The Visibility of Migrants and the Permanence of Migrations: A Multistate Analysis of Black In-Migration to Southern Counties, 1985-1990

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The in-migration of blacks to counties in the American South from 1985-1990 is a potentially important compositional factor contributing to the *visibility*, or proportionate concentration, of blacks in these counties over this period. Theoretical and empirical work has made extensive use of the visibility concept in accounts of racial inequality; however, the implications of another feature of migration for racial inequality are not understood, namely the turnover inherent in flows and the corresponding permanence of migrations. We provide a descriptive account of county-level trends in black in-migration to the South from 1985-1990. For Southern counties, we distinguish the contribution made by black in-migrants to the visibility of blacks from the total time lived by these migrants on average, thereby detailing counties' *exposure* to black in-migrants. Our estimates of exposure can be used with measures of visibility to elaborate theories of black-white racial inequality.

BACKGROUND

Beginning in the late 1950s, counties in the American South experienced positive net-migration for the first time since the exodus known as the Great Migration (Long and Hansen 1975). Part of the reason for this sea change was the in-migration of blacks from northern cities following deindustrialization and the erosion of semi-skilled blue-collar jobs, particularly in the Midwest (Kasarda 1995). With material conditions in northern cities rapidly deteriorating, contingents of blacks—most especially, children and grandchildren of former northern migrants—initiated a return to the South in search of more favorable economic conditions and, for some, to connect with their southern familial and cultural roots (Robinson 1986; Stack 1996).

The in-migration of blacks to the South, however, did not match patterns of black emigration during the Great Migration. Between 1965-1970 and 1975-1980, gains to black net-migration were concentrated in two states, Maryland and Texas, with black net-migration increasing by 34% in the former and over 800% in the latter (McHugh 1987). The spatial distribution of black in-migration is important for two reasons. First, theories linking population redistribution and local racial inequality suggest that the relative size of a minority group catalyzes inequality-generating processes by inducing competition for resources, inter-group threat, and racial discrimination (Blumer 1958; Blalock 1967). Second, other theoretical perspectives emphasize the human capital endowments of migrants and their potential over-representation in the local labor queue as mechanisms for lowering inequality (Kornrich 2009; Vigdor 2002, 2006).

Each of the above dynamics rests on at least one of two assumptions—that black in-migrations are relatively permanent and/or a system of turnover in black emigration and immigration flows so consistent as to generate, for example, the observed increases in black net-migration in southern states detailed by McHugh (1987). From a demographic perspective, time spent by

migrants at destination is an indicator of potential *exposure* to migrants. In contrast, the proportionate concentration, or *visibility,* of migrants at destination offers no guarantee of inter-group contact (e.g., between blacks and whites) in the presence of extremely mobile migrant populations characterized by high rates of turnover. Such inter-group contact has been shown to reduce the incidence of prejudice and discrimination at the individual level (Allport 1954; Pettigrew and Meertens 1995).While the relevant theoretical and empirical literature on black in-migration and local racial inequality has demonstrated the implications of migrants' visibility (Beggs et al. 1997), the effects of exposure to migrants are less clear.

The notion of exposure encompasses two conceptual dimensions pertinent to inequality. First, because it summarizes the total time spent by a migrant in an aggregate unit (e.g., counties) on average, it captures certain non-relational processes tied to the context of migrant reception and integration which promote and/or dissuade changes in the size of flows and thus visibility of migrants.[1] Second, as we noted earlier, exposure also captures certain relational processes involving inter-group dynamics. This is to say, while some level of migrant visibility is assumed, the notion of exposure makes the further distinction between relatively permanent and impermanent migrations. To extent the migrants are a permanent feature at destination, one would anticipate, following Allport's (1954) thesis, that inequality in these areas should be low given higher probabilities of inter-group contact. According to this perspective, greater inter-group contact reduces the likelihood of inequality because of the potential for constructive social interaction between groups. These considerations suggest that the concept of exposure is an important element to consider in research on migration and inequality.

In this paper, we provide a descriptive account of black in-migration to Southern counties from 1985-1990.[2] In doing so, we provide the necessary building blocks for the theoretical elaboration of both the visibility and exposure dynamics as applied to black in-migration and racial inequality in the South. We estimate for each county in the South their exposure to black in-migrants, measured as the total time lived by black in-migrants on average. Distinguishing visibility from exposure allows us to describe within-group difference that result from the latter while holding constant the former. If there is considerable variation in counties' exposure to black in-migrants in places where blacks are similarly visible, this would imply that the concept of exposure might be meaningful for understanding processes generating racial inequality.

APPROACH

We use multistate (Schoen 1988) demographic methods to construct period increment-decrement life tables to track the age-specific transitions of black in-migrants to Southern counties each decade from 1985-1990. At the outset, we define the *state-space,* or the various transition options that black in-migrants have available to them. These include: any one of 1,425 Southern counties, the non-South which, consistent with the literature on the Great Migration, we break

[1] To take a familiar example, life expectancy is often used to summarize the mortality conditions among aggregate units (e.g., countries). In similar fashion, the exposure to migrants as proposed here is viewed as summarizing the conditions of migration at destination.

[2] These are the only suitable data for this purpose available from the U.S. Census county-to-county migration flow files each decade from 1965-1970 to 1995-2000.

into two U.S. regions (North and West); and death. Like single-decrement life tables, multistate life tables track the transitions of a *hypothetical* birth cohort through time (i.e., age). To track the transitions of black in-migrants we simply restrict all "births" to the non-South and track these transitions to each Southern county. Black in-migrants are thus treated in the life-table as born in the non-South despite that some migrants may have actually been born in the South and are properly considered black return migrants. Additionally, death is included to account for the fact that some cohort members die at each age.

The data used in this project are race- and age-specific, county-to-county migration flow counts from 1985-1990 available from the U.S. Census. The starting point for constructing increment-decrement life tables is to construct age-specific transition matrices. These describe the rates of transition between all pairs of states (e.g., from the North to a Southern county, from a Southern county to another Southern county, etc.) detailed above. In contrast to using life history or survival data to express the instantaneous probability of transition at each age, our data are in the form of occurrence/exposure rates one, five-year period. We therefore employ Schoen's (1988) general algorithm for increment-decrement life table construction, which assumes that age-specific transitions occur halfway through the age interval (i.e., linear).

At each age, we track of the number person-years spent by black in-migrants in each state. Once all members of the cohort have "died" (i.e., we close the life table), we sum for Southern county the number of person-years lived in that county across age. For each Southern county, the ratio of total person years lived in that county to the size of the initial birth cohort expresses the average total number of years that a black in-migrant is expected to reside in that county given the set of prevailing age-specific migration and mortality conditions. Similar to the single-decrement life table, this measure is a period life expectancy; however, in our case, it is conditioned on starting all persons, or "births," in the non-South (Palloni 2001). The above measure is intended to capture counties' exposure to black in-migrants, which is essential for elaborating theories of black-white racial inequality.

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