000 blacks lived in suburbs in the South, whereas 6,822,000 blacks did so in 2000 (Wiese 2004, 256).
black suburbs initially sprang up in the 1940s in response to *de jure* segregation, many of these communities have since redefined the image of a black-occupied space. They offer members of the black middle-class an opportunity to live the suburban dream—or, a somewhat limited version of it—while still offering residents a thriving black community with black neighbors, community institutions, and role models for the next generation.\(^72\) Similarly, many New Great Migrants move to the South seeking to live in exactly this kind of empowering community, yet they find similar limitations to the fulfillment of their suburban dream.

**Streams of the New Great Migration: Return and Primary Migrants**

Although the South did not begin to receive a net gain of black migrants until the early 1970s, African Americans had been moving South throughout the twentieth century, as a counter-stream to the Great Migration. In the 1930s, for every four African Americans moving North, approximately one African American migrated North to South (Schomburg 2009). This counter-stream—composed primarily of southern-born blacks who had participated in the Great Migration only to become disillusioned with life in the North—increased in the following decades. In every five-year period from 1955 to 1970, 100,000 black northerners moved to the South; in the early 1970s, however, those numbers overtook the Great Migration, giving the South a net gain of black migrants and the North a net loss (Schomburg 2009).

Return migrants—who were born in the South, moved North for the Great Migration, and are now returning South—comprised the bulk of the beginnings of the

\(^72\) This tension between black suburbs as spaces of black empowerment and of class privilege amidst persisting racism resonates with the experiences of many primary migrants in Atlanta, as will be discussed further in chapter five.
New Great Migration, as at least two-thirds of black migrants moving South from 1965 to 1970 were returnees. College graduates and young adults now lead the movement, however. The region has simultaneously become a place to which return migrants feel comfortable, even inspired, to move as well as a place to which primary migrants with little or no personal connection to the region seek to move.

While the New Great Migration refers to a specifically black migration, it is part of a larger movement to the South that extends across racial lines. Between 1920 and 1950 the region experienced a net outmigration of both races; however, in 1950 white movement switched to net immigration and in 1970 the region experienced net immigration from both races (Long 1988, 149). Accordingly, demographers have named the South “the nation’s fastest growing region” since the 1970s (Long and Hansen 1975, 601). Between 1990 and 1996, the South’s population grew faster than that of any other region in the nation, accounting for 46 percent of the nation’s total growth (New York Times 1998).

Although the region is drawing in migrants from both races, there are important differences between these two movements. The proportion of return migrants is higher among the black population than the white (Long and Hansen 1975, 609). Moreover, of black and white returnees, blacks are more likely to return to their states of birth—as opposed to moving elsewhere within the South—which demographers interpret to mean that perhaps black migrants feel stronger cultural, personal, community-based, and/or familial ties to the region than do their white counterparts (Long and Hansen 1975, 609). With this larger interracial and historical
context in mind, this section explores streams and patterns among black migrants, in order to fully understand the diversity and complexity of this movement.

**Demographics: Gender, Education, Class, and Destination**

The population participating in the New Great Migration both builds on and departs from traditional migration statistics as well as Great Migration demographics. As is common in most migrations, migrants in this movement are younger than their northern and southern counterparts and more likely to be male (Hunt et al. 2004, 500). There is a growing female presence among migrants, however, as they are overrepresented among returnees moving to their home state (Hunt et al. 2004, 504). Moreover, the percentage of black primary migrants who are female has increased significantly more from 1970 to 2000 than has that of white primary migrants (Hunt et al. 2008, 109).

In terms of socio-economic class and education, the New Great Migrants differ from their Great Migrant counterparts. As is common among all migrants in all movements, participants in the Great Migration were more advantaged—in terms of both class and education—than those they left behind in the South but less advantaged than those they were joining in their destination of the North (Hunt et al. 2004, 500). Blacks moving to the South today, however, have a higher socio-economic class, higher occupational status, and higher levels of education, than their counterparts in both the North and the South, both origin and destination (Hunt et al. 2004, 501; Schomburg 2009). They are, on the whole, “more educated, more skilled, and more closely resemble the image of the ‘best and the brightest’” (Hunt et al. 2004, 506).
According to migration theory, this largely middle and upper-class movement suggests that these migrants are positively selected and are thus more pulled than pushed to relocate (Hunt et al. 2004, 501). This would imply that perhaps migrants are more motivated to move by improved conditions in the South than they are by deteriorating conditions in the North. Moreover, such an analysis suggests increasing agency among African American migrants, who can choose to move to the South in hopes of attaining opportunity and building community, thereby motivated by positive, as opposed to negative, incentives.

The modern South’s increasing appeal to migrants is also evidenced by the increase in migrants moving to the Deep South. When the New Great Migration first began in the early 1970s, both primary and return migrants were less likely to move to the Deep South—though return were more likely than primary—compared with the general southern population (Hunt et al. 2004, 501). By 1990, however, both groups increased in numbers moving to the Deep South, with return migrants just as likely to reside in the Deep South as the general southern population (Hunt et al. 2004, 502). Interestingly, the subregion in which blacks were historically concentrated, and from which many blacks once fled, now attracts black migrants, which signifies important changes to both the Deep South and the South as a whole.

*Return Migrants*

Demographers identify two main streams among participants in the New Great Migration: return migrants and primary migrants. Each stream is defined by predominant personal characteristics and distinctive destinations that signal differing motives for moving to the South. Taken together, these streams comprise a diverse
movement of people across generations and interests, though contained in a specific socioeconomic demographic.

Return migrants—who comprised the bulk of total migrants at the movement’s beginnings in the earlier 1970s—are defined as African Americans who grew up in the South, then moved North as part of the Great Migration, and are now returning to the South as part of the New Great Migration. Accordingly, returnees are older and of an entirely different generation than primary migrants. Many return to the South to retire, citing the region’s warmer climate and slower pace of life as particularly attractive features. They are less likely to be in the labor force and are also less educated than primary migrants (Hunt et al. 2004, 504). In terms of destination, return migrants are more likely to move to non-metropolitan areas, as 20 percent of returnees move to rural areas (Hunt et al. 2004, 504). Returnees are also more likely to move to a Deep South state and/or areas high in black density than are primary migrants (Hunt et al. 2004, 504). In this respect, returnees more closely resemble the stable southern black population, than do primary migrants (Hunt et al. 2004, 503).

Studies also show important differences among return migrants, namely between those who move back to their home state and those who move elsewhere within the South. In terms of destination preferences, migrants returning to their state of birth are more likely to reside in the Deep South, in areas of high black density, and in rural places (Hunt et al. 2004, 504). In terms of personal characteristics, returnees who move back to their state of birth have less education, are less likely to be in the labor force, are older, are disproportionately female, and are less likely to be
married (Hunt et al. 2004, 504). This would suggest that this subpopulation of returnees is responsible for the major differences between general return migrants and primary migrants, regarding trends in personal characteristics and destination. This subgroup of returnees is thus not only distinct in and of itself, but has also shaped the characteristics of all return migrants as distinct from that of primary migrants.

Interestingly, return migrants who did not move to their home state only differ from primary migrants in terms of personal characteristics—age, education, and marital status—not destination (Hunt et al. 2004, 504).

In her ethnography *Call to Home: African Americans Reclaim the Rural South*, anthropologist Carol Stack documents the experiences of several return migrants, many of whom have moved back to their birth state and home communities, emphasizing the persistence of long-term, multi-generational family bonds. For the people in Stack’s book, a return to the South stems from a desire to return home, both in terms of family and community: “The South, scene of grief and suffering for black Americans, never ceased to represent home to many city dwellers” (Stack 1996, xv).

This confirms migration scholar Stewart Tolnay’s theory that cross-generational familial and cultural connections to the South among northern blacks has in part helped to shape and facilitate this return migration (Tolnay 2003, 227). A 1973 survey of recent migrants to Birmingham noted that family was the most influential factor prompting them to move back down South—for 12 percent of return migrants, caring for an ill or aging parent or relative was the single most important reason (Schomburg 2009).
In addition to familial connections, many return migrants have also cited a reclaiming of black heritage—rooted in specific communities—as reason to move. Although many of the return migrants in Stack’s book move to impoverished rural areas with little opportunity—as “twentieth-century life seemed to pass these places by”—they do so to be in familiar communities, from which they had “never entirely departed” (Stack 1996, 40, 16). Moreover, while the migrants in Call to Home may have initially returned for family, community, or a sense of belonging, many end up taking on leadership roles in local politics and development. Although return migrants may be more motivated to return home by personal circumstances—loss of job, marital issues, ill relatives needing care—than by larger structural transformations in the South, their renewed presence in these communities inevitably contributes to further transformation (Hunt et al. 2004, 507).

Primary Migrants

While primary migrants may not have as close personal or familial connections to the region as do returnees, for many, the idea of the South as a homeplace for all African Americans—regardless of their ancestors’ connections to the region—persists. These migrants also act on economic and social opportunity, as is reflective of their distinctive demographics.

In almost every personal characteristic, primary migrants differ greatly from returnees. Primary migrants tend to be young, more highly educated, not yet married, and in the labor force (Hunt et al. 2005, 504). Many are the children or grandchildren

---

73 Actor Morgan Freeman is quoted in the Schomburg Center’s report on the Return South migration: “This is home. This is where my roots are…[We] built the South, and we know it” (Schomburg 2009).

74 In Stack’s book, for instance, many of the returnees run for local offices or work in city/regional planning, using skills they learned in the North to revitalize their old Southern hometowns. Many work to ameliorate racial inequality in their communities, as well.
of Great Migrants. A significantly younger generation, many primary migrants may come to the South for college—perhaps to attend an HBCU—and then stay after graduation to begin a career. In terms of destination, they are most likely to reside in the suburbs, and less likely to reside in rural areas, in the Deep South, or in areas of high black density than returnees (Hunt et al. 2004, 503-504). Many move to large metropolitan areas in particular, which sometimes function as liberal oases of freedom and opportunity, at least politically speaking (Frey 2004, 5). In terms of both place of residence and personal characteristics, primary migrants very much depart from the return migrant population statistically.

Moreover, primary migrants stand out from the black population as a whole. They are more educated than any regional (“stable”) segment of the black population not engaged in migration (Hunt et al. 2004, 506). This makes them especially distinctive from their Great Migration counterparts, many of whom had little education. In fact, primary migrants are among the “most advantaged African-Americans, irrespective of region,” in the country (Hunt et al. 2004, 507). Accordingly, primary migrants are in a good position to benefit from economic expansion and better job markets in the South—further evidence that they are positively selected and thus move more for the pull of the South than the pushes of the North.

---

75 This is the case for two of the four primary migrants interviewed in chapter five.
76 In the late 1990s, Southern metropolitan areas, particularly Atlanta, “led the way” in attracting black migrants (Frey 2004, 1).
Primary migrants’ motives for moving South are complex and relatively understudied given the recent recognition of this trend. While many are in the educational position to benefit from expanded economic opportunity, there is also the allure of “returning” to a place where their ancestors (if not they themselves) lived” (Hunt et al. 2004, 507). In contrast to return migrants who are more likely to move because of direct individual and personal links to specific southern communities, the movement of primary migrants thus suggests a larger black connection to the South based on a collective sense that contemporary blackness and African American history are rooted in the South. The idea of the modern South—and of black communities in the modern South in particular—has special resonance for many primary migrants, which will be further explored in a case study in the following chapter.

Consequences of the New Great Migration

The recent movement of both primary and return migrants to the South has impacted and continues to impact both regions, the nation, and the larger African American community in a variety of important ways. Moreover, media coverage of the New Great Migration could potentially reshape public conceptions of the modern South and race relations within it. Media presentation has even greater resonance given that scholarly work on the movement is lacking, limited to statistic-based demographic studies and short epilogues to work on the Great Migration.

77 Scholarly work on return migrants and the migrant population in general (without distinction between return and primary), however, emerged in the 1970s in the beginnings of the movement.
Reshaping the Regions and the Nation?

