

Southern Historical Association

The Southern Exodus, 1910-1960: A Primer for Historians

Author(s): Jack Temple Kirby

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (Nov., 1983), pp. 585-600

Published by: [Southern Historical Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2208677>

Accessed: 26/12/2011 15:13

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Southern Historical Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Southern History*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

The Southern Exodus, 1910-1960: A Primer for Historians

By JACK TEMPLE KIRBY

FROM EARLY TIMES THE SOUTH CONTRIBUTED MORE MIGRANTS TO other regions than it received in return. The southern deficit was relatively small, however, until, following the census of 1910, flood-gates opened. In less than half a century nine million left for the North, Middle West, and West. Cumulatively the migrants were equal to 34 percent of the entire 1910 population.¹ Massive as it was the migration did not bring an end to southern history; it was hardly the equal of the diasporas of West Africans via the slave trade or of the ancient Jews.² Yet nothing approaching this population movement has occurred elsewhere in recent American history, and the migrants left impacts upon the South they departed and the regions they joined that have yet to be calculated.

Scholars and journalists have been aware of this phenomenon since it began, before American entry into World War I. The bibliography is enormous. Historians of the region have recognized that the migration is profound in its significance, but they have contributed virtually nothing to its measurement and little to its understanding.³

¹ "South" here means thirteen states—the old Confederacy plus West Virginia, Kentucky, and Oklahoma, but *minus* Florida, which is exceptional for reasons given later. "Migration" here refers to a negative net figure; that is, nine million more southerners left than non-southerners entered the region. The out-migration total is 9,067,000, aggregated from net migration figures by states in U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1957* (Washington, D. C., 1961), 45–47; and *Historical Statistics of the United States . . . : Continuation to 1962 and Revisions* (Washington, D. C., 1965), 9–10.

² The thirteen states' population still grew from 26,807,974 to 45,710,616 between 1910 and 1960, an increase of 70.5 percent and testimony to southerners' vaunted procreativity. Aggregates made from Donald B. Dodd and Wynelle S. Dodd, comps., *Historical Statistics of the South, 1790–1970* (University, Ala., 1973), 2–63.

³ George B. Tindall, for example, wrote nothing directly about migration in his magisterial *The Emergence of the New South, 1913–1946* ([Baton Rouge], 1967). John S. Ezell refers but briefly to migration (and then not to white migration) in his fine survey, *The South Since 1865*

MR. KIRBY, professor of history at Miami University, expresses appreciation to the American Philosophical Society for support of this research (Grant No. 1593 Johnson Fund) and to Robert Freymeyer of Gettysburg College and John Shelton Reed of the University of North Carolina for helpful readings of the manuscript at an early stage.

Rather, the study of migration has been the province mainly of sociologists, some geographers, and many economists. A few of the social scientists have carefully reconstructed events in chronological context.⁴ Most have been concerned with abstract "laws" of migration or with data collection and analysis for future policy formulation.⁵ What follows is a report for historians that contains a discussion of sources and their limitations, some modest suggestions on methodology, and a translation (in effect) of social scientific work to date.

If historians have turned too easily to handy printouts on the "Census South," or have been intimidated by complex numbers, they might be forgiven. For not only the literature but the primary sources on migration are extensive and dismayingly complex. The federal Bureau of the Census has long counted out- and in-migrants and published net aggregates by race. Some censuses also divide migrants by sex, age, and educational level. There are no census data on gross (as opposed to net) migration flows for the 1910s, 1920s, or 1940s, however; and the bureau has never counted individuals or used counties as a base for enumeration. (Resident populations and agricultural activities are registered by counties.) Rather, migrants are counted by states, and beginning in the 1940s, by metropolitan areas as well. This means that scholars may not study directly movements of the

(New York and London, 1963), 234, 458-59. The same is true of Charles P. Roland's *The Improbable Era: The South Since World War II* (Lexington, Ky., 1975), 28. In *The Burden of Southern History* (rev. ed., Baton Rouge, 1968), 6-10, C. Vann Woodward at best infers that a migration took place in the context of his "Bulldozer Revolution."

⁴ For example, Louise V. Kennedy, *The Negro Peasant Turns Cityward: Effects of Recent Migrations to Northern Centers* (New York and London, 1930); and Robert Higgs, "The Boll Weevil, the Cotton Economy, and Black Migration, 1910-1930," *Agricultural History*, L (April 1976), 335-50. Demographers Daniel M. Johnson's and Rex R. Campbell's *Black Migration in America: A Social Demographic History* (Durham, 1981) is historical in approach but rather thin and derivative. A better social-scientific survey is Flora Gill's *Economics and the Black Exodus: An Analysis of Negro Emigration from the Southern United States, 1910-1970* (New York, 1979). Most useful of all is sociologist Neil Fligstein's *Going North: Migration of Blacks and Whites from the South, 1900-1950* (New York and other cities, 1981). Fligstein is self-consciously historical in his approach and is virtually alone among scholars of migration in that he treats whites as well as blacks, in the context of agricultural conditions and other aspects of the southern socio-economic structure that provided "pushes." His study is restricted to nine cotton-producing states, however, excluding not only Florida but nearly all the upper South.