This movement is a profound brain drain for the North and brain gain for the South, as migrants are highly educated. Currently, 50.5 percent of black migrants to the South have a college education (Schomburg 2009). While the South has gained migrants of both low and high education levels, highly educated blacks are moving at higher rates—that is, the proportion of the black educated population that is moving South is far greater than the proportion of the black less-educated population that is moving South (Frey 2004, 7). In particular, between 1995 and 2000, Georgia (and Atlanta, in particular), Texas, and Maryland gained the largest net inmigration of black college graduates of any states in the country; four other southeastern states ranked in the top 10 for recipients of a net inmigration of black college graduates (Frey 2004, 7). In contrast, New York was the top brain drain state in this five-year period, losing more than 18,000 black college graduates (Schomburg 2009).

Interestingly, Deep South states like Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana were also in the top 10 for black brain drain, complicating a neatly aligned North-South drain-gain dichotomy (Frey 2004, 8). This might suggest that there is movement within the South, perhaps from the Deep South to the Upper South.

Interestingly, the black brain gain states are distinct from white brain gain states, which suggests that black primary migrants moving to the South do so for more than just expanded economic opportunity, but for some social, cultural, or historical connection to the region. Although there is some overlap between states that receive net immigration of educated blacks and those that receive net immigration of educated whites, the top 10 lists for the two differ. The list of white gainers
includes a larger proportion of western states, whereas the list of black gainers includes more southern states (Frey 2004, 8). This would suggest that the South “exerts a stronger ‘pull’ on highly educated blacks than on highly educated whites” (Frey 2004, 8). The movement of educated northern-born blacks thus both stems from and contributes to an expanding southern black middle class. Primary migration becomes self-perpetuating—as more educated blacks move to the South, the region’s pull for educated blacks around the country increases. According to William Frey, author of the Brookings Institution’s study on the New Great Migration, these new migrants are contributing to the growth of the black middle classes in cities like Atlanta and Charlotte (New York Times 1998).

This new movement has and continues to facilitate a new sense of black southern identity for many migrants, which may have larger implications for the broader African American community. Many migrants, whether return or primary, see themselves as reclaiming their black southern identity, exerting a new willingness to claim the South as “their territory” (Painter 1991, x; Franklin 1994, 17). In addition to a profound sense of historical connection to the region, blacks have maintained contemporary ties as well. In the 1990s, 65 percent of the nation’s black population growth took place in the South (Schomburg 2009). As of 2002, 55.3 percent of blacks lived in the South, while 18.1 percent lived in the Northeast, 18.1 percent lived in the Midwest, and 8.6 lived in the West (US Census Bureau 2003). If the Great Migration reshaped the broader African American community as urban and northern, the New Great Migration—in conjunction with accelerated black suburbanization across the country—has altered these demographics, as the black
population becomes less northern and less urban, more southern and more suburban (Hunt et al. 2004, 505).

And yet, despite its potential to reshape the broader African American community, the New Great Migration is still very much a movement of a specific socio-economic demographic, though it remains intergenerational (Hunt et al. 2004, 505). Given that a historical perspective is not yet available, it is too early to tell if the movement will ever become a grassroots, mass migration like its predecessor, the Great Migration, or if it will remain socio-economically homogeneous.

**Media Coverage: A Brief Literature Review**

Although this movement is still in motion today, both mainstream and black media sources have written on it since its emergence over 30 years ago. With the exception of demographic studies, coverage of the New Great Migration is found more often in the mass media realm than in academia. From supposedly objective features to blatantly slanted editorials, these articles paint a romanticized and superficial image of a truly reformed, truly tolerant modern South with improved race relations and a thriving job market.

Mainstream newspaper features on the New Great Migration praise the region’s economic and racial progress, though such coverage has become increasingly critical over the years. In 1976, *Time* published a special section entitled “The South Today,” which explored changes in the modern South, including the development of reverse migration. The magazine writes that “lessening racism and rapid economic growth” have spurred this new movement, offering anecdotes from

---

78 For more on the socioeconomic homogeneity of the migrant population, see chapter five.
new migrants about the improved interracial interactions they have encountered since moving down South (Time 1976). One return migrant, who grew up in Atlanta but had moved to Chicago in the Great Migration, decided to move to Decatur, Georgia in the early 1970s after a surprisingly enjoyable vacation in the South: “I fell in love with it all over again” (Time 1976). Once in Decatur, he was skeptical at first about opening a liquor store in town, but was pleasantly surprised by how he was treated: “[The rental agent] was beautiful. He highly respected me. It seemed he went out of his way to make it easy for me” (Time 1976).

This portrayal is evident 30 years later, as a CBS online report in 2003 draws similarly stark, anecdotal contrasts between migrants’ oppressed lives in the pre-civil rights South and the post-Great Migration North versus their newly open lives in the post-civil rights South (Leung 2003). One primary migrant spoke about her negative experiences being the only black family in an all-white suburb in Philadelphia, which prompted her to move her family down to Atlanta: “We were the first blacks that our neighbors’ children had ever seen...You often feel like you don’t fit in” (Leung 2003). A return migrant cited overt racism he had faced while teaching in Tennessee in the 1950s; however, after visiting his daughter at Spelman College in Atlanta, he noticed changes and decided to move back, as the reporter writes, “the new South had won him over” (Leung 2003).

A 1991 *New York Times* article, “South’s New Blacks Find Comfort Laced with Strain,” offers a more nuanced approach to the experiences of black migrants in the South. The article cites one migrant’s recent incident in her hometown of Saluda, South Carolina, in which a white elderly woman pointed at her and said to her
grandson: “That girl’s gonna get you” (Smothers 1991). While the white woman apologized after this migrant confronted her, this incident indicated to the migrant that racism in the South is perhaps still more overt than the subtle encounters she had had while living in Los Angeles. Moreover, this migrant added that living in a small town is more draining than living in L.A. in general, as she can’t be anonymous and has to engage more intensively in her community; she noted, however, that though these one-on-one interactions can be more draining, they can also be more rewarding (Smothers 1991). In exploring migrants’ daily experiences actually living in the South, this article complicates mainstream media sound-bite anecdotes of a changed and open South, which are based only in migrants’ perceptions of what has changed, as opposed to what has not changed.

Black media coverage both supports and resists the temptation to draw overly positive generalizations from and about this trend. A 1998 article in Ebony named Atlanta the “Harlem of the 1990s” and identified improved living conditions in the South as compared to the previous South and the current North (Chappel 1998). The article, however, also delves into the lived experiences of recent migrants in the South, including adjusting to the slower pace of southern life, dealing with homesickness for the North and northern communities, and issues around dating life in the South (Chappel 1998). In articles like these we see a more complex depiction of the African American migrant experience in the South, which alludes to the inevitable individual variation in any large group-based experience.

Just as black newspapers like the Chicago Defender published editorials during the Great Migration that urged their black readers in the South to move North,
many black publications are similarly advocating that readers migrate South. *The New Pittsburgh Courier* recently published an editorial that recounted its own role in encouraging blacks to move to the North during the Great Migration and then suggested that the New Great Migration now represented a “people coming home again” (*New Pittsburgh Courier* 2003, A4). One columnist for *The Atlanta Tribune* drew on personal experience as a migrant in an effort to urge other blacks to follow his move down South: “I grew up in Detroit, Mich., but I never felt I was a part of Detroit. Here [in Atlanta], I felt like I belonged” (Dickerson 2003, 68). Dickerson feels the New Great Migration is a source of empowerment in and of itself for African Americans, a movement for African Americans by African Americans: “The mecca comes from believing that it’s here, acting on that belief -- then it’s real” (Dickerson 2003, 68). Still others couched the movement in civil rights terms, suggesting that the South now offers African Americans “the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (Graves 2007, 12).

Scholars and journalists have tended towards a romanticization of the movement as one of black empowerment and a changed South; however, many of these migrants are moving to black suburbs, which, as we have seen, are often unequal in many respects when compared to their white counterparts, no matter how affluent the residents are. The New Great Migration does not exist in an isolated vacuum but in the context of a larger society in which space remains predominantly defined by race and class. Accordingly, migrants’ experiences once living in these southern cities are bound to be just as complicated as were their experiences in their hometowns that prompted them to decide to move. Only in comparing migrants’
expectations of the South with their actual experiences there can we truly understand
to what extent the New Great Migration is an act of empowerment and to what extent
it is a movement profoundly limited. The following chapter seeks to do so through an
analysis of primary migrants in Atlanta, paying special attention to the impact of class
privilege on migrants’ experiences as well.
Chapter Five
Primary Migrants in Atlanta, Georgia:

“Atlanta is very empowering for African Americans yet still very segregated”\(^{79}\)

“So it is important to remind our newcomers that if Atlanta is not the mecca they expected, they are to bring it with them. There's only one way for the mecca to be realized: to build our own communities and businesses, to create jobs for neighbors and friends, to live in peace and with a sense of community and cohesiveness.

Those qualities have eluded some African-American communities for generations. Now is the time to make them happen here. There's no better place than here. We create the mecca everyday, by believing that it exists, and by working hard to ensure that it materializes. And we can do that by turning dreams into reality. There is no better place than to start that business you've been thinking of, to open that school or launch that church or help that neighbor or friend.


“[Atlanta] holds the distinction of being the only place where a black single mother with platinum hair can become a wildly popular mayor. People come with aspirations and ideas. They succeed, they fail; but there's something to be said about the fact that so many people come specifically to this place to try.”


Atlanta, Georgia is a valuable vantage point from which to explore both the New Great Migration and changes in race relations in the modern South. Media sources have characterized Atlanta as the “Harlem of the 1990s” (Chappel 1998).

From 1985 to 1990 and 1995 to 2000, Atlanta received the highest black net migration of any metropolitan area in the nation, gaining 74,705 black migrants in this first five-year period and 114,478 in the second\(^{81}\) (Frey 2004, 5). Not only is

\(^{79}\) Survey respondent 6, when asked to describe race relations in Atlanta.

\(^{80}\) Cobb is an Associate Professor of History at Spelman College in Atlanta.

\(^{81}\) See Appendix E for charts that illustrate these trends.
Atlanta the most popular destination for primary migrants, but it also has a history of supposedly progressive race relations, as an “oasis” in a “dry desert of ignorance” or as “the city too busy to hate” (Kruse 2005, 610). Moreover, the city has been known for its large and politically active black middle class as well. Once crowned the capital of the New South, Atlanta has historically been distinctive from the rest of the South; the city remains distinctive today in its popularity among primary migrants in the New Great Migration.

But while Atlanta may appear to be a “black mecca,” many argue that it in no way fulfills its “promised land” image, as the city suffers from the same spatialized racial and socioeconomic inequality as the rest of the country82 (Dixon 2005). Similarly, I argue that the everyday experiences of primary migrants in Atlanta expose additional limitations on New Great Migrants. Although this movement is empowering for many migrants, it is also shaped by and continues to shape both interracial and intraracial tensions.

A Note On Field Research

As a case study, this chapter offers a more in-depth and detailed exploration of a specific group of primary migrants, as opposed to a broader, more generalized, and perhaps regional approach. In looking at primary migrants in Atlanta—their motives and their experiences—we can begin to better understand primary migrants in general, as well as race relations in the modern South, particularly in Atlanta.

82 For critical commentary on Atlanta’s persisting inequalities, see Bruce Dixon’s online report “Black Mecca: The Death of an Illusion,” in the internet magazine “The Black Commentator.” In particular, Dixon argues that the black business class in Atlanta has profited off of the city’s largely poor black masses. He proposes the creation of new models of black leadership in urban areas across the country, which would utilize the people and resources already available in each city, as opposed to working to attract wealthy black migrants to the city (Dixon 2005).
Accordingly, this chapter begins with a brief history of race relations in Atlanta, in order to offer a historical context through which to better understand the city’s attraction to potential migrants and its current image as a mecca for affluent African Americans. This first section relies on secondary sources, primarily historical and political works.