⁵ Typical are Richard J. Cebula, *The Determinants of Human Migration* (Lexington, Mass., and Toronto, 1979), which treats migration as an "investment"; and Donald J. Bogue and Warren S. Thompson, "Migration and Distance," *American Sociological Review*, XIV (April 1949), 236-44, which debates Ernest George Ravenstein's 1885 "distance law" as applied to the U. S. experience. The least usable work of social science I have discovered is Donald J. Bogue and Margaret J. Hagood, *Differential Migration in the Corn and Cotton Belts: A Pilot Study of the Selectivity of Intrastate Migration to Cities from Non-metropolitan Areas*, Volume II of Bogue *et al.*, eds., *Subregional Migration in the United States, 1935-1940* (Oxford, Ohio, 1953), which excludes from the "Cotton Belt" Alabama's Tennessee Valley counties, the Mississippi Delta, and all of Arkansas and southeastern Missouri; see map on p. 6.

rural population, which are central to the southern exodus. Following the 1940 census there was hope, for the bureau began an ambitious project to measure migration between 1935 and 1940 by rural areas as well as metropolitan ones, employing an elaborate map broken down into small, useful, homogeneous blocks. The project was halted by World War II, however; and when demographers reconstructed pieces of it during the 1950s the results were of little use to historians.⁶ So one cannot follow specific persons or families from place to place, or even faceless migrants from one agricultural crop area to another. One cannot study migration in a single year, either. Finally there is the problem of the censuses' credibility: some scholars estimate that the black population, particularly, has been undercounted by as much as 20 percent.⁷

Definition of "South" is crucial to counting migrants and evaluating the southern exodus.⁸ Most social scientists and historians employ the Bureau of the Census model—the old Confederacy plus Oklahoma, Kentucky, West Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and the District of Columbia—although hardly anyone seems satisfied with such a vast and diverse area. In that Maryland's and Delaware's populations were classified as urban as early as 1920, it would seem obvious that they, along with the nation's capital, might readily be excluded from the region. Whatever scheme united southerners (there is no consensus on this, either), everyone might agree they were statistically a rural and poor people until recently. Migration data which include these urban and relatively prosperous states atop the "real" South skew the southern experience, especially in overrepresenting white in-migrants.

Florida, a state of the Census South as well as the old Confederacy, also presents a problem. Since the early 1920s Florida has enjoyed rapid and rather steady population growth, most of it urban, along with a flourishing tourist and citrus economy. Florida's allurements, in fact, attracted enough white migrants to skew the statistical por-

⁶ See the censuses of population, 1910–1960; Gill, *Economics and the Black Exodus*, 10, 48, 117, and *passim*; and on the Bureau of the Census project and its aftermath, Donald Bogue, Henry S. Shryock, Jr., and Siegfried A. Hoermann, *Streams of Migration Between Subregions: A Pilot Study of Migration Flows Between Environments*. Volume I of Bogue *et al.*, eds., *Subregional Migration in the United States, 1935–1940* (Oxford, Ohio, 1957), especially 28. There is, however, a very complex technique for calculating net migration from county data: see Fligstein, *Going North*, Appendix C (pp. 202–209).

⁷ On the issue of undercounting the black population see Marcus E. Jones, *Black Migration in the United States, with Emphasis on Selected Central Cities* (Saratoga, Calif., 1980), 10–11.

⁸ David F. Sly, "Migration," in Dudley L. Poston, Jr., and Robert H. Weller, eds., *The Population of the South: Structure and Change in Social Demographic Context* (Austin, 1981), 109–36, especially 110–11, refers to "thirty-odd definitions" of the region. Sly's own "redefined South" consists of only seven states: Kentucky, Tennessee, the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi.

TABLE 1
NET MIGRATION, 1910-1960: CENSUS SOUTH (A)
AND THIRTEEN-STATE SOUTH (B) (IN 1000s)

	1910s	1920s	1930s	1940s	1950s
A:	-430.2	-1419.1	-1391.4	-1908.4	-2022.7
B:	-1042.2	-1589.1	-1147.5	-2472.3	-2815.9

SOURCES: (A) U. S. Bureau of the Census, *U. S. Census of Population: 1960*, Subject Reports. *State of Birth* (Washington, D. C., 1963), 1; (B) Thirteen-State totals from *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1957* (Washington, D. C., 1961), 45-47; and *Historical Statistics of the United States . . . Continuation to 1962 and Revisions* (Washington, D. C., 1965), 9-10. Figures in (B) exclude small numbers of the white foreign-born.

trait of the entire census region. Elimination of Florida, as well as Maryland, Delaware, and Washington, D. C., from the Census South, actually *increases* the totals of out-migrants in four of five decennial census periods, as seen in the following table.

The impact of Florida alone on Census South aggregates is apparent in the graph below. During a half-century when blacks fled nearly every other southern state every decade, Florida gained nonwhite population via migration. Numbers of white in-migrants are even more significant in skewing Census South net migration totals.

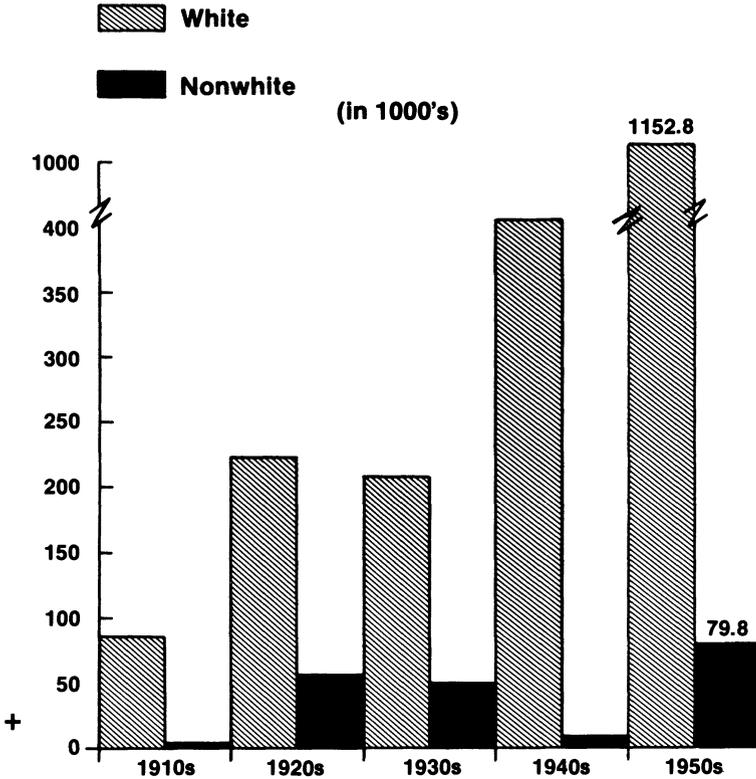
Twentieth-century Florida as a whole, then, is not a southern state; so it should be excluded from regional generalizations. None of the remaining thirteen states is a perfect representative of the preferred model. Two in particular—Virginia and Texas—present very irregular migration profiles. Like the rest of the region they were rural and poor until well after World War II, but both gained white population during most of the half-century under study because of spotty metropolitan growth, agricultural renewal, or the opening of new farm lands.⁹ A “typical” southern state’s migration experience would be shown entirely on the negative (lower) side of a graph; but as the following graphs for Virginia and Texas demonstrate, both of these states left checkered records.

Other than Virginia’s and Texas’s atypical infusions of white migrants, there are few important exceptions to the thirteen-state South’s half-century record of negative migration: Oklahoma gained whites during the 1910s, as did Louisiana in the 1920s and 1950s. Oklahoma and West Virginia gained a few blacks during the 1910s, Oklahoma again in the 1920s; and Tennessee actually gained black migrants, too, during the 1930s (probably rural Mississippians and

⁹ Generalization is based upon county tables, censuses of agriculture, 1920–1959, which is developed at length in Kirby, “Agricultural Souths, 1920–1960,” a paper read November 13, 1981, Southern Historical Association annual meeting, Louisville, Kentucky.

GRAPH 1

NET MIGRATION BY RACE: FLORIDA, 1910 - 1960



Arkansans into Memphis).¹⁰ Such exceptions notwithstanding, these states and Virginia and Texas (by virtue of Confederate tradition, poverty, and rural populations) constitute a credible and workable South.

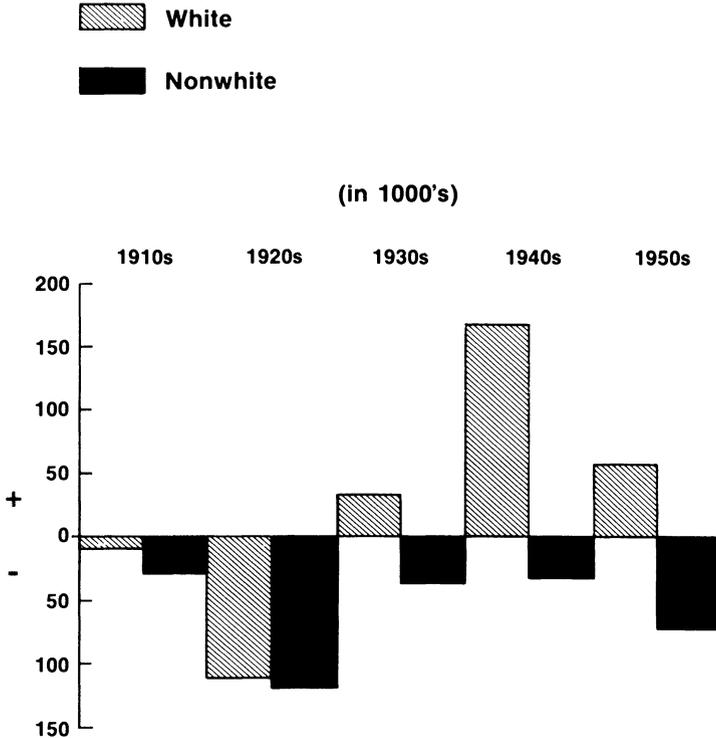
Once "South" is defined, the more important divisional criterion for migration studies is not states, but race. Proportionately more nonwhite southerners left the region than whites, and massive black flight, beginning about 1915, has always been perceived as more significant. This is overwhelmingly obvious in the attention scholars have lavished upon black migration. Owing to this attention, dating back to World War I, a rather good portrait of the southern black exodus exists.

Sociologist Louise Venable Kennedy first collated and interpreted data during the late 1920s. She connected the dramatic decline in

¹⁰ *Historical Statistics of the U. S. . . . to 1957*, pp. 45-47; *Historical Statistics of the U. S. . . . to 1962*, pp. 9-10.