The second section uses field research from primary migrants in Atlanta to construct a narrative and analysis of their experiences and motives. While my field research is in no way generalizable, I seek to offer a glimpse into the experiences of several migrants. My field research comes from two primary sources: an online survey and phone interviews. I constructed a 10-question online survey\(^3\) intended for anyone who identifies as African American, grew up in the North or West, and moved to Atlanta in approximately the last 20 years. While the survey was posted on the internet and was theoretically accessible to anyone, I utilized personal and professional connections to maximize responses. I sent a link to the survey to a black professionals listserv, to Humanities-Net African American Studies, Migration Studies, and Southern Studies listservs, and to various friends and acquaintances in Atlanta who either fell in this category or knew others who did. The survey was open for four months, and 27 people responded, with 22 completing the survey in its entirety.\(^4\)

The final question on the survey asked respondents if they would like to be interviewed further, on the phone. Fourteen people responded affirmatively and were

\(^3\) The Institutional Review Board of Wesleyan University approved this survey. It can be found in Appendix A.

\(^4\) Responses were coded in the order in which each respondent filled out the survey, which is why only 22 respondents are cited here, but their assigned numbers range from 1 to 27.
contacted via e-mail to set up a phone interview. I conducted four interviews with primary migrants,\textsuperscript{85} which ranged from 30 minutes to an hour and a half. Given that these primary migrants had already completed the survey, the phone interview served as an opportunity to dig deeper and gain insight into people’s individual motives for moving, as well as their individual experiences with race both in their hometowns and now in Atlanta. Taken together, the survey results and the phone interviews comprise the field research used in the second half of this chapter.

**Atlanta: A Brief History of Race Relations**

Like many southern cities, Atlanta has historically been biracial, composed primarily of black and white citizens (Ambrose 1996, 9). Atlanta was and continues to be the home of both civil rights leaders and pro-segregation activists, of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Lester Maddox (Kruse 2005, 13-14). To some, “there are two Atlantas,” black and white, distinguished by geography, culture, and history (Pomerantz 1996, 17). And yet, when compared to its southern metropolitan counterparts, Atlanta has historically been exalted as racially progressive, as a “symbol for the New South” (Pomerantz 1996, 19). There is tension in scholarship on both past and present Atlanta, as historians and political scientists debate how much race relations in Atlanta have changed since World War II, as well as how the city compares to the rest of the South and to the rest of the nation.

A full rendering of the history and contemporary racial politics of Atlanta is beyond the scope of this paper; this next section, however, aims to provide an overview of the city’s past and present race relations, to give context to the city to

\textsuperscript{85} See Appendix B for interview script, including consent script. I use letters (instead of first names) to refer to the primary migrants whom I interviewed, as will be clear later in the chapter.
which many primary migrants are moving. This section first explores the origins of Atlanta’s progressive image and then complicates it in the context of contemporary racial issues.

“City Too Busy to Hate”

Prior to the Civil Rights Movement, Atlanta was seen as progressive in its racial politics, though it still operated under the racial creed of Jim Crow like the rest of the supposedly “New South.” In the post-Civil War period large groups of rural blacks migrated to the city—the black population comprised 20.3 percent of the total population in 1860 but jumped to 45.5 percent in 1870 (Bayor 1996, 7). The city’s overall population grew from 22,000 to 270,000 from 1870 to 1930, as its railroad access and proximity to “cotton country” made it an attractive location for businesses and entrepreneurs, setting a strong precedent for a commitment to business growth (Glaeser 2010). But despite the city’s bustling economy, blacks living in Atlanta in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries faced similar conditions to their counterparts in other southern cities: disenfranchisement, inferior municipal services (such as unpaved streets and poor water supplies), limited educational and occupational opportunities, residential and public segregation, and a violent race riot in 1906 (Bayor 1996, 8-10).

---

86 The black population increased further throughout the twentieth century, to 66.6 percent of the total population in 1980 (Bayor 1996, 7). This significant increase is a function of both black migration to Atlanta and white flight to suburbs and exurbs just outside of metro Atlanta’s boundaries.

87 After a particularly intense gubernatorial campaign, several Atlanta newspapers wrote articles accusing black men of assaulting white women. Such rumors were then spun further through word-of-mouth, ultimately resulting in white mob violence on black Atlantans of all classes. Blacks banded together in community organizations to protect their neighborhoods, but many black-owned businesses were destroyed. Eventually, state militias were called in to stop the riot (Bayor 1996, 12).
Seeking to fill in where the government refused to provide, black Atlantans founded many of their own institutions in this time period, such as fraternal societies, self-help organizations, churches, and private education institutions (Bayor 1996, 7-11). With the help of northern missionaries, six private colleges—Spelman College, Morehouse College, Clark College, Atlanta University, Morris Brown College, and the Interdenominational Theological Center—were established at the turn of the century, collectively comprising the Atlanta University Center (AUC). These institutions began with elementary and secondary courses but soon were able to offer bachelor degrees. Within 35 years of emancipation, most black Atlantans were literate (Merritt 2004). Today, the AUC includes Spelman College, Morehouse College, Clark Atlanta University, and the Interdenominational Theological Center. Although Atlanta’s reputation as a center for black education began in the late nineteenth century amidst Jim Crow, it continues today: Spelman is ranked first in the nation for all HBCUs and Morehouse is ranked third (US News & World Report 2010). Many migrants cite the city’s proximity to HBCUs—as well as other institutions of higher learning—as a factor in their decision to move.

The presence of black universities in Atlanta helped to facilitate a long-standing and educated black middle-class, which impacted city politics. By the 1940s, Atlanta had become a hub for black business and higher education, as employees of HBCUs comprised a black middle-class of “unprecedented size” (Wiese 2004, 174). By 1945, black-owned businesses in Atlanta had a combined net

---

88 In 1988, Clark College and Atlanta University merged to form Clark Atlanta University. Morris Brown College has struggled financially throughout the last decade, losing its accreditation as well as its affiliation with the Atlanta University Center in 2002.
89 Atlanta is also home to Emory University, Georgia Institute of Technology, Georgia State University, and other institutions of higher learning.
worth of about $30 million (Kruse 2005, 28). Many black professionals lived and/or worked either on “PhD Row” near Atlanta University or on Auburn Avenue, which was also known as “Sweet Auburn”—a residential and commercial neighborhood that combined black middle-class residences with black financial institutions (Wiese 2004, 174). *Fortune* magazine called Sweet Auburn “the richest Negro street in the world” (Kruse 2005, 29).

But despite these concentrated, affluent areas, the rest of the black middle and lower classes lived in older neighborhoods, under poor conditions. In the post-World War II period, however, black elites in Atlanta began to negotiate with white government officials for the construction of “Negro Expansion” areas, which would become some of the first black suburbs of Atlanta, utilizing black real estate organizations and black financial institutions for capital (Wiese 2004, 176-183). While these areas—located primarily to the west, east, and south of the city—in some ways furthered white aims to increase residential segregation, black leaders reasoned that the creation of separate but equal residential areas was a more feasible solution than the ideal solution, which was equality through integration. They continued to fight to end segregation while simultaneously strengthening black communities through these all-black suburbs.

The black elite’s role in spearheading black suburbanization in the mid-century is evocative of the black middle class’ powerful, yet tenuous, place in the city’s government. Twentieth century case-studies of the city’s power structure found

---

90 The neighborhood also holds symbolic significance as the home of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as well as other important civil rights leaders.
91 New black neighborhoods built on the western fringes of the city would later become some of the premier black residential districts in the country (Wiese 2004, 184).
that there were two distinctive groups of elite leaders in Atlanta: one black, one white.\textsuperscript{92} The two were similar in promoting business interests and class exclusivity; they diverged, however, in that the city’s black power structure included more female leaders and more professionals, such as educators and ministers (Hornsby 2009, 1-2). In contrast to the entirely white supremacist politics of the rest of the New South, black and white leaders in Atlanta worked together in the pre-civil rights period with the belief that racial progressivism was necessary for economic progress\textsuperscript{93} (Kruse 2005, 20). The city’s black community was known for remaining active and forging its own policies among diverse leaders (Bayor 1996, xiv). In the aftermath of World War II, blacks began to exert more political influence, forming a biracial coalition with upper and middle class whites to re-elect Mayor William Hartsfield in 1949—the very leader who christened Atlanta the “city too busy to hate,” alluding to both its commitment to business and its relative racial progressiveness (Dittmer 1997, 105).

But while black leaders in Atlanta in the pre-civil rights period were able to advocate for improved housing, education, and political participation to an extent — for example, organizing the Atlanta Negro Voters League in 1949—they often remained powerless to implement African American-centered community policies, as they still had to work within the larger white power structure (Hornsby 2009, 2). One scholar writes that black leaders in Atlanta practiced “Atlanta Style” politics, aiming to achieve their goals without economic repercussions or violent consequences, and preferring to emulate white middle class values instead of working towards uplift for

\textsuperscript{92} Sociologist Floyd Hunter is widely credited with positing this theory in a 1953 study, though others have expanded on it since (Hornsby 2009, 2; Kruse 2005, 19).

\textsuperscript{93} Perhaps the most striking example of this collaboration is Booker T. Washington’s “Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition Speech” on race relations in 1895.
the black masses (Hornsby 2009, xi). Ultimately, the black elite often had to acquiesce to the white power structure’s commitment to development and economic progress, much of which profited the white business community.

Mayor Hartsfield’s appointment of the first black policemen in 1948 is indicative of the city’s uneven racial progress in the mid-century period, as well as the misleading nature of supposed markers of racial progress. Although Hartsfield’s appointment of eight black policemen was significant in that it put blacks in public and authoritative positions for the first time, this did not lead to fundamental change in terms of equalizing black civil service opportunities and eradicating the prevalence of police brutality against the black community (Hornsby 2009, 241). Moreover, these eight policemen were still subject to segregation within the police force, as they were given separate locker facilities. Similarly, the civil rights period would offer markers of supposed racial progress that would distinguish Atlanta from the rest of the South, while still managing to preserve its racial status quo through other means.  

Persisting Inequality in the Post-Civil Rights Period

As discussed in the previous chapter, the national gap between lower and upper class blacks only widened in the post-civil rights period, and Atlanta is no exception. In 1999, 24.4 percent of Atlantans lived below the poverty line (US Census 2000). Moreover, the child poverty rate jumped from 39.3 percent in 2000 (fifth highest in the country) to 48.1 percent in 2004 (now the highest in the country) (US Census 2000; US Census 2004). As of 1998, 35 percent of the city’s black

---

94 For more on Atlanta’s mixed civil rights record, particularly in terms of school desegregation and then resegregation, see Ronald H. Bayor’s Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta. Kevin Kruse’s White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism also includes analysis of the city’s civil rights successes, failures, and spatial and political legacies.
population lived in poverty (Mays 1998). While black Atlantans of all classes had faced at least similar restrictions and limitations under Jim Crow—often frequenting the same churches and social organizations, with the exception of several exclusive elite clubs—the end of segregation, and therefore the end of the formal anti-segregation movement, meant there was no longer an absolute need for black alliances across class lines (Hornsby 2009, 241). Class and race tensions persisted in the post-civil rights period, in the form of uneven spatial, socioeconomic, and political progress.

In chronicling the Civil Rights Movement in Atlanta, many scholars laud the city for its “peaceful” desegregation of public schools in 1961 (Kruse 2005, 3). But while Atlanta may have succeeded in avoiding a violent desegregation incident like that in Little Rock, Arkansas, the city resisted segregation through less overt, but perhaps more long-lasting, means. The Atlanta school board sought to create the impression that it was complying with the Brown court orders while simultaneously taking steps to keep segregation intact as much as was possible for more than a decade after Brown (Bayor 1996, 227). Through token desegregation—in which a tiny minority of black students would be permitted to superficially integrate a few white schools—the Atlanta government succeeded in perpetuating a mostly segregated system, in which most white schools were still under capacity and most black schools were still over capacity. In 1963, the city’s schools were next to last—just behind Greensboro, NC—in number of students desegregated when compared to other southern cities (Bayor 1996, 229). The United States Fifth Circuit Court of

95 Ironically, Little Rock was considered racially moderate prior to its issues integrating Central High School.
Appeals finally intervened in 1972, ordering the Atlanta school board to design and implement a new desegregation plan by the 1972-1973 academic year (Bayor 1996, 245).