GRAPH 2

NET MIGRATION BY RACE: VIRGINIA, 1910 - 1960



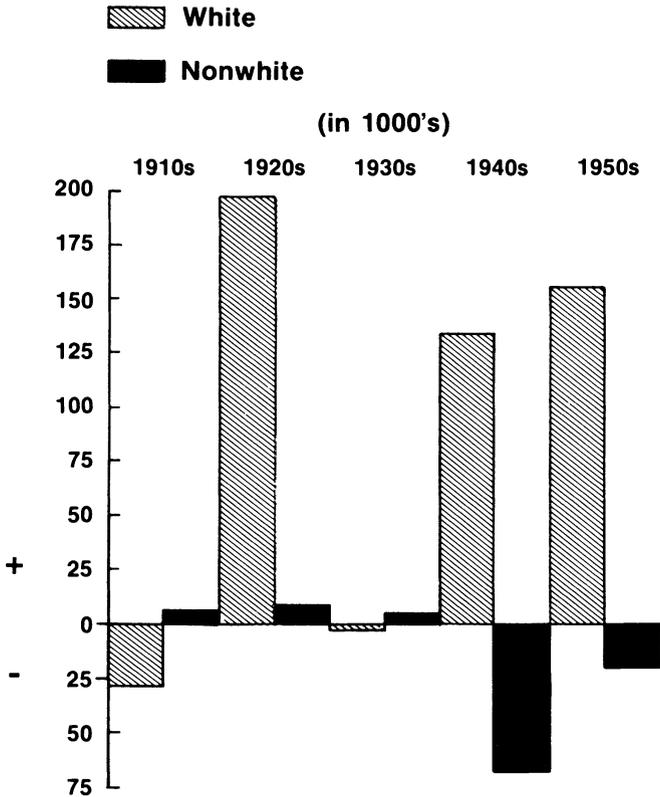
European immigration into the United States after the outbreak of World War I with the origins of southern black migration. By 1915–1916 there was a vacuum in the northern industrial labor market, creating for the first time since the Civil War a substantial “pull” to southern blacks. Long-standing racial oppression, including low wages and the sharecropping system, as well as the encroaching boll weevil, were more than adequate “push.”¹¹ Since the federal census was not taken until 1920, Kennedy and other scholars relied upon local and state Chamber of Commerce and other estimates that were published in the *Literary Digest* for 1916 and 1917 migration totals by states.¹² This flow of blacks abated only momentarily when northern industries adjusted to peacetime production in 1919. Between 1919 and 1924 the boll weevil advanced to the limits of cotton culture in North Carolina and southern Virginia, while New Era consumer production got underway; so “the Great Migration,” as it is

¹¹ Kennedy, *Negro Peasant Turns Cityward*, 43–44.

¹² See Johnson and Campbell, *Black Migration in America*, 72–76.

GRAPH 3

NET MIGRATION BY RACE: TEXAS, 1910 - 1960



termed, resumed. During the mid-1920s the weevil was relatively quiescent and migration ebbed once more; but between 1927 and 1929 the weevil surged again, and so did southern blacks to the North.¹³

The Great Depression of the 1930s reduced industrial employment and the flow of black migrants. Even then, 458,000 more blacks left the South than moved in. Many of them were probably sharecroppers and other tenants displaced by New Deal crop-reduction programs.¹⁴

¹³ Higgs, "The Boll Weevil, the Cotton Economy, and Black Migration," *passim*. See also Kennedy, *Negro Peasant Turns Cityward*, 71-80, 88-92, which reports growing northern industrial employment for blacks, especially for women who had been domestic workers. Arthur F. Raper, *Preface to Peasantry: A Tale of Two Black Belt Counties* (Chapel Hill, 1936), 209-10, discussed the varying experiences of Black Belt People with the boll weevil and migration.

¹⁴ *Historical Statistics of the U. S. . . . to 1957*, pp. 46-47; see also Howard Kester, *Revolt Among the Sharecroppers* (New York, 1936).

That migration continued in times of economic depression, however, is remarkable and may probably be explained at least in part by the interregional networks of families and friends established during the 1910s and 1920s. Earlier migrants, in other words, set up contacts and shelters that tended to perpetuate the flow even in the worst of times. Federal censuses tell nothing of such networks, only that there were rather distinct directional streams from subregions of the South: South Atlantic folk tended to move to the Northeast (especially New York and Pennsylvania); "Mid-South" people (from Kentucky to the Gulf east of the Mississippi River) decamped for the Middle West; trans-Mississippi southerners usually went west, especially to California. Minor variations are West Virginians and Georgians dividing between the Northeast and Middle West, and Arkansans and Louisianians dividing between the Middle West and West.¹⁵ Of individuals and families we know little, except where a diligent scholar has tracked down migrants as such, beginning either with the destination or community of origin.

Such a scholar is Frank T. Cherry, who as a graduate student in sociology during the 1960s studied the North Lawndale section of Chicago. Cherry conducted extensive interviews with ninety-four subjects who had left the South since the Depression. Almost two-thirds came from Mississippi. Most followed known earlier migrants, were married, somewhat better educated than blacks back home, and while most had difficulty adjusting to urban life and labor, most liked Chicago better than their southern homes.¹⁶ A more remarkable work of research is sociologist Elizabeth Rauh Bethel's history of the tiny South Carolina all-black community of Promised Land. The community survives to this day, but it has contributed many of its sons and daughters to the North. Bethel, a persistent detective, found some of them, and in retelling the stories of their travels, re-creates and humanizes early migration networks that persisted until recent times. One young man, for example, moved first to Atlanta, worked as a railroad porter, then after some years settled into New York City and a job in the garment industry. His home served as shelter for several Promised Land relatives when they migrated. Another example provides another route: Before World War I a married couple without land in the community set out for Mississippi, where the wife's family offered promises of opportunity. The sharecropping venture failed, but a few years later the couple and their children were drawn to Chicago by a labor recruiter. There the

¹⁵ Johnson and Campbell, *Black Migration in America*, 74-77.

¹⁶ Cherry, "Southern In-Migrant Negroes in North Lawndale, Chicago, 1949-1959: A Study of Internal Migration and Adjustment" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation in sociology, University of Chicago, 1966), 25-30, 82-83.

family pooled resources, acquired property, and finally moved to a black suburb. All the while they acted as migration contacts for relatives and friends both in South Carolina and Mississippi.¹⁷ Such pioneers prepared the way for those who left the South in less propitious times, such as the 1930s, as well as for the floods of the 1940s and 1950s.

By 1940 more than half (58 percent) of all urban blacks had migrated from other urban areas, often cities within the South. By the 1960s nearly all black migration was interurban. Demographers are fairly certain, then, that while many southern blacks were long-distance migrants from the beginning, most (especially after World War I) probably moved to northern cities in stages, beginning with southern cities. Indeed, southern metropolitan areas such as New Orleans, Atlanta, Memphis, and Norfolk-Portsmouth, Virginia, burgeoned with rural blacks throughout the era of interregional migration. These people were frequently pushed from farms by the mechanization of agriculture and pulled to southern urban centers by economic opportunity as well as by strong, in-place black communities.¹⁸

While great numbers of southerners black and white continued to leave the region, net migration for both the Census and thirteen-state Souths began a great change toward the end of the 1950s. The rate of out-migration began to falter; but more important, non-southerners' rate of migration into the region became significant. In the 1960s, as two demographers put it, "the counterstream . . . [became] the dominant migration stream."¹⁹ Thereafter, blacks on the move in urban America were not usually southerners at all, but probably second, even third generation "Americans."²⁰ Robert Coles, the child psychiatrist, lived with such migrants as these (both black and white) and wrote of them sympathetically in his remarkable *The South Goes North*.²¹

Historians are not alone in neglecting white southern migrants. The published literature on their odysseys is very limited. This may be because white migrants are less visible, often disappearing into

¹⁷ Bethel, *Promiseland: A Century of Life in a Negro Community* (Philadelphia, 1981), 177-81, 241-54. On the eastern stream of black migrants during the 1960s see Dwayne E. Walls, *The Chickenbone Special* (New York, 1971), a journalist's engrossing account.

¹⁸ Johnson and Campbell, *Black Migration in America*, 94-98, 105-107, 141, 169; Karl E. and Alma F. Taeuber, *Negroes in Cities: Residential Segregation and Neighborhood Change* (Chicago, 1965), 129; Jones, *Black Migration in the United States*, 101-103, 106.

¹⁹ Larry H. Long and Kristin A. Hansen, "Trends in Return Migration to the South," *Demography*, XII (November 1975), 601-14; quotation on p. 601.

²⁰ Jones, *Black Migration in the United States*, 106.

²¹ Coles, *The South Goes North*, Volume III of Coles, *Children of Crisis* (Boston and Toronto, 1971). Although Coles is a physician and scientist, his "method" (pp. 28-50) is collective biography (humanistic), accomplished by sensitively edited interviews both with children and adults.

TABLE 2
 OUT-MIGRATION BY RACE, 1910-1960:
 KENTUCKY/WEST VIRGINIA WHITES AND ALABAMA/MISSISSIPPI BLACKS
 (migrants as percent of racial populations at beginnings of decades)

	1910s	1920s	1930s	1940s	1950s
Whites	5.7	7.1	3.7	11.1	15.0
Blacks	10.4	8.1	6.2	20.6	23.2

SOURCES: calculated from Donald B. Dodd and Wynelle S. Dodd, comps., *Historical Statistics of the South, 1790-1970* (University, Alabama, 1973); and *Historical Statistics of the United States . . . to 1957*, and *Historical Statistics of the United States . . . 1962*.

TABLE 3
 NET MIGRATION, 1910-1960, BY DECADES
 AND BY RACE
 (in 1000s)

	1910s	1920s	1930s	1940s	1950s
Whites	-559.9	-764.4	-689.5	-1126.9	-1453.0
Blacks	-482.3	-824.7	-458.0	-1345.4	-1362.9

SOURCES: *Historical Statistics of the United States . . . to 1957*, and *Historical Statistics of the United States . . . 1962*.

white host societies in less than a generation. (By contrast southern black migrants, segregated and most noticeable, provoked alarm, curiosity, and research in northern universities.) A smaller proportion of the southern white population migrated, too, and this may constitute another reason for their neglect. Racial proportions may be well expressed by comparisons of black and white migrants as percentages of racial populations from two pairs of states, one Appalachian (white majority) and one lower South (black majority). Typical of the Southwide experience, a smaller proportion of whites than of blacks migrated each decade. Yet, net migration aggregates for the thirteen-state South reveal that white migrants were more numerous than blacks in three of five decades. The grand totals for the half-century are whites, 4,593,700, and blacks, 4,473,300—or 120,400 more white migrants, enough to populate a sizable city.

There does not yet exist a historical synthesis that traces these migrants and explains their journeys by decades and by “pushes” and “pulls.” Instead, one must read of the mechanizations of agriculture (1930s onward) and of coal mining (especially the 1940s and 1950s) to find only a broad context. The 1910s and 1920s are particularly mysterious. Whites were not driven from their homelands by the racial oppression that pushed blacks. One must assume that economic pushes and pulls comparable to those affecting blacks also

drove out whites—1,324,300 of them—even before the Great Depression. The boll weevil, continued failures of white (as well as black) farmers, and the spectacular overproduction of children everywhere in the South must have pushed whites as much, or nearly as much, as blacks.²²

The only well-known southern white migrants are the “Okies.” This is owing not to scholarly attention (until recently), but to John Steinbeck’s novel, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), Carey McWilliams’s exposé of California agriculture, *Factories in the Field*, published almost simultaneously, and to an excellent and popular film version of Steinbeck’s book. Unlike Steinbeck’s Joad family, most migrants from Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri (collectively, “Okies”) were not hard-up former farm owners but tenants of varying classes shut out of homes and work by the process of mechanization ongoing since the 1920s and by New Deal crop reductions. Few migrants came from those parts of the southern plains affected by the infamous dust storms, either. Rather, landless rural folk were first attracted to the cotton fields of Pinal County, Arizona, and Kern County, California, by labor recruiters. Once Route 66 was discovered and the interpersonal and family networks established, a great migration stream began to flow. During the 1930s about 100,000 Oklahomans became Californians. The best estimate of the number of migrants to the West from all four “Okie” states is 350,000, nearly all white.²³