Atlanta’s desegregation saga was further complicated by simultaneous white flight, which allowed anti-integration activists to claim that post-\textit{Brown} segregation in Atlanta was entirely de facto. As blacks moved into white neighborhoods to the west of the city in the 1960s and 1970s, whites moved further south—a complicated process that resulted in whole neighborhoods effectively transitioning from one race to another (Kruse 2005, 4). In 1963, 52 cases of “racial transition,” in which whites fled from neighborhoods as blacks bought homes there, were recorded (Kruse 2005, 5). As early as 1957, nearly 30,000 whites moved out of the city limits of Atlanta; in the 1960s, another 60,000 white Atlantans left the city; in the 1970s, still another 100,000 fled (Kruse 2005, 5). As in the rest of the South—and the rest of the country—white flight to Atlanta suburbs contributed to the deterioration of the urban tax base and to the emergence of privatized resources in the suburbs, also widening the gap between the city’s black elite and black poor.

White flight in Atlanta also impacted city politics, as the very same ideologies that informed many whites’ decisions to flee the city evolved into a new form of southern conservatism. Just as white Atlanta suburbs were characterized by a commitment to individual rights over communal responsibilities, privatization over public welfare, and “free enterprise” above all, so too did these priorities guide the emergence of the post-civil rights New Right (Kruse 2005, 8). As in the rest of the country, conservative suburbs sprung up around the more liberal city of metro
Atlanta, the former of which had primarily white Republican national representation while the latter had primarily black Democratic national representation.

In the desegregated post-civil rights South, white flight became a way to preserve segregation through seemingly de facto means through the establishment of suburbs as sanctions of white supremacy and racial, social, and political homogeneity (Kruse 2005, 8). Racism and anti-segregation sentiment in Atlanta were thus not necessarily changed by civil rights, but simply transformed into different forms with altered language that could be passed off as acceptable in the post-civil rights period. One historian argues that a kind of “corporate multiculturalism” modified form of segregation replaced Jim Crow, in which segregation is no longer mandated by law but instead enforced through the legacies of those laws, as well as a complicated intersection of economic and political policies (Hale 2004, 21).

Although black Atlantans moved steadily into white suburbs as well as black suburbs throughout the 1980s and 1990s, segregation persisted, as the city continued to be composed of racialized spaces. Black suburbanites settled primarily in counties east and south of the city, though some moved to the predominantly white counties north of Atlanta96 (Kruse 2005, 263). Some moved to black suburbs, such as Stone Mountain in DeKalb County—ironically the birthplace of the Ku Klux Klan—where homes were offered at approximately $200,000 (Wiese 2004, 257). Others moved to majority white counties, like Cobb and Gwinett, which were 96 percent and 95 percent white respectively in 1970, but were both only 70 percent white by 2000 (Kruse 2005, 263). But despite some residential integration, many public school

---

96 See Appendix F for a map of Atlanta by county.
districts remained segregated, as wealthy white residents often opted for private schools—the end result being that public schools in many white areas consisted of majority black student populations. A 2000 research project by the Harvard University Civil Rights Project found that three of the top four rates of schools resegregation were found in suburban counties surrounding Atlanta—these three included the seemingly integrated Cobb and Gwinett counties (Kruse 2005, 264).

In addition to grappling with emerging education and residential resegregation, the city of Atlanta has also shown uneven progress in city politics since the Civil Rights Movement. The government’s urban renewal projects of the 1950s and 1960s only exacerbated the city’s residential segregation, forcing many poor blacks to find new housing (Dittmer 1997, 107; Hale 2001, 26). The election of Maynard Jackson in 1974 as the first black mayor, however, is heralded as a major achievement for the city, as are the successive elections of several black mayors since. In building the multi-million dollar Hartsfield-Jackson airport, Jackson hoped to use joint-venture projects that would engage in affirmative action, aiming to award 25 percent of municipal contracts to minorities; however, in order to maintain ties with the city’s white elites, Jackson ultimately had to tone down his affirmative action rhetoric (Hornsby 2009, 244; Pomerantz 1996, 13). Moreover, some argue that Jackson used his identity as a black politician—theoretically maintaining a “black” position—to get the larger black Atlanta population behind him on pro-development plans for the city, regardless of whether these initiatives would actually benefit the black community (Hornsby 2009, 244). Accordingly, little economic development
under Jackson and the city’s other black mayors have actually “trickled down” to the black masses, serving to boost the black middle class instead\footnote{In 1973, fewer than 1 percent of city contracts went to minorities; however, five years later, it was 38.6 percent. At one point, 80 percent of all minority contracts in U.S. airports were in Atlanta (Suggs 2003).} (Hornsby 2009, 244).

While post-civil rights Atlanta saw at least a more visible black presence in city politics, race relations continued to inform policy in this period, maintaining both racial and socioeconomic status quos (Bayor 1996, xiii). Although Atlanta’s black middle class won better jobs in both private and public sectors after the Civil Rights Movement—as well as access to increasingly affluent black and white suburbs—“the black masses remained relegated to domestic and service employment… mired in poverty and its attendant poor education, poor housing, and inadequate access to good health care” (Hornsby 2009, 243). There is a very visible and very real contrast between the city’s public housing units and its surrounding bourgeois black suburbs (Cobb 2008). Composed of resegregated and racialized spaces, as well as widening socioeconomic and racial inequality, Atlanta’s story is, in a sense, not only a southern story, but an American story (Kruse 2005, 15).

**Primary Migrants in Atlanta**

But despite these and other struggles, Atlanta has experienced unprecedented in-migration in the last two decades, especially of young people. In the past 20 years, the population has doubled and by 2020 the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce projects that 2 million more people will move to Atlanta. From 2000 to 2006, Atlanta added an average of more than 142,000 people annually, resulting in a 20 percent population increase and making it the fastest growing metropolitan area in the
country.\textsuperscript{98} According to president of the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce Sam A. Williams, the city’s thriving airport, its third-highest concentration of Fortune 500 companies in the country, its research universities, and its pleasant weather distinguish it from urban areas across the nation, making Atlanta “the business capital of the Southeast.”\textsuperscript{99}

While the city attracts migrants of all ages, it is a particularly popular destination for the “Young and Restless” demographic, which is defined as college-educated 25- to 34-year-olds. From 1990 to 2000, this population increased by 46 percent in Atlanta, faster than any of the top 20 most populous metro areas in the country. Many of these young migrants are moving from big cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, which still have greater absolute numbers of “Young and Restless” adults; however, Atlanta is beginning to outpace these other cities, adding 80,000 migrants of this demographic from 1990-2000, while New York only added 35,000 in that decade. Perhaps partially due to this new in-migration, young adults in Atlanta are on average better educated than their counterparts in other cities, as 36 percent have four-year college degrees—as opposed to the national average of 30 percent.\textsuperscript{100}

African American primary migrants comprise a significant portion of this “Young and Restless” demographic. While the national African American young

\textsuperscript{98} It should be noted, however, that despite its popularity among migrants, Atlanta still faces many of the same economic problems as other urban areas. For instance, in the 20-county Atlanta metro region there was a 47 percent increase in foreclosure filings from 2008 to 2009 (Atlanta Regional Housing 2010).

\textsuperscript{99} Atlanta created 70,000 jobs in 2005, adding another 60,000 in 2006 to make it no. 3 in the country for job creation (Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce 2007).

\textsuperscript{100} All statistical information was taken from two Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce press releases from 2007.
adult population decreased by about 6 percent in the 1990s, Atlanta’s young black population increased 36 percent in the same decade (Metro Atlanta Chamber 2007). Just as with most migrations, males dominate the primary migrant stream, though there is a growing female presence among black migrants, which is greater than that among white migrants. Like their white counterparts, black primary migrants move to Atlanta for its affordability, its growing job market, and its warm and sunny weather. The prevalence of blacks among this new group of migrants to Atlanta suggests that there may be specific factors that influence black migrants in particular, such as black communities and opportunities that are possibly unique to Atlanta.

The social networking site “Black Newcomers Network” was founded in 1988 as a way for African Americans who have recently relocated to Atlanta to network through the site and to interact at organized events (BNN 2010). Primary migrants to Atlanta thus have opportunities to socialize with one another both on the internet as well as in mostly black suburbs. These online and on-the-ground ethnic enclaves, however, also offer insight into the ways in which migrants’ experiences remain spatially confined, amidst race and class tensions throughout the city.

Similarly, in speaking with migrants, many stressed that they had found opportunity and community in Atlanta; however, many also noted that they dealt with

---

101 Three of my four interviewees identified as female, while one identified as male. Thus their responses cannot be interpreted as representative of migrants of a specific gender, but instead have broader implications.

102 In 2008, the median sales price of existing single-family homes was $149,500 for the Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta metropolitan area; however, it was significantly higher in many of the northern metropolitan areas from which migrants move: $245,600 for the Chicago-Naperville-Joliet metropolitan area and between $365,200 and $494,300 for several New York metropolitan areas (National Association of Realtors 2010).
the same racial issues in Atlanta as they had elsewhere in the country, albeit in
different forms. Moreover, a complicated dialectic emerged between race and class,
as many migrants openly acknowledged the ways in which interracial tensions shaped
their daily lives, while simultaneously situating their narrative in a strictly middle-
class framework. One scholar locates this tension in black middle class ideas of
“racial uplift,” as in the “struggle for a positive black identity in a deeply racist
society,” affluent blacks have historically used “ideology of class differentiation, self-
help, and interdependence” in order to turn “the pejorative designation of race into a
source of dignity and self-affirmation” (Gaines 1996, 3). Although migrants are
taking part in a profound redefinition of select southern places, many assert a very
class-specific form of black empowerment, invoking barriers of class while
simultaneously seeking to break down barriers of race.

Motives for Moving: Hope and Faith in a Mecca

While 7 out of 21 respondents ranked “job opportunity” as their “most
influential motive,” 6 out of 21 ranked “large black middle class” and 3 out of 21
ranked “large black community.” 103 Taken together, more migrants ranked black
middle class or black community first than any other single factor in this decision.
While “job opportunity” and/or “lower cost of housing/living” were most often
ranked as a close second or third, the presence of a strong black community was
clearly important to many migrants. Not only do these motives set black primary
migrants apart from their white counterparts, but they also provide insight into how

---

103 See Appendix C for survey results. Given that there were 22 full responses to the survey, I have
chosen to present only quantitative responses (Appendix C), as well as a collection of qualitative
responses to one question (Appendix D). All other relevant responses are integrated into the text.
these migrants experienced race in their hometowns versus how they imagined they would experience race in Atlanta when deciding to move here. The two inform each other, as one’s experiences in one’s hometown or previous place of residence inevitably inform one’s perceptions of a potential destination—the two are often compared and contrasted when one considers the idea of moving (Lee 1966, 50). Accordingly, in order to fully understand migrants’ decisions to move and their expectations of strong black communities in Atlanta—as well as how these expectations now play out on the ground—it is first necessary to understand from where they are moving.

Studies on the New Great Migration have found that most primary migrants move to the South from northern, midwestern, and western urban centers, such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles (Frey 2004, 1). When citing these large metropolitan areas, however, it is unclear the extent to which these people are hailing from the cities themselves or from their surrounding suburbs. When newspaper articles quote recently arrived migrants discussing their journey from some northern city to the suburbs of Atlanta, this glosses over the group of people who already made the move from the city to the suburbs within their own northern hometown, and are now simply moving from the suburbs of the North to those of the South. Accordingly, my survey asks migrants to describe their hometown as urban, suburban, rural, or other. Of the 22 survey respondents, 40 percent described their hometown as “urban,” 30 percent described it as “suburban,” 15 percent described it as “rural,” and a remaining 15 percent opted for “other,” often writing in “small
town.” Thus while a significant portion do fit into the northern big city narrative, the majority deviate from that, growing up in suburbs, rural areas, or small towns.

Just as respondents’ hometowns vary by type, their neighborhoods also vary by racial composition. In terms of hometown, 45 percent of respondents grew up in majority-white neighborhoods, while 33 percent grew up in majority-black neighborhoods and 15 percent grew up in mixed neighborhoods with no clear racial majority. Interestingly, neighborhood demographics differed in migrants’ Atlanta residences. In terms of Atlanta neighborhoods, 36 percent live in majority-black neighborhoods, while 32 percent live in mixed neighborhoods and 27 percent live in majority-white neighborhoods. This shows a significant decrease in migrants who grew up in majority-white neighborhoods compared with those who currently live in majority-white neighborhoods, which could possibly suggest that migrants who grew up in majority-white neighborhoods specifically seek to live in either majority-black or mixed neighborhoods in Atlanta. There is also a significant increase in migrants who grew up in mixed neighborhoods compared with those who currently live in mixed neighborhoods, which might suggest that there are more mixed neighborhoods in Atlanta than in many northern areas or that migrants are more likely to live in these neighborhoods than the average Atlantan. The relatively even spread of racial composition in Atlanta neighborhoods also might suggest that the city is more integrated than the cities from which migrants are moving.

104 I provide pie charts of this data in Appendix C.
105 A remaining 7 percent checked “other.”
106 A remaining 5 percent checked “other.”
Numbers, however, do not tell the whole story. While linear comparisons of race relations between places are inherently subjective, some migrants did assert that they found race relations in Atlanta to be better than they were in their hometowns and still others felt that they were similar but with several important differences. Descriptions of race relations in migrants’ hometowns differed, but focused on the existence of several phenomena: subtle/hidden racism, residential and social *de facto* segregation, economic inequality, and white flight. Responses ranged from perceptions of harmonious race relations to the occurrence of race riots as recently as 2003. The majority of respondents, however, described strained but seemingly peaceful relations, punctured by great physical and economic distance between the races.

This idea of a façade of peaceful coexistence, underneath which lies hidden racism, has been prevalent both in media renderings of the New Great Migration as well as in migrants’ survey responses. This theme came up again and again, though in different language, as descriptions of hometown race relations ranged from “indifferent,” “strained,” “polite,” and “separate,” to “a little tension, but overall okay.” One migrant from Oakland, CA captured this sentiment exactly, noting that people were friendly and relatively integrated, yet races “still stick together” (Respondent 6). A migrant from New Haven, CT acknowledged the paradox of “closed ethnic communities” despite the integration of most schools (Respondent 18). Segregation, it seems, was a huge part of race relations in many respondents’ non-

---

107 In 2003, Benton Harbor, MI—a mostly black and underserved community located just across the river from the mostly white and affluent town of St. Joseph—erupted in violence and looting after a black motorcyclist, being chased by police, crashed into a building and died. State troopers were called in to stop the two days of rioting that followed the accident (Paulson 2003).
southern hometowns, which could perhaps have motivated a significant number of migrants to settle in mixed neighborhoods in Atlanta.

The size and status of many migrants’ home black communities contributed to this veneer of tolerance. One migrant from the majority-white area of Angwin, CA, wrote: “On the surface, everything seemed fine since we were the only African-Americans in town. Had there been more of us, I think things would have been less harmonious” (Respondent 15). A respondent from Milwaukee, WI highlighted the economic and social inequality pervasive in her city’s segregated black communities: “Did not see a lot of successful African Americans. Not many African American nice neighborhoods” (Respondent 24). The presence of small and often marginalized black communities, for many, shaped race relations in their hometown communities, contributing to the façade of tolerance.

Many migrants spoke about the challenges of growing up in the minority, across residential and educational settings. For C, who is from the mostly white suburb of Dover, DE, this meant not having a black teacher until high school (Interview 3). For A, who is from New Haven, CT and was one of a few students of color at a predominantly white private high school, there was an overall feeling of “being outside of, or not always feeling a part of, the larger group.” Moreover, A noted that while her school was for the most part receptive, there were always teachers and students who were surprised to see black students there. One professor, in particular, was uncomfortable around black students and issued offhand comments, prompting A to switch out of his class. Another time, A and several other students of color who were doing work-study for the summer were the only students assigned to
do grounds maintenance outside. While she is to this day unsure of whether the school actually assigned work-study jobs based on race, A noted that the following year the jobs were mixed up by race, after she and several classmates complained. Instances such as these were isolated, however, as overall the experience was not as “ugly as it could have been” (Interview 1).

Other issues with race involved segregated public spaces and complicated relations with the criminal justice system. A noted that when she lived in Boston, she felt that the whites she passed in public and in malls indicated through their body language that they did not want to interact with her (Interview 1). K from Benton Harbor, MI noted that when she was growing up in this mostly-black community she felt completely comfortable going across the river to the mostly-white, affluent community of St. Joseph for dance or swimming classes or to shop. Now, 30 years later, when she returns to her hometown and goes to coffee shops in St. Joseph, she can’t help but look around her and think, “There really aren’t any black people here.” Moreover, she feels the white customers around her stare at her as if to say, “Why is she here?” Additionally, K feels race relations in her hometown are deteriorating, including increasingly wide economic disparities between her community and the white and affluent St. Joseph just across the river. Moreover, K feels that whites are increasingly hesitant to go to Benton Harbor and blacks are increasingly hesitant to go to St. Joseph, as if the two races have become increasingly distant, both physically and economically (Interview 2).

H from Schenectady, NY, however, feels that race relations are improving in his town, since he grew up there in the 1970s and 1980s. The town now has a black
chief of police, a black city councilman, and a black governor of NY—H feels these things were not possible when he was growing up. Unlike K from Benton Harbor, H saw less spatial segregation while growing up in Schenectady where African Americans were (and continue to be) in the minority of a largely Italian American town. He noted that various racial and ethnic communities mixed in schools and in public spaces. The only racial tension H observed, however, was that between the black community and the police department, explaining that there were always a few racist police officers. Given that H had family on the police force, however, the relationship felt less strained (Interview 4).

Interestingly, H’s family hails from the South, moving up to New York during the Great Depression as part of the Great Migration. His paternal grandparents were part of the old black elite in Atlanta, his mother a graduate of Spelman College and his father a graduate of Tuskegee Institute. For H, moving to Atlanta was in a sense like moving home, given his family’s long and entrenched roots there (Interview 4). Similarly, A’s grandparents grew up in North and South Carolina before moving their families to Connecticut towards the end of the Great Migration. A’s mother’s side of the family picked cotton in the rural South, moving North for better opportunities—stories which A constantly heard while growing up. Now, however, several of A’s family members, including her mother, have moved back down South, particularly to Atlanta. One of the major reasons A chose to move to Atlanta—as opposed to other southern cities that she was considering—was to be closer to her mother\(^\text{108}\) (Interview 1). These stories illustrate the inter-connectedness of return and primary migrants’

\(^{108}\) This reaffirms Ritchey’s migration theory that proximity to family may be of special importance to black migrants (see chapter one).
stories, as many exist within the same family and influence each other’s decisions to move.\(^{109}\)

Growing up, H’s grandparents told him how they had imagined the North to be a better place. After moving to New York, they no longer had to deal with the constant threats of violence and lynchings that had characterized their time in the South; they were also able to form individual relationships with whites in the North that were less restrictive. For example, H specifically remembers his grandfather’s story of meeting a white man in Schenectady who taught him how to fly a plane—something he never imagined happening in the South. Despite the limits placed on blacks in the North, for H’s grandfather, his relationship with this white pilot embodied an important difference between race relations in the North and in the South (Interview 4).

Ironically, it would be a black pilot that would encourage H to move to Atlanta. H traveled to Atlanta for the first time in 1981 for a cousin’s wedding, which was performed in Mayor Andrew Young’s office. As a 15-year-old who had barely left New York, H was stunned at all the powerful black figures around him, to whom he had never been exposed in his hometown. He came back to Atlanta in the 1990’s for business, and was impressed by the many black-owned banks and all-black subdivisions he saw. Everything seemed so accessible to black people, and H immediately felt like this was where he wanted to be and where he wanted to raise his kids. When he finally moved to Atlanta in 1999 and began looking at houses, one of the first houses he looked at was owned by a black pilot: “I thought that that was the

---

\(^{109}\) Similarly, many of the migrants in Carol Stack’s *Call to Home* follow multi-generational family ties and kinship networks to the South.
most amazing thing. Here I was looking at buying a house from a black guy who was a pilot, and I knew I was not going to have that experience in New York, but I knew that this is an everyday experience I would have in Atlanta” (Interview 4).

While H moved to Atlanta to build a family amidst a strong black community, younger primary migrants moved to take part in the city’s large community of young professionals of color. C moved to Atlanta from Delaware in 2004, moved back to Delaware to complete graduate work, and then re-settled in Atlanta in July 2008 to start a career as teacher. C had friends in Atlanta and had visited the city many times, and knew that for “single people in my age group, people of color that were professional and ambitious, this was a good place to thrive” (Interview 3). The lower cost of housing, slower pace, and higher pay she could get in Atlanta were also contributing factors. Still other respondents stressed job opportunities and/or proximity to family members.

Experiences in Atlanta: Interracial and Intraracial Tensions

In reading survey responses and speaking with migrants on the phone, it is clear that many have found the communities and opportunities that they were hoping to find in Atlanta; however, a far more complicated picture of Atlanta emerges than is presented in many newspaper articles on the movement. Migrants noted the city’s persisting ideological, political, and socioeconomic tensions—both interracial and intraracial. Atlanta’s large and affluent black community, then, is perhaps the only feature that sets it apart from other American cities.

Although her experience in Atlanta has been mixed, C raved about the thriving social scene that she has found just as she had hoped. She noted that there
are events to attend almost every day of the week; moreover, she feels she runs into black professionals almost every day of the week (Interview 3). H, who lives in the mostly-black and affluent town of Stone Mountain, studied the data of his community in 1999 before deciding to live there. The average level of education, household income, resale value, and property taxes impressed him. In his everyday experience living in Stone Mountain—which he also chose for its green spaces—H feels he is surrounded by college-educated African Americans, many of whom own homes and are the second-generation (or more) in their family to graduate from college. He feels that these people have made a conscious effort to live together in a strong and well-educated black community, and is excited to be a part of that. H raves about the “normal landscape” of black leaders in Atlanta—a “heavy index” of black doctors, lawyers, corporate executives, and government officials—and the impact it has on both black and white attitudes, as he feels it sets a certain tone of expectations. For example, H noted that if he were to have a dinner party in which half of his guests were black friends from Atlanta and the other half were white friends from Schenectady, he predicted: “[my white guests would be] absolutely and utterly stunned at the qualifications and credentials of the black guests. Whereas in Atlanta it’s to be expected.” In Schenectady, H feels, the white guests would say, “Wow, I didn’t know that black people like you existed” (Interview 4).

C echoed this sentiment, identifying class differences between black communities in Atlanta and those in her hometown in Delaware: “[In Atlanta] you can go into $300,000 houses and see people of color, whereas it’s different in Delaware, the divide was very clear. There were very few black people that were
living in those kinds of houses” (Interview 3). Moreover, K finds that if she visits a coffee shop in Atlanta, unlike in Benton Harbor, she will see other black people, whether they are other customers or are working behind the counter (Interview 2). Additionally, A’s neighborhood in South Fulton-Camp Creek is mostly black, ranging from working class to affluent, and seems to be in a transition in which more wealthy homeowners are moving in (Interview 1).