Before the “Okies” left farm work for city jobs during World War II they were as visible and oppressed as a white minority might be. “Okie” (as well as “Arkie” and “Texie”) was a slur word. The migrants lived in cars, in tents, and in tin shacks by irrigation ditch banks on company property for six months to a year. Then on to garages and barns, and on to jerry-built shacks, which were gradually improved into suburbs of sorts—“Little Oklahomas” on the outskirts of Bakersfield, Delano, Shafter, and so on. Their children, like those of black migrants elsewhere, fell behind in school and became habitual truants and fighters. Natives thought “Okies” innately inferior, a transplanted “poor white trash” prone to violence, alcoholism, and incest. Legislatures both in Arizona and California discriminated

²² A very general summary of white migration is to be found in Lewis M. Killian, *White Southerners* (New York, 1970), 91–119. See also Chap. VI: “Migration/Urbanization,” in J. Wayne and Dorothy S. Flynt, comps., *Southern Poor Whites: A Selected Annotated Bibliography of Published Sources* (New York, 1981). Fligstein, *Going North*, 93–114, is convinced that whites migrated during 1910–1930 for the same reasons (economic) that blacks left, although his evidence is inferential.

²³ Walter J. Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration* (Westport, Conn., and London, 1973), 6, 10, 15, 20, 201–10; Carey McWilliams, *Ill Fares the Land: Migrants and Migratory Labor in the United States* (Boston, 1942), 13–15, 25–26, 32, 72–75, 194–96, 247–56.

against migrants in welfare residence requirements, and in 1939 a sign was placed in a San Joaquin Valley theater, "Negroes and Okies Upstairs." Carey McWilliams, a Los Angeles attorney and journalist, wrote sympathetically of these trans-Mississippi southerners in *Factories in the Field* (1939) and again in his masterful study of migratory farm workers, *Ill Fares the Land* (1942), but "Okies" did not find a fair and careful historian-scholar until Walter J. Stein's *California and the Dust Bowl Migration* appeared in 1973.²⁴

The white masses who moved to the Northeast and Middle West have no historian, although several sociologists and geographers have done fine studies of migrants in a few northern communities. Research on these migrations is confounded by many problems: the large numbers of migrants, the five decades of their travels, the Census Bureau's method of identifying migrants by state of birth rather than by county, and the persistent Yankee practice of referring to all working-class white southern newcomers as "hillbillies," a term inappropriate for most—and as stigmatizing as "Okie" in the West. Lewis Killian, who studied "hillbilly" migrants in Chicago during the late 1940s, estimated that no more than 20 percent of Kentucky newcomers to Illinois were Appalachian highlanders. Another investigator found that Detroit's white southerners included no more than 30 percent highlanders.²⁵

Even Appalachia is an unworkable basis for study and synthesis. Much as scholars (and politicians) would like to treat the southern highlands as a coherent and homogeneous subregion, they are not—either culturally or as a source of migrants. Appalachia is huge and complex, and as demographers have demonstrated, its migratory streams took several directions, not all of them northward.²⁶ The remainder of the South is no less diverse culturally, and considering the inadequacies of the censuses for migration research, perhaps it is no wonder that so little work on the sources and streams of the migrants has been accomplished.

So one is left with a number of social profiles of white migrants in their new Middle Western communities. Most important are Killian's dissertation on Chicago, Todd Gitlin and Nanci Hollander's *Uptown*:

²⁴ McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (Boston, 1939); Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration*, 51–63, 126–27; quotation on p. 63.

²⁵ Killian, *White Southerners*, 102–103. The references to his chapter on migration include valuable journalistic studies of "hillbillies" in Great Lakes cities. See also Killian, "The Adjustment of Southern White Workers to Northern Urban Norms," *Social Forces*, XXXII (October 1953), 66–69; and James S. Brown and George A. Hillery, Jr., "The Great Migration, 1940–1960," in Thomas R. Ford, ed., *The Southern Appalachian Region: A Survey* (Lexington, Ky., 1962), 76–78.

²⁶ George A. Hillery, Jr., James S. Brown, and Gordon F. De Jong, "Migration Systems of the Southern Appalachians: Some Demographic Observations," *Rural Sociology*, XXX (March 1965), 33–48.

Poor Whites in Chicago, the chapter on Detroit's migrants in historian Alan Clive's *State of War: Michigan in World War II*, and sociologists Gene B. Petersen, Laure M. Sharp, and Thomas F. Drury's *Southern Newcomers to Northern Cities: Work and Social Adjustment in Cleveland*. There are also several unpublished studies of Appalachian migrants in industrial Butler County, Ohio, (just north of Cincinnati), which collectively portray highland migrants and their environments well.²⁷

Ohio stands alongside and directly above the upper part of the southern Appalachians and has been the principal target of genuine hillbilly migration. By World War I much of the highlands' timber had been cut and shipped, many coal mines were already worked out, and its poor, rocky soil would support little more than subsistence agriculture. Yet highlanders' human reproduction rate continued as the highest in the nation. In 1940, when 1,000 statistical American women of child-bearing age bore 73.7 children, 1,000 women of Wolfe County, Kentucky, birthed 174.3.²⁸ Ohio received the huge surpluses. As early as 1930, 54,043 Tennesseans, 206,353 Kentuckians, and 130,363 West Virginians were living in Ohio. The 1940 census figures are much smaller because the Depression slowed migration and because the bureau counted only people who had lived in another state in 1935 (instead of 1930). But the 1950 and 1960 censuses reported results of enormous continued flows to Ohio from all three mountain states: Tennessee—77,280 (1950) and 119,388 (1960); Kentucky—301,500 (1950) and 409,059 (1960); and West Virginia—190,000 (1950) and 311,134 (1960).²⁹ So by 1960 there