Further, H noted that he finds that many of his black neighbors are extremely politically informed, in contrast to his experiences in black communities in the North. When he listens to black radio in Atlanta, he is increasingly impressed by how much local and national politics are discussed, as compared to the black radio stations he listened to in New York. Beyond the broadcast industry, when H runs into people at barbershops, supermarkets, gas stations, and other public places, he feels that his fellow black Atlantans not only know about politics but are also interested in and committed to discussing issues. This heightened intellectualism among blacks—stemming at least partially from the high concentration of black colleges as well as the prevalence of black mayors and other city officials—is very much part of H’s experience in Atlanta, as he feels there is a distinction between affluent blacks here and those in other parts of the country, in terms of education, travel, and work experience: “All-black communities in the North typically do not have the breadth or depth that I have found in all-black communities in the South”110 (Interview 4).

---

110 Admittedly, H noted, his perceptions of various black communities across the country are very much shaped by his differing experiences in them. For example, as a bachelor in Harlem, he associated with different black communities in terms of age and life stage than he does now as a parent in Atlanta.
The black communities of Atlanta, in many migrants’ experiences, are diverse, regionally and ethnically. H guessed that in his subdivision in Stone Mountain, 85 percent of people were probably from outside of the South, particularly New York (Interview 4). C noted that when she lived in Stone Mountain for a brief period, she noticed its ethnic diversity, as she lived near people of Haitian, Dominican, Jamaican, and West Indian descent (Interview 3). Two primary institutions, according to H, shape black communities in Atlanta: black churches and black colleges. While these institutions act as important affiliations for many current residents in Atlanta, they can “rapidly open doors” for new arrivals in particular (Interview 4). These institutions have historically shaped identity and community among black Atlantans and continue to do so today.

Differences in institutional affiliations, political ideology, class, and regional upbringing have the potential to divide people, however. While there is a significant gay and lesbian population in Atlanta, the city is still part of the Bible Belt in many ways. According to A, the black community can be socially conservative or traditional in this respect (Interview 1). Tension is sometimes seen—across and within racial lines—between homosexual communities and fundamentalist communities. Additionally, H finds disconnects within the black community between native Atlantans with the Atlanta dialect and recent arrivals who were educated in the North; he feels this disconnect can be at least as great as differences between black and white perspectives (Interview 4).

Atlanta has the third highest proportion of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people of any metropolitan area, at 12.8 percent, after Seattle and San Francisco (Gates 2006).
The black community in Atlanta is also very much fractured by class. A, who lives in a majority black neighborhood in South Fulton-Camp Creek, noted that she does not see much interaction across race and class lines, unless it is the occasional superficial mingling at public social events (Interview 1). In addition to minimal interactions, C cited actual intraracial class-based tension. When C first moved to Atlanta, she initially settled in Stone Mountain where she was excited to buy a house. After being broken into twice in one year, however, she decided to move to the safer, more rural area of Covington in Newton County, which she described as more diverse, 70 percent black and 30 percent white. For C, Stone Mountain was characterized by black-on-black crime, as she was surprised to hear how casually many of her neighbors spoke about being broken into (Interview 3).

Although H had no complaints about the crime in Stone Mountain, he did comment on the strong correlation between suburbs like Stone Mountain and ideas of middle class success. He feels that he got caught up in the idea of getting “the nice house in the suburbs with the two cars,” which influenced his decision to live in a subdivision that he now finds isolating: “It’s almost like the prize for the generation that made sacrifices that allowed me to be here, kind of a way of saying, ‘Thank you, I couldn’t have done it without you.’ Now we’ve done it and realized, there was something that we’re missing. We have traded what we knew in for stuff that we could get and I get a sense that there’s a certain desire to go back to something that’s a little bit more authentic than simply saying I got the house and the two-cars, and I think people want to get back to something that’s a little simpler.” As H acknowledges, affluent black enclaves like Stone Mountain emphasize material status
and wealth to construct a specifically middle-class black identity, perhaps seeking to
distinguish themselves from other, less privileged, sectors of the black population.\textsuperscript{112}

In some ways, H feels he has traded in proximity to Atlanta culture and
events—as well as recently built, green, energy-efficient and more manageable
housing right in the city—for “all the trappings” of spacious houses and yards that are
“just ridiculous.”\textsuperscript{113} Some of the disadvantages of living in H’s subdivision are the
long commute to work in the city—often lengthened further by horrendous traffic—as well as his neighborhood’s lack of sidewalks and abundance of over-sized houses. H’s subdivision not only cuts him off from community events in Atlanta, but it also
separates him and his neighbors from other—and perhaps less affluent—black
neighborhoods within the city. On one hand, H’s choice to live in Stone Mountain
has placed him in a community that is homogeneous and isolated by socioeconomic
class. But on the other hand, H takes a lot of pride in his mostly black and affluent
community and in surrounding his children with educated and successful black
neighbors (Interview 4).

Similarly, C’s experiences in black professional communities in Atlanta
function within a specifically black middle class narrative, relying on middle class
notions of respectability. C, who works at a school in which nearly all of the teachers
and administrators are black, feels that this overwhelmingly black staff has altered the
school’s professional environment. For instance, she noted that at staff meetings the

\textsuperscript{112} Similarly, Kevin Gaines writes that pre-civil rights black elites “sought status, moral authority, and
recognition of their humanity by distinguishing themselves…from the presumably undeveloped black
majority” through the accumulation of wealth and the emphasis of middle class values of thrift,
patriarchy, and social purity (Gaines 1996, 2-4).

\textsuperscript{113} H’s self-criticism here interestingly resonates with sociologist E. Franklin Frazier’s problematic
assertion that members of the black elite are ostentatious in their display of material wealth (Frazier
1957, 25).
principal would occasionally eat while running the meeting, which C feels she wouldn’t do if the rest of the faculty were Caucasian. C feels that the all-black teaching staff has allowed many of her colleagues to be both laid-back and unprofessional at times—due to the fact that they are especially comfortable with one another—in addition to making some of the authority figures extra hard on the teachers because they are of the same race. Moreover, C has found her principal to be excessively stringent with timeliness, almost to the point of creating a culture of fear among her colleagues, which she attributes to the city’s origins in the plantation tradition of having an authoritative “master” run things. She summed it up: “Black people here are harder on each other than other ethnic groups are. We are now the slave masters to each other; it’s quite sad” (Interview 3).

While C adeptly points to power dynamics that may exist within black communities, she may herself be replicating potentially problematic black elite ideas of social mobility. In asserting that her black colleagues would act more “professional” if they were in the company of white colleagues, she is both criticizing and reproducing the performance of middle class respectability among blacks, in which “black opinion leaders deemed the promotion of bourgeois mortality, patriarchal authority, and a culture of self-improvement, both among blacks and outward, to the white world, as necessary to their recognition, enfranchisement, and survival as a class” (Gaines 1996, 3). To one extent, C is calling her black colleagues out for possibly only performing professionalism in front of whites; to another extent, however, it seems C might feel professionalism should be performed to construct a certain class-oriented image at all times. This idea of performing respectability both
within black communities and in front of white audiences converges with black middle-class values of self-help and self-reliance\textsuperscript{114} to inform C’s claim that her black principal is harder on her black colleagues in expecting them to take initiative in being on time. Moreover, C sees this tendency towards strict authority within her black professional community as broadly connected to white-created master-slave relationships on southern plantations—perhaps another part of performing patriarchal authority to gain recognition and status (Gaines 1996, 3).

Atlanta’s plantation roots also impact interracial tensions, as seen in an incident in K’s daughter’s classroom, which illustrated to K the lengths that Atlanta still has to go in terms of race relations. When K’s daughter was in the fourth grade in Atlanta Public Schools—where the principal and one teacher were the only black staff members—her daughter’s white history teacher presented a lesson to the class on slavery. The teacher had the students complete an art project, for which they had to draw a diagram or picture of their own plantation, complete with a master’s house and slave quarters. At the top, they were to title the plantation by their last name, as in “[Student’s last name’s] Plantation.” When K’s daughter came home and showed K her plantation, complete with her own slaves, K was shocked. Another incident included K’s son’s sixth grade teacher telling him he was “going to get shot one day” if he couldn’t control himself and stop fidgeting. In both cases, K explained to the teachers what they had done wrong and that they had been insensitive, but found only superficial receptiveness. Interestingly, her children’s schools have had diverse

\textsuperscript{114} Black elites have historically emphasized the value of self-help in achieving “racial uplift;” however, this “orientation toward self-help” could be divisive among blacks, as it “implicitly faulted African Americans for their lowly status, echoing judgmental dominant characterizations of ‘the Negro problem’” (Gaines 1996, 4).
student bodies—roughly a third black, a third white, and a third Hispanic. While K feels the kids get along very well across racial lines, she has been deeply disappointed in the teachers, who she feels prove to her just how much the South still has to change (Interview 2).

K has also encountered racial issues in her work environment and in her neighborhood in Atlanta. Five years ago, she worked for a white woman who did not have a college degree but had presumably advanced in the company because of her race and her good looks, according to K. Although K had an MBA, she continually applied for higher positions within the company and was continually rejected. Once she noticed that many of the people in power had blonde hair and blue eyes, she realized she would never be able to move up. She filed a lawsuit with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the company eventually paid her to leave (Interview 2).

K lives in the predominantly white and affluent Cobb County, though she describes her immediate neighborhood in Marietta as roughly a quarter-black, a quarter-white, a quarter-Hispanic, and a quarter-Asian. Although there is some segregation, K finds that her area—particularly the older section in which she lives among people of all races—is pretty integrated. Still, during the 2008 presidential election, she felt surrounded by McCain-Palin campaign signs on many of her neighbors’ lawns. K noted that the few Obama supporters around her seemed unwilling to make their support known, herself included. K felt uncomfortable putting Obama signs on her lawn or on her car: “That’s when I really felt like, okay we’re still in the South and we’re still in a very Republican area, and strong
Republican; you wouldn’t want to just drive around and have an Obama sticker on your car.” K noted that a neighbor had put an Obama sign in front of his house, only to find one day that it had been taken down. K also didn’t allow her children to wear their inauguration T-shirts to school (Interview 2).

This spatialization of certain political ideologies is also related to white regional backgrounds, according to K. She noted that she perceives whites from Atlanta very differently than she perceives those who have recently moved here, primarily based on accent: “If I talk to someone white, and they have a southern accent, then I pretty much know what I’m dealing with…But if that white person has a New York or midwestern accent, I know what I’m dealing with [in a different way]. But that straight country southern drawl, ‘good ole boy’ tone, then I know where I am going to go, I know how they may be perceiving me.” When she moved to Atlanta in the 1980s, K was surprised to find the stereotypically southern closed-mindedness, which she noted that she still sees today, especially in the prevalence of “uneducated Republicans.” While K feels that younger whites are to some extent trying to break away from that generation—as she sees with many of her children’s white classmates—she wonders how long it will be before this really changes (Interview 2).

While K finds that racism in Atlanta can be overt close-mindedness, manifested in support for conservative Republican ideologies, A finds it to be subtler and perhaps veiled. She finds that southern hospitality can complicate racism, as many people seem to feel tension between being racist and being nice—as if it is more important to treat people with a superficial appearance of respect and kindness
instead of being upfront about the fact that they don’t like you.\textsuperscript{115} A feels that perhaps it was easier for whites to be overtly racist in her hometown of New Haven because of the smaller black community there: “In Connecticut, it is almost as if you had license to be racist, because who is going to confront you, the numbers are smaller, who is going to challenge you...though there were challenges. But in Atlanta, here you have to veil how you really feel, because you might work for someone of color, your boss or dean will be black, so I’m going to tolerate it and cover it up.” A sees this subtle racism in the stares she used to get from white people when she would go grocery shopping in Roswell, a predominantly white area in North Fulton where she used to live (Interview 1).

Just as K got stares when frequenting white businesses in the white town of St. Joseph, so too does A get stares when frequenting predominantly white areas of Atlanta. Many migrants saw Atlanta as more progressive than their hometowns—namely in the emergence of affluent black communities and symbols of black political power—but many claimed that Atlanta has the same problems as their hometowns: segregation, white flight, racial and socioeconomic inequalities, and both overt and subtle forms of racism.\textsuperscript{116} A finds social segregation in her university campus in Atlanta and residential segregation throughout the city and beyond it. A noted that segregation increases as you get farther and farther outside of Atlanta proper, and there are pockets outside of Atlanta to which “black folks just wouldn’t move, it’s uncomfortable.” But, there are also areas within Atlanta that A would not

\textsuperscript{115} For more on racism laced with southern hospitality, see William Chafe’s \textit{Civilities and Civil Rights}.
\textsuperscript{116} See Appendix D for an expanded list of quotes from primary migrants.
live because she would not feel safe, and there are areas within Boston and throughout the country that she would not move: “I knew a lot of people of color here, but I also knew of different instances, parts of the city that you won’t move. It’s true for Boston; there are places in Boston I would never go to. And in North Carolina too. It’s something you learn or you’re told or you experience, and you realize, ‘Okay that’s just not going to be a safe place for me’” (Interview 1).

The racialization of space in Atlanta profoundly shapes migrants’ lives, quite literally limiting the space in which they can exercise agency. In living or taking part in majority-black communities, migrants gain a sense of racial identity and affirmation, as well as access to cultural and professional opportunities. In another sense, however, migrants’ decisions to live in these spaces suggest that there may still be implicit and/or explicit restrictions on their living elsewhere in Atlanta. Choosing to live in a black enclave is, to one extent, an assertion of black empowerment; however, it also offers insight into the ways in which migrants’ choices remain spatially confined amidst persisting racial segregation and inequality. Given the individual and institutional factors that have combined to create and now perpetuate spaces defined by race and class, to what extent are migrants choosing their communities and to what extent are these spaces being chosen for them?

But by the same token, if black Atlantans with lesser means wanted to live in these migrants’ communities, could they afford to do so? Ironically, in building on spatially defined black middle-class communities, migrants participate in the spatialization of class, perhaps inadvertently. The communities to which they move, and the black empowerment in which they are thus engaged, is confined to a specific
socioeconomic class of people, potentially perpetuating class-based exclusion while simultaneously grappling with persisting racial exclusion.

Migrants’ experiences living in Atlanta differ based on the hometowns in which they grew up (which serve as a point of reference), the neighborhood(s) to which they move in Atlanta, their stage in life, and their daily experiences in work and at home. While participants in this research do not comprise a generalizable sample, it is possible to draw preliminary conclusions about primary migrants’ experiences. If, as sociologist Thomas Grieyn offers, places can be changed by those who live in them, then perhaps black people moving to Atlanta are participating in a profound redefinition of the South, or at least select southern places within it (Grieyn 2000, 466). In seeking out affluent black communities, primary migrants in Atlanta thus both respond and contribute to the transformation of race (and class) relations in these spaces. Although the spatialization of race restricts their movement, primary migrants find empowerment in black communities, which are ironically defined by the spatialization of socioeconomic privilege.
Conclusions

In moving South, African Americans in the New Great Migration are, in a sense, reclaiming a black southern past and redefining black southern places in the present. This movement and its impact on the South, however, are confined. Migrants tend to move to specific places within the South—particularly metropolitan areas and their surrounding suburbs—as substantial parts of the region still remain resistant to the symbols of black political and economic power for which cities like Atlanta are now known (Dawidoff 2010). Moreover, this movement is limited to a specific socioeconomic group—affluent blacks with the means to relocate to wealthy, majority-black communities, in which class privilege and middle-class values are also defined and confined by space. While migrants continue to grapple with interracial tensions throughout Atlanta, they also experience intraracial tensions in the city.

But the New Great Migration is more than a stream of people moving from one region to another—it is also a manifestation of several significant regional and national processes over this last century. The North, to which Great Migrants once moved, experienced rapid industrialization that was followed by similarly rapid deindustrialization within decades. The South, from which many Great Migrants once fled, transitioned from a white supremacist regime of Jim Crow to one with many blacks in political office and more residential integration than the North. The Civil Rights Movement has left an uneven impact on both regions. The northern cities that many New Great Migrants are now leaving are experiencing unprecedented urban decay in the wake of the recession—but the southern cities to which they now move have experienced race riots, white flight, and urban crises as well. Thus many
migrants are instead settling in surrounding black suburbs in the South, where they are a calculated distance from both northern and southern urban issues.

Media coverage of the New Great Migration does not do justice to the complexity of this movement. While this migration is certainly an assertion of black mobility as power, it is also a sobering reminder of the persisting inequities in this country, in the North and in the South. Just as the North never lived up to its image as a “promised land” for Great Migrants throughout the twentieth century, the South is in no way a genuine “promised land” for New Great Migrants today. This is true of most migrations, however, as migrants’ perceptions of their destinations are inevitably overly optimistic given that they are based on second and third-hand accounts from friends, family, and news sources in the destination (Lee 1966, 50).

With this thesis as a starting point, future scholarship on the New Great Migration should investigate the precise ways in which migrants’ experiences with race and class differ in the North and in the South. Future work on the New Great Migration should mimic Nicholas Lemann’s anecdotal case study of the Great Migration, and focus on specific streams of migration, such as New York to Atlanta. In connecting migrants from origin to destination, such studies will offer direct comparisons between migrants’ experiences in both areas, as well as anecdotes from specific local players. With such a local focus, scholars will be able to construct community-based narratives that further examine the role of community in African American migrations. Additionally, rigorous analyses of migrants’ experiences in specific southern cities will illuminate specific institutional and individual factors that restrain their choices of where to live and work in their new cities. Ideally, these
studies will be able to fully take stock of the ways in which this migration empowers blacks and the ways in which migrants’ regional and local choices still remain limited. The New Great Migration then becomes a lens through which we might understand contemporary racial issues and the ways in which black mobility still remains constricted.

Given that the mainstream media tends to focus on interracial tensions, scholars might also investigate intraracial tensions in the South and in migrants’ experiences. This could include an examination of migrants’ attitudes on how race and class function in their new southern communities. Studies might also look at how primary migrants’ middle class consciousness potentially complicate and/or reproduce traditional black elite ideas of racial uplift. Alternatively, scholars might focus on the experiences of black southerners—of a wide range of classes—who live in the cities to which migrants move, and their perceptions of the new migrants to their city.

Although the movement is still in progress, it is clear that it builds on the ways in which African Americans have historically used migration to resist oppression, to gain opportunity, and to build community. While return migrants are reclaiming ties to family and specific homeplaces, primary migrants are building on and taking part in already large affluent black communities. Just as the establishment of social networks and civic institutions—known as the process of ethnogenesis—was important in drawing blacks to Chicago and other northern cities in the Great Migration, so too is it important in drawing blacks to Atlanta and other southern cities in the New Great Migration (Price-Spratlen 1998, 515). Like many black migrants
before them, New Great Migrants utilize mobility to better their position economically, socially, and politically; however, given that these migrants have significantly more means than their predecessors, they are also able to utilize their socioeconomic privilege to achieve empowerment and opportunity.

While many migrants point to the ways in which race has shaped their lives, many simultaneously invoke class-based assumptions in their analysis of their experiences in Atlanta. In seeking to live in wealthy black communities, primary migrants both respond to and reinforce the connection between race, class, and space. The New Great Migration is indicative of the continuing legacies of interracial and intraracial divisions, very much defined by space. The movement proves that race and class have retained the power to shape spaces and communities in both regions, illuminating the complex intersection of race and class that must be taken into account in any understanding of “race relations.” Identity factors such as race, class, and region are still very much salient in the post-civil rights period and continue to shape the African American experience.

This is a movement of the privileged who are seeking to be surrounded by others of privilege who look like them, to have access to communities of likeness, just as Americans of all races have done. And while these migrants do seek to escape certain aspects of life in the North and the West, racism is not something they can effectively escape by moving to a different region. The southern places to which they move have been profoundly shaped by institutions and ideologies of oppression, by several supposedly “New South’s.” In moving to these still racialized and unequal spaces, migrants are not ameliorating the structures that have created such spatialized
inequality. They are not finding a “promised land,” but perhaps they are finding a “place of their own,” as much as may be possible within the limits of America.

The modern South, then, becomes a place in which many blacks now thrive, which represents a hugely important departure from the South of the Great Migration. In the context of African American history, the region, like much of America, now functions somewhere in between the explicit oppression of the past and the ideally free society of the future. Despite its convergence with the rest of the country, the South still holds special resonance for many affluent blacks, as a place in which they can find a sense of ownership and of belonging, albeit amidst racial and socioeconomic inequality. The New South has been reinvented. African Americans moving to the South reinvent it. In doing so, they reshape not just the South, but African American history.
Appendix A: Survey for Primary Migrants in Atlanta

My name is Miriam Leshin and I am a senior at Wesleyan University in Connecticut. I am writing a senior thesis in African American Studies on The New Great Migration, in which thousands of African Americans are migrating to the South each year, effectively reversing the Great Migration of the first half of the twentieth century. I am focusing my research on primary migrants in Atlanta—that is, people who have grown up outside of the South, but are now choosing to move there to raise families or start careers.

If you moved to Atlanta in the last twenty years, but grew up outside of the South, and identify as African American, I would greatly appreciate your participation in this short anonymous survey.

PLEASE NOTE: THIS SURVEY IS ENTIRELY ANONYMOUS. (At the end of the survey, you will have an opportunity to write your name and contact information if you are interested in being interviewed further.)

Thank you very much for your time,
Miriam Leshin
Wesleyan University

I. Pre-Atlanta
1. Where did you grow up? (City/town, state)

2. How would you describe your home town?
   a. Rural
   b. Suburban
   c. Urban
   d. Other:________

3. How would you describe the racial composition of your neighborhood?
   a. Majority black
   b. Mixed, with no clear racial majority group
   c. Majority white
   d. Other:________

4. How would you characterize race relations in your town?\(^{117}\)

II. Atlanta

\(^{117}\) Given that answers to this question can only be fully understood in the context of the respondent’s hometown and neighborhood, these are integrated into the text as opposed to provided in list form as an appendix (as I’ve done with question 9).
5. When did you move to Atlanta? Why did you move to Atlanta?

6. Please rank the following motives for moving to Atlanta in how central they were to your decision.
   a. Family reasons (to be near family or to help out family)
   b. Job opportunity
   c. Health/climate reasons
   d. Lower cost of living/housing
   e. A large black community
   f. A large black middle-class/professional network
   g. Proximity to HBCU’s
   h. Other reason: ______________

7. In what neighborhood in/outside of Atlanta do you live? What attracted you to live there?

8. How would you describe the racial composition of your neighborhood in Atlanta?
   a. Majority black
   b. Mixed, with no clear racial majority group
   c. Majority white
   d. Majority another race (neither white nor black)

9. How would you characterize race relations in Atlanta? How do they differ from race relations in your hometown? In what ways, if any, do you feel that race relations in modern Atlanta differ from those that characterized the region pre-Civil Rights?\footnote{See Appendix D for survey responses to this question.}

10. Would you be interested in being interviewed further about this topic via telephone? If so, please provide the following information: 1. Your Name 2. Your E-mail 3. Your Phone Number (This information will only be used for the researcher to contact the participant, and not as data for the project). If you are not interested, please leave this space blank.
Appendix B: Phone Interview Script

Hello,

Thank you for filling out my survey and for agreeing to speak further with me. My name is Miriam Leshin and I am a senior at Wesleyan University in Connecticut. As was clear in my survey, I am writing a senior thesis in African American Studies on The New Great Migration, in which thousands of African Americans are migrating to the South each year, effectively reversing the Great Migration of the first half of the twentieth century. I am focusing my research on primary migrants in Atlanta—that is, people who have grown up outside of the South, but are now choosing to move there to raise families or start careers.