²⁷ Killian, "Southern White Laborers in Chicago's West Side" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation in sociology, University of Chicago, 1950). Gitlin and Hollander, *Uptown: Poor Whites in Chicago* (New York, Evanston, and London, 1970), is a sensitive and impressionist work based largely upon the interview/oral-history method, by two activist members of Students for Democratic Society. Clive's brief chapter (pp. 170–84) in *State of War: Michigan in World War II* (Ann Arbor, 1979) is not offered as a definitive study of southern migrants in the Detroit area. Petersen *et al.*, *Southern Newcomers to Northern Cities: Work and Social Adjustment in Cleveland* (New York and London, 1977), is an able social-scientific study, but its subjects are primarily post-1960 migrants, most of whom arrived in Cleveland from southern cities, not farms. Additional useful published works (some not very accessible) on mountaineer migrants are: William W. Philliber and Clyde B. McCoy, eds., *The Invisible Minority: Urban Appalachians* (Lexington, Ky., 1981), which contains chapters on migration; the special "Urban Appalachians" issue of *Mountain Life and Work*, LII (August 1976); John D. Photiadis, *West Virginians in Their Own State and in Cleveland, Ohio* (Morgantown, 1970); and Dan M. McKee and Phillip J. Obermiller, *From Mountain to Metropolis: Urban Appalachians in Ohio* (Cincinnati, 1978). On Butler County see below and notes 28, 32, and 34.

²⁸ John L. Thompson, "Industrialization in the Miami Valley: A Case Study of Interregional Labor Migration" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation in geography, University of Wisconsin, 1956), 126.

²⁹ U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930*. Volume II, *General Report: Statistics by Subjects* (Washington, D. C., 1933), Table 21, "Native Population of Each Division and State, By Division and State of Birth: 1930," pp. 155–56; _____, *United States Census of Population: 1950*, Special Report No. 4A, *State of Birth* (Washington, D. C., 1953), Table 13, "Native Population of Each Division and State, By Division and

lived in the Buckeye State 839,581 people born in the nearby South, the overwhelming majority of them highlanders.

They appeared and mingled in all parts of the state. During the 1920s and 1930s, for example, an agricultural corporation specializing in onion production in northwestern Ohio recruited West Virginians and especially Kentuckians (most from one county, Magoffin) as laborers. Many of them remained in Hardin County, Ohio.³⁰ Most West Virginians apparently migrated to the nearby steel and rubber industrial cities of northeastern Ohio. Kentucky and Tennessee mountaineers met in Columbus, Cleveland, Lorain, and Toledo. But the industrial towns of southern Ohio—Ironton, Portsmouth, Chilli-cothe, Dayton, Middletown, Hamilton, Cincinnati—were favorites with eastern Kentuckians because of these cities' proximity to the homeland.³¹

Their migration to Ohio apparently began (like the black exodus) with recruitment. One witness in Hamilton reported that Kentuckians were brought up to help clear debris following the 1913 Miami River flood. Then from 1915 to 1917, when new European immigrant laborers were no longer available, the Champion Paper Company of Hamilton sent recruiters to the mountains, then special trains to transport workers to the plant. The Lorillard Tobacco Company of Middletown (just north of Hamilton) probably also recruited.³² Armco Steel of Middletown and Champion Paper actively encouraged the stem-family pattern of migration. Geographer John L. Thompson confirmed this during the 1950s: The companies recruited in specific Kentucky counties, Champion in five, Armco in another five primarily. Inside Armco's plant former Kentucky neighbors worked in the same departments. A sign over a doorway between departments read, "Leave Morgan County and Enter Wolfe County." On weekends these Ohio branches returned to family stems in Morgan, Wolfe, Clay, or Laurel and reported on job prospects at the plants in Hamilton and Middletown. The companies gave preference to members of employees' families in hiring new workers. Thus, migration did not so much destroy neighborhoods and families as transport them.³³

State of Birth: 1950," p. 4A-22; _____, *U. S. Census of Population: 1960*, Subject Report No. 2A, *State of Birth* (Washington, D. C., 1961), Table 18, "Native Population of Each Region, Division, and State, By Region, Division, and State of Birth: 1960," pp. 22-23.

³⁰ McWilliams, *Ill Fares the Land*, 130-37.

³¹ Harry K. Schwarzweller, James S. Brown, and J. J. Mangalam, *Mountain Families in Transition: A Case Study of Appalachian Migration* (University Park, Pa., and London, 1971), 73-118 and *passim*.

³² Thompson, "Industrialization in the Miami Valley," 136-39; William D. Worley, "Social Characteristics and Participation Patterns of Rural Migrants in an Industrial Community" (unpublished M.A. thesis in sociology, Miami University, 1961), 49.