Consent Script:
1. Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw your consent at any time during and after the interview.
2. All the information you give me will be treated confidentially.
3. I will not disclose your name, unless you give your express permission for me to do so.
4. When reporting on the findings I will use other names where appropriate in place of your name (e.g. coded/disguised names), or I will simply cite “Interview [#], Date.”
5. The information will be stored in a safe manner at all times in a place to which I alone have access.

Do you consent to the above conditions?

Thank you very much for your time. This interview should take about 30 minutes.

I. Pre-Atlanta
1. Where did you live prior to moving to Atlanta?

2. How would you characterize your hometown? Rural, suburban, urban? Racial demographics?

3. How would you characterize race relations in your town?

II. Atlanta: Expectations
4. When did you first starting thinking about and/or decide to move to Atlanta?

5. When did you move to Atlanta? How long have you lived here?

6. Why did you move to Atlanta? What was your primary motive to move? What were some secondary factors as well?
III. Atlanta: Experience
7. Where in Atlanta do you live? (Neighborhood/location)

8. What about your neighborhood attracted you to live there? Why did you choose to live there?

9. Please describe the racial demographics of your neighborhood.

10. How would you characterize race relations in Atlanta? How did you imagine them before arriving? How have you experienced them during your time here?

11. How do race relations in Atlanta differ to race relations in your hometown? How do they differ from race relations in the pre-Civil Rights South?

12. Given the reason(s) that you relocated to Atlanta, to what extent has your experience thus far fulfilled/accomplished that reason?
Appendix C: Survey Results (Quantitative)

2. 

![Hometown Type Pie Chart]

- Urban: 40%
- Suburban: 30%
- Rural: 15%
- Other: 15%

3. 

![Hometown: Racial Composition Pie Chart]

- Majority White: 45%
- Majority Black: 33%
- Mixed: 15%
- Other: 7%
6. Motives (top 3 in each category):\textsuperscript{119}
   A. “Most influenced my decision” (rank of 8 on scale of 1 to 8)
   \begin{itemize}
   \item Job opportunity: 7/21
   \item Large black middle-class: 6/21
   \item Large black community: 3/21
   \end{itemize}
   B. “Second most influenced” (rank of 7 on scale of 1 to 8)
   \begin{itemize}
   \item Lower cost of living: 4/17
   \item Large black middle-class: 4/17
   \item Large black community: 3/17
   \end{itemize}

There were eight categories to be ranked from 1 to 8. Given that this is a lot of information, I have chosen to present the top three categories chosen in ranking 8 and in ranking 7.

\textsuperscript{119} There were eight categories to be ranked from 1 to 8. Given that this is a lot of information, I have chosen to present the top three categories chosen in ranking 8 and in ranking 7.
Appendix D: Survey Responses to Question 9

Question:
How would you characterize race relations in Atlanta? How do they differ from race relations in your hometown? In what ways, if any, do you feel that race relations in modern Atlanta differ from those that characterized the region pre-Civil Rights?

Improvement Over Hometown:
- “There is tension but a lot better than my hometown [of Benton Harbor, MI]. Obviously the racial makeup of the government has changed since Civil Rights, but there are many racial issues in Atlanta, especially involving education and crime protection/prevention.” (Respondent 1)
- “Fairly good. Blacks seem to be accepted in all walks of life here- better than DC/MD [hometown of Bethesda, MD].” (Respondent 16)
- “I find the greater metro area is very progressive in terms of race relations compared to upstate NY.” (Respondent 23/Interview 4)
- “I noticed the African American community is the majority and I have not dealt with any racial issues since moving there. In my hometown (Milwaukee) I had to deal with discrimination from school teachers, law enforcement, and I noticed the lack of diversity in top positions in the workforce.” (Respondent 24)

Similar, but different/complicated:
- “I believe that relations are similar to other cities of this size, the situations of blatant in your face racism have decreased, but don’t go outside the city too far and while in the city don’t forget that ignorance lives everywhere.” (Respondent 4)

---

120 I have not included every response to this question. I omitted responses that were redundant and/or irrelevant, while still seeking to offer a breadth of responses.
“Relations in Atlanta are good as long as blacks don't take too many white jobs. This is no different from my hometown [of Morristown, NJ]. Modern Atlanta and pre-civil rights era racism are the same, just in different forms.” (Respondent 2)

“[Race relations are] strange. It appears that for an area that has been majority black, blacks would not be so far behind. I think blacks and whites are trying to still hold on to the pre-civil rights. People will not let go of the pre-civil rights and live in harmony. People (black and white) are people!” (Respondent 5)

“There is still an obvious sense of divide in some parts of Atlanta and surrounding neighborhoods. Class struggles are more apparent than race, however the latter still exists.” (Respondent 8)

“Better than before the 1970's; more ‘civil’ (pun unintentional); but issues are undoubtedly still there. Veneer of ‘new’ South gives some changes: intown there are many whites from elsewhere who are not directly part of the old legacy.” (Respondent 13)

“Race relations in Atlanta differ depending on which part of town you’re in. The area is much more black vs. white than where I grew up [in Angwin, CA]. In California, there is racism but it's more white vs. other than white vs. black. The difference between racism now and then is the extent of it and the way it is exhibited.” (Respondent 15)

“While many parts of ATL are integrated, there are still ethnic enclaves. Race in the South is laced with southern hospitality. Generally, people are cordial/polite even if they harbor racist ideals.” (Respondent 18/Interview 1)

“[Race relations are] separate -with tolerance in the city. Outside of metro-Atlanta, it
is different.” (Respondent 19)

-“I think challenged. It is almost as if it isn't discussed in polite company but the current mayoral race [Kasim Reed vs. Mary Norwood] has brought race issues to the fore. I think historically everyone understood the issues and how to navigate them. I think it’s a greater challenge today because race like sex is difficult to discuss. However, I am new so my perspective may not be valid.” (Respondent 22)

-“I found them to be very contentious in 1978 and a little better in 1987. I worked in the legal field and I was shocked by the lack of Black partners in the major law firms in 1987 when I worked in Atlanta, particularly in comparison with the number of Black partners in Detroit where I had previously worked. I was disappointed that in 1978 and 1987, I found Atlanta not to be very progressive. There was a lot of pretense about Black political power, but whites controlled everything in the town with the allusion of Black political power and progress. Also, the wages were extremely low, but I attributed this to the lack of unionized workers in Atlanta.” (Response 25)

-“Being from the north and living in a predominately Republican area, I am cautious when it comes to race. Folks are polite for sure. However, I do experience issues and insensitivity in dealing with my children at public school. I'm constantly bringing issues to teachers and administrators that walk a fine racial line. Feel that we still have ways to go in terms of race in the South.” (Respondent 26/Interview 2)
Appendix E: New Great Migration Statistics

Figure 1. Black Net Migration, U.S. Regions, 1965–2000


Figure 2. Top 10 States for Black Net Migration Gains, 1965–1970 and 1995–2000*

Source: Author’s analysis of 1970 and 2000 decennial census data.
*Maryland was among the top 10 states in both 1965–1970 and 1995–2000.
Table 1. Black Net Migration, States with Largest Gains and Losses, 1965–2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>91,425</td>
<td>75,746</td>
<td>80,827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>63,839</td>
<td>54,793</td>
<td>59,066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>44,654</td>
<td>47,685</td>
<td>57,009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>28,571</td>
<td>29,616</td>
<td>53,873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>22,518</td>
<td>22,295</td>
<td>39,015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>16,085</td>
<td>15,900</td>
<td>21,636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>10,536</td>
<td>14,456</td>
<td>12,525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>9,845</td>
<td>10,216</td>
<td>11,207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>8,924</td>
<td>9,238</td>
<td>10,143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>8,125</td>
<td>8,861</td>
<td>9,211</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Largest Losses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>-66,114</td>
<td>-128,144</td>
<td>-150,695</td>
<td>-165,366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>-61,907</td>
<td>-58,184</td>
<td>-60,120</td>
<td>-64,480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>-37,067</td>
<td>-37,320</td>
<td>-46,053</td>
<td>-55,238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>-29,732</td>
<td>-25,849</td>
<td>-45,272</td>
<td>-34,682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>-27,594</td>
<td>-20,106</td>
<td>-19,522</td>
<td>-34,118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>-26,884</td>
<td>-16,503</td>
<td>-14,600</td>
<td>-18,074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>-23,363</td>
<td>-10,428</td>
<td>-13,046</td>
<td>-18,024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>-17,704</td>
<td>-9,286</td>
<td>-10,084</td>
<td>-16,449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>-15,390</td>
<td>-7,843</td>
<td>-8,931</td>
<td>-7,263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>-11,586</td>
<td>-6,462</td>
<td>-8,332</td>
<td>-6,538</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2. Black Net Migration, Metropolitan Areas with Largest Gains and Losses, 1965–2000*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>55,943</td>
<td>32,764</td>
<td>74,795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>54,766</td>
<td>27,111</td>
<td>29,904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Washington-Baltimore</td>
<td>44,865</td>
<td>24,267</td>
<td>27,643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>26,699</td>
<td>16,034</td>
<td>17,611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>24,601</td>
<td>16,521</td>
<td>16,097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>18,792</td>
<td>12,460</td>
<td>13,368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Dallas</td>
<td>18,804</td>
<td>12,141</td>
<td>12,598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Houston</td>
<td>16,301</td>
<td>9,999</td>
<td>12,482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>14,064</td>
<td>9,939</td>
<td>11,765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>10,914</td>
<td>9,082</td>
<td>10,048</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Largest Losses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham</td>
<td>-12,177</td>
<td>-139,789</td>
<td>-190,106</td>
<td>-193,061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memphis</td>
<td>-8,498</td>
<td>-44,884</td>
<td>-69,068</td>
<td>-59,282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile</td>
<td>-8,017</td>
<td>-16,678</td>
<td>-22,482</td>
<td>-88,853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh</td>
<td>-5,003</td>
<td>-13,483</td>
<td>-17,395</td>
<td>-20,613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Orleans</td>
<td>-4,886</td>
<td>-12,030</td>
<td>-11,731</td>
<td>-15,095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery</td>
<td>-4,685</td>
<td>-5,871</td>
<td>-11,558</td>
<td>-18,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charleston</td>
<td>-4,395</td>
<td>-4,889</td>
<td>-10,374</td>
<td>-9,970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>-4,096</td>
<td>-4,576</td>
<td>-7,078</td>
<td>-7,772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lafayette</td>
<td>-4,061</td>
<td>-5,022</td>
<td>-5,503</td>
<td>-7,423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheveport</td>
<td>-4,047</td>
<td>-2,795</td>
<td>-4,987</td>
<td>-7,018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* Metro areas are CMAAs, MSAs, and (in New England) NECMAs, as defined in Census 2000. Names are abbreviated.

Appendix F: Atlanta by County

*Source: Sellect Realty, Atlanta, GA. [http://www.atlflatfee.com/](http://www.atlflatfee.com/)
Bibliography

Primary Sources

Interview 1 with primary migrant (A), Feb. 23, 2010.

Interview 2 with primary migrant (K), Feb. 24, 2010.

Interview 3 with primary migrant (C), Feb. 24, 2010.

Interview 4 with primary migrant (H), Feb. 25, 2010.


Secondary Sources

Chapter One


**Chapter Two**


Grossman, James R. *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great*


Trotter, Joe William. Introduction and Conclusion to The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender, edited


**Chapter Three**


**Chapter Four**


Angelou, Maya. “Why Blacks are returning to their southern roots; renowned author and poet finds peace and a new meaning in North Carolina.” *Ebony.* April 1990.


“In a Reverse Migration, Blacks Head to South.” *The Tennessee Tribune.* June 3-June 9, 2004.


http://www.nul.org/newsroom/publications/soba


**Chapter Five**

Atlanta Regional Housing. “Foreclosure Watch.”