³³ Thompson, "Industrialization in the Miami Valley," 132-35; Schwarzweller, Brown, and Mangalam, *Mountain Families in Transition*, 96-97. The stem-family pattern also describes

Family and friends sustained hillbillies in the Ohio environment where, as in California and Chicago, working-class white southern migrants were scorned. In southern Ohio natives favored "Briar" (or "Briarhopper") over hillbilly. During the Depression "Briars" took scarce jobs from "decent" people, shunned underwear and shoes, knifed one another like blacks, and lived in filth and ignorance. "Briar" jokes became fashionable: "The hot-air registers were recommended . . . as built-in spittoons, the bathtub . . . as a convenience for storing ashes, and the commode . . . as a fine spring on the second floor." In truth, as a sociology student discovered early in the 1940s, migrant children in Hamilton *were* often truants, their families were disproportionately represented on welfare rolls, and migrant married couples split more often than natives.³⁴ A sociologist who studied mountain-born Cincinnatians during the mid-1970s concluded that Appalachian migrants (and their children) were maladjusted and "little more assimilated . . . now than they were when first coming to the area."³⁵ If this judgment is correct (I think it harsh and dubious) it would not appear an adequate basis for a generalization. For most Kentuckians in Hamilton and other Ohio towns, like the "Okies" of Bakersfield, improved their statuses rapidly, dispersing from slums to good working- and middle-class neighborhoods. By the 1960s middle-class *arrivistes* had founded a prestigious social and public-service organization called the "O'Tucks" — Ohioans from Kentucky.³⁶

There is only one long, published study of white migrants from any part of the South that examines the entire process of migration, from the old communities through adjustment in the new: Harry Schwarzweiler, James S. Brown, and J. J. Mangalam, *Mountain Fami-*

the family of country singer Loretta Lynn in Wabash, Indiana. Her father followed friends and relatives to Wabash, then returned to Johnson County, Kentucky. Her mother then found a job in Wabash, established a home, and was followed by the remainder of the family. Loretta Lynn with George Vecsey, *Loretta Lynn: Coal Miner's Daughter* (Chicago, 1976), 94–95. See also Richard A. Ball, "The Southern Appalachian Folk Subculture as a Tension-Reducing Way of Life," in John D. Photiadis and Harry K. Schwarzweiler, eds., *Change in Rural Appalachia: Implications for Action Programs* (Philadelphia, 1970), 69–84.

³⁴ Raymond P. Hutchens, "Kentuckians in Hamilton: A Study of South-born Migrants in an Industrial City" (unpublished M. A. thesis in sociology, Miami University, 1942), 4–5, 9–11, 111–14. Humor at hillbilly migrants' expense was common in Michigan as well: see Clive, *State of War*, 175–76.

³⁵ William W. Philliber, *Appalachian Migrants in Urban America: Cultural Conflict or Ethnic Group Formation?* (New York, 1981), 36, 56, 86, 99, 111–20.

³⁶ Petersen *et al.*, in *Southern Newcomers to Northern Cities*, did not study Cleveland migrants in the same manner Philliber surveyed Cincinnatians; but insofar as their work may be compared with Philliber's, their Cleveland findings do not confirm Philliber's grim generalization on the Appalachians' adjustment to Ohio cities. See also Hutchens, "Kentuckians in Hamilton," 111–14; Worley, "Social Characteristics and Participation Patterns," 56, 59–60, 89–92, 102–109; and Thompson, "Industrialization in the Miami Valley," 139–45. Ercel Eaton, a Kentucky-born writer for the *Hamilton Journal*, has anthologized her nostalgic newspaper features in *Appalachian Yesterdays* (Hamilton, Ohio, 1982).

lies in Transition: A Case Study of Appalachian Migration (1971). A work of sociology, it is a model (like Bethel's *Promiseland*) for historians as well. The appearance of *Mountain Families* culminated what sociologists term a "longitudinal" project that began in the early 1940s, when Schwarzweller and company began to investigate an eastern Kentucky hamlet they called "Beech Creek." Over the ensuing twenty-odd years they kept in touch and followed many natives as migrants into southern Ohio. As "Beech Creek" dwindled from more than a hundred households to about forty the Kentuckians established many of their families and neighbors in many Ohio cities, all the while maintaining contacts with what remained of family stems back home. The sociologists were thus able to confirm on either side of the Ohio River the stem-family mode of migration described much earlier in Europe, and piecemeal and impressionistically among black and white southerners in their moves about the United States.

The tragedy of migration scholarship is that only "Beech Creek" and its northern branches have been studied so long and well. Elizabeth Bethel's labor on *Promised Land's* blacks focuses upon the southern base. John Thompson's dissertation examines branches in the northern workplace. Robert Coles wrote brilliantly but impressionistically of scattered branches in several northern centers. No one other than Thompson (to my knowledge) has sifted the personnel records of northern industries to determine local origins of large, coherent groups of migrants. The migrants have now grown old, many have ascended socially and dispersed; and few (if any) companies keep such personnel records today.³⁷ The ideal history of the great southern exodus—especially of the whites—may not be possible. One may only hope that the ongoing oral-history movement ultimately will produce enough migrant testimony to permit a more complete reconstruction of this complex phenomenon.³⁸

³⁷ Thompson to the author, June 23, 1982.

³⁸ J. Wayne Flynt collected a few migrant oral histories for the Samford University Oral History Program (Birmingham), and reported them in *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites* (Bloomington and London, 1979), 138–41. The Appalachian Oral History Project and the Marshall University Appalachian Oral History Collection include a few interviews with migrants; both collections are available on microfilm. Unpublished oral histories of varying quality may sometimes be acquired through the history faculties of middle western colleges such as the Middletown Campus of Miami University. The most promising work on farm-to-factory migration concerns not travel to the North but resettlement in southern industrial centers. See the Samford University Oral History Program, the Carrboro Project at the University of North Carolina Library, and await completion of Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's "Piedmont Project" at the Department of History at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. The Federal Writers' Project "life histories" series (1938–1939) produced but a handful of migrant interviews. These are to be found at the University of North Carolina Library; the Kentucky State Archives, Frankfort, and the Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock.