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7 "To the Promised Land": Education and the Black Exodus

The probability that a black male held a nonfarm job in the South has been shown to be a positive function of schooling. This chapter demonstrates that schooling and leaving the South were also positively related, and that changes over time in schooling explain a significant fraction of black migration. The economic status of black migrants compared favorably with that of non-southern blacks, but fell well below the economic status of non-southern whites.

7.1 Schooling and the Great Migration

Table 7.1 shows the percentage of the black population residing in the South and the percentage of southern-born blacks residing outside the South, from 1900 to 1950. At the turn of the century, fully 90 percent of the black population lived in the South and only a tiny proportion (4.3 percent) of those born in the region were living elsewhere. The proportion of black migrants increased to 8 percent in 1920 and to 13 percent in 1930. Migration came to a halt during the Great Depression, but resumed with fervor during the 1940s. By 1950 the proportion of blacks living in the South had declined to 68 percent, and 20 percent of those born in the region had left it.

Historians have thoroughly investigated the broad social and economic forces at work behind the movement of black people from the South, the so-called Great Migration.[1] Less attention has been paid to the migrants themselves, however. It is known that young, single men and women predominated (although many families, too, participated); that migrants were drawn disproportionately from areas of the South with ready geographic access to, and information about, the North; and that the migrants clustered in a small number of large metropolitan areas with established black communities. For many migrants, a big northern city like Pittsburgh or Chicago was the final destination of a carefully plotted, lengthy trip, one with many intermediate sojourns.

Table 7.1 The Great Migration, 1900–1950

	% of Blacks Residing in the South	% of Blacks Born in the South but Residing Elsewhere
1900	89.7	4.3
1910	89.0	4.9
1920	85.2	8.1
1930	78.7	13.3
1940	77.0	13.5
1950	68.0	20.4

Sources: Percentage residing in the South was calculated from U.S. Bureau of the Census (1975). Percentage born in South but residing elsewhere was calculated from the following: *1900, 1910:* U.S. Bureau of the Census (1918, 65); *1920:* U.S. Bureau of the Census (1922, 636); *1930:* U.S. Bureau of Census (1935, 27); *1940:* U.S. Bureau of the Census (1944, 30, 35); *1950:* U.S. Bureau of the Census (1953, 12).

For others the flight was unplanned and nonstop all the way. By the deed itself the migrants sought a higher standard of living and to be rid of Jim Crow's daily indignities. "To the ambitious men and women venturing North," writes historian James Grossman (1989, 37), "the Great Migration represented a new strategy in the struggle for the full rights of American citizenship."

The idea that schooling and black migration might be related is not novel. Bowles (1970) used published census data to show that between 1955 and 1960, better-educated blacks were more likely to have left the South. Earlier published census have proven to be less informative.[2] Either the characteristics of migrants were never compiled separately from those of nonmigrants or the cross classifications were too limited to support detailed analyses (Vickery 1969, 144–47). Here I surmount the problem by relying on samples of individuals drawn from the public use tapes of the 1900, 1910, 1940, and 1950 censuses.

Migrant status is inferred if a person was born in the South but lived outside the region when the census was taken. Although this way of measuring migration is far from perfect—in general, multiple or return migration cannot be identified—the defects are outweighed by that fact that the variable can be constructed in a consistent manner across the census samples.

Table 7.2 reports the basic findings on schooling and black migration from the sample. Separate figures are given for all persons who in principle could have been in the labor force as conventionally measured (ages 10 and over in 1900 and 1910, and ages 14 and over in 1940 and 1950); and for adult males, ages 20 to 64.

The probability of migration rose sharply over time, but at any point in time, the chances of having left the South were higher among the better educated. In 1900, for example, literate adult males were three times as likely to have migrated than were illiterate ones. In 1940, persons who had attended high school were twice as likely to have migrated than persons with no or

Table 7.2 Schooling and Black Migration from the South

	Full Sample		Adult Males (Ages 20–64)	
	% All	% Migrants	% All	% Migrants
1900				
Illiterate	53.4	2.5	47.7	3.9
Literate	46.6	8.5	52.3	12.3
Total		5.3		8.3
1910				
Illiterate	38.8	2.8	38.2	3.2
Literate	61.3	8.9	61.8	12.3
Total		6.5		8.9
1940: Years of schooling completed				
0–1	10.9	7.7	12.3	8.7
2–4	29.1	8.4	33.7	8.3
5–8	43.3	17.1	40.6	23.2
9–12	14.2	23.3	10.8	29.8
≥13	2.5	23.2	2.6	31.7
Total		14.6		17.4
1950: Years of schooling				
0–1	8.4	13.9	8.7	14.6
2–4	20.9	18.3	23.5	20.7
5–8	43.7	28.4	43.2	34.8
9–12	23.1	40.6	21.0	47.4
≥13	3.9	29.4	3.6	36.2
Total		27.9		32.4
Number of observations	5,224		1,897	

Note: % Migrants: born in South but residing elsewhere. In the full sample, data for 1900 and 1910 are for ages 10 and over; for 1940 and 1950, ages 14 and over.
Sources: 1900, 1910: census public use tape; *1940, 1950:* 20% random sample of census public use tape.

limited schooling (0–4 years). In 1950 there is some evidence that the relationship followed an inverted U-shaped pattern. A possible explanation is that the "black elite" (lawyers, doctors, teachers) had an established segregated clientele in the South by midcentury, and for them the economic benefits of migrating may have been smaller.

Although I know of no other sources with which to check the general reliability of the estimates in Table 7.2, there is some independent evidence to verify the figures for grades 13 and above. According to Johnson (1938, 41), who collected a national sample of college-educated blacks, the outmigration rate of the southern born was 25 percent, quite close to the 1940 figure reported in the table.

As clear as Table 7.2 seems to be, there are a number of reasons why the schooling-migration relationship might be more apparent than real. The relationship could be confounded with age, family, cohort, and distance effects on

Table 7.3 Coefficients of Schooling: Logit Analysis of Migration

	β	*t*-statistic	*dp/dx*
1900: Literate	1.221	6.512	0.093
1910: Literate	1.115	8.199	0.090
1940: Years of schooling			
2–4	0.671	2.314	0.084
5–8	1.991	7.214	0.248
9–12	2.596	8.653	0.324
≥13	2.330	5.854	0.291
1950: Years of schooling			
2–4	0.464	1.826	0.102
5–8	1.280	5.311	0.280
9–12	1.926	7.494	0.422
≥13	1.415	4.067	0.310

Note: dp/dx evaluated at sample mean probability.
Source: See text.

migration. Older youths and young adults who had completed their schooling would be more likely to migrate than children living at home. Persons in large families were less likely to migrate than persons in smaller families. Average schooling levels rose over time, but so did the probability of outmigration. Schooling levels were lower in the Deep South, but one might expect migration to the North to vary with distance.[3]

Yet another issue is that some persons migrated from the South as children and attended school in the North. Because schools were better in the North, such children would have completed more grades, on average, than did their counterparts in the South. But the pattern was not typical, because the migration rate of black children was much lower than the sample average. In 1940, for example, only 8 percent of southern-born black children, ages 14 and under *and* enrolled in school, were migrants.[4]

Given these various points, a multivariate analysis of schooling and migration is in order. Column 1 of Table 7.3 reports schooling coefficients derived from logit regressions, in which the independent variables were constructed from the information available in the samples.[5] The results in the table pertain to adult males, but similar findings were obtained for the full samples. A more detailed discussion of the determinants of migration appears in Section 7.3. Here the issue is simply whether the positive effect of schooling is still apparent once other factors are controlled for simultaneously.

In all of the regressions the schooling coefficients are positive, large, and statistically significant. Schooling was positively associated with the probability a southern black would migrate from the region, independent of other factors that affected the probability of moving.

A subtler problem is that schooling may be an indicator of some unobserved background characteristic that positively influenced the probability of migra-

Table 7.4 Schooling and White Migration from the South

	%	% Migrants
1900		
Illiterate	12.2	6.1
Literate	87.8	10.8
Total		10.3
1910		
Illiterate	9.3	4.4
Literate	90.7	12.2
Total		11.5
1940: Years of schooling		
0–1	3.4	5.3
2–4	11.7	7.2
5–8	43.8	14.8
9–12	30.8	14.1
≥13	10.4	18.7
Total		13.8
1950: Years of schooling		
0–1	2.5	5.3
2–4	8.2	9.8
5–8	37.7	16.6
9–12	37.0	18.3
≥13	14.6	21.3
Total		17.1

Sources: See Table 7.2.

tion.[6] Of particular concern is that schooling might be positively correlated with an urban residence prior to migration, which was not reported in the census samples. Urban blacks had better access to information about economic opportunities outside the South than did rural blacks, but urban schooling levels were higher than rural schooling levels. However, the appendix to the chapter demonstrates that, even under the most favorable assumptions, such a bias cannot explain the schooling-migration relationship.

Given that schooling had a positive effect on the probability of migration from the South and that the effect apparently cannot be attributed to biases in the census data, it is important to ask if a similar relationship existed between schooling and white migration from the South. Table 7.4 shows the relationship between schooling and white migration. Better-educated whites were more likely to have left the South then their less-educated counterparts; and there was an increase in white outmigration over time.

Racial differences in schooling, however, cannot possibly explain racial differences in migration. It is true that early in the century the white outmigration rate exceeded the black rate. But had blacks had the same literacy rate as whites, black migration would have exceeded white migration. On the eve of World War Two, the white migration rate was less than the black migration

rate, even though white schooling levels were far higher. Clearly, race was an overriding factor in determining who left the South, and its explanatory power increased over time.

7.2 Accounting for Changes in Black Migration: The Role of Schooling

What "caused" the Great Migration? Widely noticed and reported on, the initial wave of the movement occasioned a number of informed studies by contemporaries, whose methodology and findings have largely framed the debate down to the present day (Epstein 1918; U.S. Department of Labor 1919). Most of these early students concluded that short-run "push-pull" factors, exogenous to individuals, explained why black people left when they did. At the turn of the century, real wages in the South were below the average in the rest of the United States. But the lure of higher wages failed to "pull" significant numbers of southern blacks into the North, because a competing group—European immigrants—filled the jobs that might have gone to southern blacks (or, for that matter, to southern whites).

The supply of immigrants was reduced with the outbreak of World War One. At the first the reduced supply had little effect, because business was slack. Eventually the insatiable labor demands of a wartime economy made northern employers willing to try someone new, and they turned to southern black men (Whatley 1990). The news got through in a number of ways. Northern employers, willing to foot the bill for transportation, sent labor agents south looking for workers. Word of mouth travelled down the tracks, carried by black railroad workers. The North was advertised to be a wondrous "promised land" where black people could find jobs at unheard-of rates of pay; where they could sit next to white folks on public transportation; where they did not have to defer or look down when spoken to; where they could spend their money as they pleased; and where they could be upwardly mobile without the threat of lynching. Conditions in southern agriculture were poor at the time. An insect with a voracious appetite for cotton, the boll weevil, had infested large parts of the region, wreaking havoc on the cotton economy and the blacks' incomes.

Stories of a promised land were exaggerated. The North was not prepared for the black influx. Housing conditions in migrant neighborhoods were deplorable. High rents sapped some of the higher pay. The North had its own brand of racial etiquette, and race relations turned sour when riots broke out in several cities. Some southern whites were ecstatic when the migration took hold, imagining their "race problem" could finally be solved by exporting it. Others (and some black leaders) pleaded with potential migrants, urging them to stay put. The South, as the saying went, was the "Negro's Natural Home." But the black masses did not listen. Once the flow started, they continued to stream north, literally depopulating whole areas of the South in their wake.

Chicago's black population increased 248 percent between 1910 and 1920; Detroit's, by a factor of seven (Grossman 1989, 4).

Nativist legislation, nonfarm economic growth, and a comparatively weak farm economy helped sustain further black outmigration in the 1920s. The flow slowed during the Great Depression. But soon the trickle became a tidal wave when, once again, war broke out. Millions of black people left the rural South for jobs in northern cities, never to return. Agricultural wages in the South rose to unprecedented levels by the late 1940s, leading to widespread mechanization in the 1950s, and further outmigration (Cogan 1982; Wright 1986).

In view of the widespread acceptance of the "push-pull" framework, it is worth pointing out that some scholars have disagreed with parts of it, downplaying the causal importance of shocks. Writing during World War One, at the height of the first wave of migration, Francis Tyson, advisor to the Division of Negro Economics in the Department of Labor, argued:

> The Negro migration is neither an isolated nor a temporary phenomenon, but the logical result of a long series of linked causes beginning with the landing of the first slave ship and extending to the present day. . . . The intelligent Negro has long believed that his only escape . . . is to go to the North. . . . [The] basic causes for his migration are inherent in the social and economic system which has retarded his progress for years. (U.S. Department of Labor 1919, 155)

Statistical analysis of county-level data led Robert Higgs (1976) to question whether the boll weevil was a significant push factor.[7] According to William Vickery (1969), the world wars have been overrated as pull factors. Regional income differences compelled the migration; except through a temporary stimulation of labor demand, World War One had no independent effect. Vickery also claimed that some of the migration during the 1940s would have occurred anyway, having been postponed because of the Great Depression.

The relationship between schooling and migration would seem to support a long-run, supply-side explanation of the Great Migration, one associated with long-run changes in black schooling. An individual characteristic—in this case, schooling—is positively associated with the probability of an event occurring—in this case, migration from the South. Why the association existed is discussed in Section 7.3; for the moment, simply assume that the relationship was a causal one. As the average value of the characteristic increases, so too does the proportion of the population experiencing the event. Chapter 2 demonstrated that average schooling levels of southern blacks increased over the first half of the twentieth century, which is prima facie evidence that the supply-side explanation could be quantitatively significant. There is the related implication that, if black schooling levels had equalled white schooling levels, the black migration rate would have been higher than it was.

Column 1 of Table 7.5 shows the change over time in the black migration

Table 7.5 Effects of Schooling on Black Migration

	Predicted Increase (in percentage points)	% Explained	Equal Schooling	% Increase
1900–10				
Full sample	1.20	100.0		
Adult males	0.80	133.3	11.3	26.9
1910–20				
Full sample	0.43	13.4		
1910–30				
Full sample	0.83	9.9		
1910–40				
Full sample	1.24	14.4		
Adult males	1.86	21.9	23.9	37.3
1910–50				
Full sample	1.39	9.0		
Adult males	2.07	8.8	38.0	17.3
1940–50				
Full sample	1.59	12.0		
Adult males	2.79	18.6		

Autoregression of State-level Outmigration, 1910–1930 (*t*-statistics in parentheses):

$$M_t = \underset{(0.594)}{0.034} + \underset{(3.85)}{0.832}\, M_{t-1} + \underset{(4.140)}{0.027}\,(\mathrm{Yr}=1920) + \underset{(3.938)}{0.043}\,(\mathrm{Yr}=1930)$$

Number of observations = 51
$R^2 = 0.96$

Notes: Full sample: ages 10 and over. *Predicted Increase:* predicted change in black migration rate, assuming black schooling level in the terminal year (e.g., 1920) equalled the level in the base year (e.g., 1910). Predicted migration rates are based on the cross-tabulations from Table 7.2. *% Explained:* predicted change in migration rate/actual change in migration rate (actual change from Tables 7.1 and 7.2). Calculations of percentage explained for full sample assume that the actual change in the black migration rate for ages 10 and over equalled the actual change for the entire population. Because the actual change in migration for ages 10 and over was greater than for all ages, the full sample calculations are biased upwards. *Equal schooling:* predicted black migration rate if mean black schooling equalled mean white schooling level; mean white schooling levels are from Table 7.4. *% Increase:* percentage increase in black migration rate if mean black schooling level equalled mean white schooling level. *Autoregression:* dependent variable is percentage migrants (born in South but living elsewhere); regression includes state dummies (not shown).

rate (in percentage points) predicted by the change in black schooling; Column 2 gives the percentage explained by the change in schooling. For example, the row labelled 1930 shows the impact on migration from increasing the black literacy rate in 1910 to its 1930s value. The predicted changes are based on the schooling effects in Table 7.2. Separate calculations are performed for the overall population and for adult males.

Prior to World War One, changes in black literacy rates can account fully for changes in black migration, which supports the "talented tenth" hypothe-

sis. The percentage explained is much lower between 1910 and 1920, the decade of the First World War. Slightly less than one-sixth of the change in black migration between 1910 and 1940 could have been predicted had the black literacy rate in 1910 equalled its level in 1940. A similar conclusion applies to the migration during World War Two. The proportion explained is higher for adult males than for the general population.

Column 3 of Table 7.5 shows the predicted black migration rate for adult males under the assumption that the average schooling levels of blacks and white were the same (e.g., they had the same literacy rate). Column 4 shows the ratio of the predicted rate to the actual rate. Had black and white schooling levels been equal, a significantly larger fraction of southern-born blacks would have left the region. The predicted-to-actual ratios would be even larger if an adjustment were made for quality of schooling, as was done in Chapter 6.[8]

The supply-side explanation deserves more credit than it has previously received. Had America not been involved in the two world wars nor the boll weevil infested southern cotton fields, a steady fraction of blacks would nevertheless have left the South. A numerically significant portion of the Great Migration, as Tyson believed, was the "logical" outcome of a "long series of linked causes" and not an "isolated" or "temporary phenomenon." Further, racial inequality in schooling contributed to keeping the black migration rate lower than it would have been in the absence of that inequality.

Yet it is also clear that the bulk of the movement and its particular timing cannot be explained by changes in schooling, and that exogenous shocks were crucial. Table 7.5 reports a regression of the percentage of black migrants on its lagged (by ten years) value. The data are state aggregates from the 1910, 1920, and 1930 censuses, and the regression includes a full set of state and year dummies.[9] The autoregressive parameter (the coefficient of the lagged dependent variable) is about 0.8, and is highly significant statistically.[60] Examining the constant term, its value is insignificantly different from zero.[11] If a state, say Alabama, began the twentieth century with a very low proportion of black migrants (which it did), the percentage of migrants would be expected to remain very low, unless jolted upward by a positive "innovation," an unexpected shock causing more blacks to leave the region.[12] Without the intervention of such shocks (e.g., the world wars) the southern share of the black population at midcentury would have been larger than it actually was.[13]

The strong dependence of the current migration rate on its lagged value is consistent with the notion of a "family and friends" effect—migration begets more migration.[14] The importance of the "family and friends" effect in encouraging southern blacks to migrate has long been emphasized by scholars of the Great Migration (Vickery 1969; Kirby 1983; Wright 1986). The existence of an established base of black migrants facilitated the transmission of information back to the South about conditions outside the region.

7.3 Explaining the Schooling-Migration Relationship

Economic analyses of migration typically begin with Larry Sjaastad's (1962) formulation of the problem. In Sjaastad's model, an individual migrates from one area to another if the expected benefits of doing so exceed the costs. The benefits may be pecuniary (e.g., higher earnings) and/or nonpecuniary (e.g., freedom from Jim Crow). The costs, too, are pecuniary (transportation costs) and/or nonpecuniary (the psychic costs of leaving a familiar environment).

Within the context of the Sjaastad model, the simplest explanation of the schooling-migration relationship would be that the economic benefits of leaving the South were greater for better-educated blacks. Previous studies have shown that black migration was motivated by the promise of higher earnings in the North (Vickery 1969; Bowles 1970). If the potential earnings gains from migration rose with education, the schooling-migration relationship could be rationalized.

Table 7.6 presents evidence from the 1940 census sample on the annual earnings differential between black migrants and nonmigrants. The differentials pertain to adult males, ages 20 to 64. The census data—nominal wage and salary earnings in 1939—have been adjusted for regional differences in the cost of living, but I make no claim that the adjustments are complete.[15] Black men who were not wage and salary workers (e.g., farm owners or tenants, self-employed professionals) do not figure in the table. It would clearly be better if the data came from a more representative year in the business cycle, but I know of no other relevant pre–World War Two data that do. No adjustment has been made for the possibility that, because migrants may have been more ambitious or hard working than nonmigrants, their earnings gains may have exceeded the gains that would have been experienced by stayers had the stayers migrated.[16] It is likely, however, that adjusting for selectivity bias would not affect the substantive conclusions reached below.[17]

Overall, the wage evidence seems supportive of an economic explanation of the schooling-migration relationship. The earnings differential was positive: there were, as pointed out earlier, real wage gains associated with migration. The earnings differential was smaller for the group with 0–4 years of schooling than for the group with 5–8 years of schooling, but the latter had a higher migration rate than the former. The same conclusion holds if the comparison is based on a regression analysis of earnings rather than sample means.

Yet there are limits to a purely economic explanation. The migration rate for the 5–8 schooling group was nearly three times as large as the 0–4 group, but the earnings differential was only twice as large. Blacks with more than a grade school education were more likely to be migrants, despite the fact that the earnings differential was far smaller at the high school level and beyond.[18]

One reason why the better educated might have higher migration rates in-

Table 7.6 **The North-South Wage Gap in 1939: Migrants vs. Nonmigrants (black males, ages 20 to 64)**

	Unadjusted ($)	% Difference	Adjusted ($)	% Migrants
Annual Earnings				
Years of schooling				
0–4	198.20	42.5	116.43	8.5
5–8	256.38	46.4	173.63	23.2
≥9	57.55	8.2	52.10	30.2
Weekly wages				
Years of schooling				
0–4	4.94	40.7	3.58	
5–8	6.13	45.9	4.84	
≥9	2.25	13.7	2.04	

Notes: Unadjusted ($): mean difference in annual wage and salary earnings in 1939 between southern-born blacks who left the South and southern-born blacks who stayed in the South; *% Difference:* Unadjusted ($) as a percentage of mean earnings of nonmigrants; *Adjusted ($):* difference in earnings derived from a regression, including age, marital status, and SMSA residence; *% Migrants:* from Table 7.2. Persons employed on work relief jobs (e.g., the WPA) are excluded). Earnings data are adjusted for regional differences in the cost of living by assuming that state-level cost-of-living (COL) indices for 1939 were the same as in 1929; see Williamson and Lindert (1980, 323–25). Williamson and Lindert also give COL indices for 1949, which could be averaged with the 1929 indices; the resulting indices would show slightly larger North-South wage gaps. Separate rural and urban indices were calculated assuming that the urban COL = (1.27 × rural COL) (see 1980, 325). If the person lived in an SMSA, the urban index was used to deflate wages; otherwise, the rural index was used.
Source: 1940 public use sample.

volves financing the costs of migration. Within the South the earnings of black men rose, on average, with schooling (Chapter 6). Because better-educated blacks had higher earnings, they could more easily afford the pecuniary costs of migration.[19]

Yet another reason involves the relationship between schooling and nonfarm employment. Chapter 6 showed that better-educated black men were more likely to hold nonfarm jobs in the South. The vast majority of jobs held by black migrants in the North were also nonfarm jobs. Thus, schooling increased the likelihood a black person would enter the nonfarm sector, whether the job was in the South or in the North.

Schooling was beneficial to migrants for another reason: it facilitated information flows between North and South. Black newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*, which circulated widely throughout the urban South, and letters from black migrants were critical conduits through which knowledge about job opportunities and living conditions was communicated to potential migrants (Grossman 1989). A fully literate population was not an absolute necessity for an efficient flow of labor market information between South and North; literate family members or friends could, and did, assist those who were illiterate in acquiring knowledge about job opportunities. When the *Defender* arrived in small southern towns, people gathered at local shops to listen

to the latest news. Nonetheless, it seems hard to deny that the spread of literacy among southern blacks facilitated the flow of information. The ability to read and write lowered an important cost of migration, that of acquiring accurate knowledge about the region of destination.

The responses to help-wanted advertisements appearing in the *Defender* are revealing on this point.[20] "Some time ago down this side," wrote a Miami man in response to an ad that appeared in 1917, "it was a rumour about the great work going on in the north. But at the present time every thing is quite there, people saying that all we have been hearing was false until I caught hold of the Chicago Defender I see where its more positions are still open." A Memphis man noted he was "a constant reader of your paper [the *Defender*] which can be purchased here," continuing on to request information on "average salaries paid there [Chicago] for unskilled labor and . . . board and room rent." A young woman from Alabama stated she was "a reader of the Chicago Defender I think it is one of the Most Wonderful Papers of our race printed. . . . I am writeing to see if You all will please get me a job."

Potential migrants, too, perceived a link between schooling and their chances of finding employment. "I am a college graduate," wrote a man from Georgia in 1917, "and understand Bookeeping." A Texas man wrote that he was "desiring work in New York or some of the adjoining states. . . . I have a little education too if it can be used to any advantage." Yet another claimed he was "willing to do most any kind of earnest work. I am 36 years old and can read end write the english language." A woman from Louisiana stated she "read the Defender every week. . . . I am honest and neat and refined, with a fairly good education." Schooling—along with such attributes as sobriety, churchgoing, and a stable, married family life, which the applicants carefully noted—was a signal of reliability and of adaptability to a different (and distant) social and economic environment.

Above all, schooling was what distinguished younger blacks from older blacks, particularly older blacks who grew up during slavery or its immediate aftermath. "My father," wrote a black minister in the early twentieth century:

> was born and brought up a slave. He was taught his place and was content to keep it. . . . I know there are certain things that I must do, and I do them . . . [but my son] has been through the eighth grade; he reads easily. For a year I have been keeping him from going to Chicago; but he tells me . . . that in the fall he's going. He says, "When a young white man talks rough to me, I can't talk rough to him. You can stand that; I can't. I have some education, and inside I have the feelin's of a white man. I'm goin." (U.S. Department of Labor 1919, 33)

In the literature on the Great Migration there has yet to be a consensus on the effects of Jim Crow on the propensity to leave the South. While some scholars (Grossman 1989) argue that discrimination was a big "push" factor, others (Vickery 1969) disagree, claiming that changes in discrimination over

time were not large enough to explain the magnitude of the movement. The effect of discrimination on the propensity to migrate, however, may have varied with schooling. For younger blacks, an unwillingness to acquiesce to Jim Crow seemed to be a consequence of being better educated. Dissatisfaction with the status quo prompted the "talented tenth" to leave. As schooling spread deeper into the black community, so did the dissatisfaction; and with it, the willingness and wherewithal to go North.

7.4 Black Migrants and the Northern Economy: Assimilation and Schooling

When he got off the train in Chicago, the world the black migrant confronted was very different from the one he left behind. Even if he had previously lived in a southern town or city, there was little in his prior experience to prepare him for life in the urban North. Throughout the Great Migration, contemporary observers attributed the poverty, irregular employment, and slow economic progress among blacks in northern cities to difficulties faced by black migrants in acclimating themselves. It was this slowness to assimilate, to adapt to a different and constantly changing economic environment, that limited racial economic progress, not solely (or simply) racial discrimination. As Edward Banfield (1968, 68) wrote in the 1960s,

> the Negro's main disadvantage is . . . that he is the most recently unskilled, and hence relatively low-income, migrant to reach the city from a backward rural area. The city is not the end of his journey but the start of it. He came to it not because he was lured by a cruel and greedy master but because he was attracted by job, housing, school and other opportunities that, bad as they were, were nevertheless better by far than any he had known before. Like earlier immigrants, the Negro has reason to expect that his children will have increases of opportunity even greater than his.

The assimilationist hypothesis is important because it offers another explanation of the stability of the black-to-white earnings ratio before World War Two. The results of the chapter thus far, however, might seem at odds with the assimilationist hypothesis, since it was the better-educated blacks who migrated. Yet the assimilationist hypothesis could still be true. Southern black migrants were better educated than nonmigrants, but "they were still poorly educated by northern standards. Inadequately educated and inappropriately trained, most migrants had few options" in the northern economy (Grossman 1989, 183). The Great Migration lowered the average educational attainment of the black labor force in the North.[21] If the assimilationist hypothesis were true, one would expect to find that, in economic status, southern black migrants lagged behind their northern-born counterparts.

The most careful prior investigation of the assimilationist hypothesis is a well-known study by Stanley Masters (1975). Using a sample drawn from the public use tape of the 1960 census, Masters showed that black migrants who

had arrived in the North before 1955 (whom Masters called "Lifetime" migrants) had higher earnings than comparable non-southern-born blacks, but those who arrived after 1955 (whom Masters called "Recent" migrants) did worse. But, no matter where they were from, black incomes fell far below white incomes. Masters (1975, 51) concluded that the "low income of blacks in the . . . North" was mainly a consequence of "white discrimination and not just a relatively short-run problem of dynamic adjustment resulting from migration difficulties." A limitation of Masters' study is that it pertains to a single year, 1960, towards the end of the Great Migration. Persistent adjustment difficulties might still have characterized the experience of southern blacks during the earlier part of the Great Migration.

This section extends Masters' study by examining the economic status of black migrants using data from the 1900 to 1950 census samples. The results confirm Masters' findings for the earlier period. In terms of their earnings and occupations, southern black migrants did not lag behind non-southern-born blacks—far from it, they did better. The gap between southern- and non-southern-born blacks' economic status did decline with schooling, but even better-educated southern black migrants did comparatively well.

Panel A of Table 7.7 shows occupational distributions of southern-born black migrants and non-southern-born blacks in 1900–1910, 1940, and 1950. The occupational distributions support the claim made earlier in the chapter: the vast majority of southern black migrants held nonfarm jobs. Most northern blacks, regardless of where they came from, held low-paying service jobs or were unskilled laborers. Some improvement in occupational status occurred during the 1940s, as many blacks moved into semi-skilled jobs in northern manufacturing. The proportion in white-collar occupations, too, increased over time.[22]

Overall, there was little difference in the occupations held by southern black migrants or non-southern-born blacks. An index of occupational dissimilarity between the two groups ranged between 7 and 10 between 1900 and 1950 (recall from Chapter 6 that the maximum value the index can equal is 100). The slight rise in the index between 1910 and 1940 is consistent with the assimilationist hypothesis, but might also be due to the impact of the Great Depression on black employment.

Panel B of Table 7.7 gives evidence on unemployment by migrant status. The annual frequency of unemployment is the proportion of blacks who experienced unemployment during the census year; the unemployment rate is the usual concept (the proportion unemployed at a point in time). Early in the century black migrants were *less* likely than non-southern blacks to become unemployed in a year's time, and there is no evidence that black migrants had higher unemployment rates than non-southern blacks.

The early twentieth century censuses did not investigate when someone migrated to the North, but the 1940 census did: a person's location in 1935 was reported, so it is possible to distinguish migrants who arrived before 1935

Table 7.7 The Economic Status of Black Migrants

A. Occupational Distributions, Adult Black Males (in percentages)

	1900/1910	1940	1950
White collar			
Southern born	5.2	11.8	11.3
Non-southern-born	4.8	15.7	17.6
Skilled blue collar			
Southern born	7.2	7.4	12.7
Non-southern-born	7.9	10.3	11.4
Semi-skilled blue collar			
Southern born	13.8	16.7	28.0
Non-southern-born	13.0	17.9	27.0
Service			
Southern born	32.2	27.3	16.3
Non-southern-born	29.4	27.3	19.4
Unskilled nonfarm labor			
Southern born	32.4	32.8	29.4
Non-southern-born	29.2	21.6	22.2
Farm operator			
Southern born	3.4	1.6	0.3
Non-southern-born	5.9	1.5	0.9
Farm laborer			
Southern born	5.9	2.4	1.7
Non-southern-born	9.7	5.7	1.5
Segregation index			
Southern-born/Non-southern-born blacks	7.1	11.3	10.0
Blacks/whites	51.7	45.2	44.4

B. Unemployment (in percentage points)

	1900	1910	1940	1950
Frequency	−4.7	−3.7		
Rate		−1.1		−0.2
Definition 1				
Lifetime			−2.5	
Recent			1.0	
Definition 2				
Lifetime			1.0	
Recent			−1.6	

C. Earnings and Weekly Wages, 1939 (in percentages)

	Lifetime		Recent	
	Unadjusted	Adjusted	Unadjusted	Adjusted
Annual earnings	10.5*	5.8*	−21.3*	−7.1
Weekly wages	8.3*	5.1*	−12.2*	−3.5
Ratio × 100, black/white				
Annual earnings = 62.5				
Weekly wages = 68.0				

(continued)

Table 7.7 (continued)

D. Interactions of Migrant Dummy with Schooling (Panel C, row 1)

	Lifetime	Recent
Annual earnings		
Migrant	0.291*	0.119
Migrant × years of schooling	−0.029	−0.017
Weekly wages		
Migrant	0.191*	0.280*
Migrant × years of schooling	−0.017*	−0.041*

Notes: **Panel B:** *1900, 1910, 1950,* figures are differences in sample means (in percentage points) between southern-born and non-southern-born black males (ages 20–64) residing outside the South; *1940,* all black males in labor force (see text). FREQUENCY: *1900,* proportion experiencing unemployment in census year (May 1899–April 1900); *1910,* proportion experiencing unemployment in calendar year 1909. RATE: proportion unemployed on census date. DEFINITION 1: counts WPA workers as employed. DEFINITION 2: counts WPA workers as unemployed; see Margo (1988a). LIFETIME: migrated from South before 1935. RECENT: migrated from South between 1935 and 1940. **Panel C:** ROWS 1 AND 2, figures are exp $(r) - 1$, where r is the mean difference between migrants and non-southern-born blacks in log earnings and log weekly wages. UNADJUSTED: difference in sample log means. ADJUSTED: calculated from coefficients of migrant dummies. Other independent variables are age, age squared, years of schooling, marital status, census region, and SMSA location. ROW 3, ratio = exp $(r) - 1$, where r is the mean difference in log earnings and log weekly wages between non-southern blacks (including southern black migrants) and non-southern whites.

*Statistically significant at 5% level or better.

Sources: **Panel A**: *1900/1910,* census public use sample; *1940, 1950:* 20% random sample of census public use tape. **Panel B**: *1900, 1910, 1950,* see Panel A; *1940,* Margo (1989). **Panel C**: Rows 1 and 2, Margo (1989); Row 3, 20% random sample of 1940 census public use tape. **Panel D**: Margo (1989).

from those who arrived after. Following Masters' terminology, I refer to pre-1935 migrants as Lifetime and post-1935 as Recent.

Panel C of Table 7.7 shows differences in average annual earnings and weekly wages between Lifetime and Recent migrants and non-southern-born blacks.[23] In 1940 the annual earnings of Lifetime migrants exceeded those of non-southern-born blacks by 11 percent; the gap for weekly earnings was slightly smaller (8 percent).[24] Recent migrants earned less than non-southern-born blacks and, therefore, less than Lifetime migrants.

None of the comparisons thus far has controlled for factors other than migrant status. The Adjusted columns in Panel C are derived from regression coefficients of migrant status. Holding constant factors other than migrant status, economic differences between migrants and non-southern-born blacks were small (particularly for Recent migrants), but the differences were still positive and large for Lifetime migrants. Panel D reports regression coefficients of the migrant status dummies interacted with years of schooling. Among Lifetime migrants with little or no schooling, annual earnings and weekly wages were much higher than among non-southern blacks. The eco-

nomic differences between migrants and non-southern-blacks, however, were much smaller at higher schooling levels. A similar pattern emerges in comparing the weekly earnings of Recent migrants and non-southern-born blacks.

Masters (1975) explained the relative success of black migrants by appealing to "selectivity bias," the idea that migrants were not a random sample of the southern black population. His reasoning would appear to apply equally well to the earlier years of the Great Migration. Poorly educated blacks were unlikely to go North, but the ones who did were rewarded, perhaps because they were more ambitious and hardworking.[25] For the better educated the prospect of migrating to the North was less daunting, because they were already likely to enter the nonfarm economy at some point.

Better-educated migrants were atypical of the population, but relatively less so within their education group. Black migrants, however, suffered from the lower quality of southern schools, and these disadvantages were greatest at the high school level or beyond. The result was a decline in the earnings of black migrants relative to the earnings of non-southern blacks, as schooling levels increased. Most non-southern blacks themselves were only a generation or two removed from the South. Faced with limited opportunities for upward mobility, "succeeding generations" might not have been "willing to work as hard as the migrants" (Masters 1975, 60).

The opportunities *were* limited, compared with those available to non-southern whites. Panel C of Table 7.7 also shows that the earnings of black migrants were far below those of non-southern whites.[26] Indices of dissimilarity (Panel A, Table 7.7) reveal that the distribution of occupations among whites differed far more from the distribution of occupations among black migrants, than did the occupations of migrants with those of non-southern blacks. Yet, in clear contrast with southern trends, racial employment segregation in the North appears to have been falling over time.[27] The North was not a promised land, but its labor market offered migrants higher wages, a way out of the rural South, and the prospect of a better life for their children.

7.5 Summary

Chapter 6 documented that long-run increases in black schooling were associated with shifts in the distribution of occupations among southern blacks, in particular the shift of black labor out of agriculture. This chapter has documented a positive association between schooling and the probability a southern black would leave the South. A complex, interrelated set of factors encouraged better-educated blacks to migrate. The earnings gains from migration rose with schooling; the better-educated could more easily finance any costs of migration; the jobs migrants took were nonfarm jobs; the ability to read and write lowered the costs of acquiring accurate information about the North; and blacks who had been to school were generally more dissatisfied with life in the South.

Recent research by economic historians has emphasized the regional character of southern labor markets before World War Two (Mandle 1978; Wright 1986). "The defining economic feature of the South prior to World War Two was not poor performance or failure," according to Gavin Wright (1986, 64), "but [the] isolation . . . of the southern labor market from national and international flows." When the northern economy expanded, jobs went to European immigrants, not southern blacks (or whites). The exclusion of southern blacks, argues Wright, cannot be explained by "ignorance and poverty" or "poor education and general unsuitability for . . . industrial jobs" because "millions of Europeans with equally poor qualifications were coming much longer distances . . . to take the very jobs [blacks] were supposedly ignorant of" (1986, 73). Europeans succeeded because they got there first. Once established, "kinship networks" sustained labor flows in both directions, creating an international labor market the South was utterly excluded from.

The South, according to Wright, was left out because of slavery and bad timing. Before the Civil War the Peculiar Institution "insulated the South from outside labor flows." After the war the region was "consumed by the turbulence . . . of Reconstruction" precisely when "mass immigration was becoming an established part of the northern social fabric" (1986, 74).

The results of this chapter do not challenge the notion that southern labor markets were "isolated," but they do identify a different cause. Contrary to Wright's assertion, European immigrants and southern blacks who stayed behind did not have "equally poor qualifications," at least as far as literacy was concerned. Immigrants from most countries had far higher literacy rates than did southern blacks.[28] Immigrants who could read and write, *in any language*, had higher earnings than those who could not (Higgs 1971).[29] The similarity of the relationships between schooling and nonfarm employment in the South and schooling and migration in the North demonstrates that ignorance, poverty, and poor education *were* root causes of southern isolation. Southern and non-southern labor markets were always linked, for those who could afford to move and who could fit in.

The explanatory power of schooling should not be overstated, however. "Shocks" were critical to getting the Great Migration started. If the isolation of southern blacks from non-southern labor markets was not fully predetermined by historical circumstances, neither was it solely an individual's affair. Poor schooling cannot explain why blacks were more likely to leave the South than were whites.

Recent research has documented the importance of the Great Migration in raising the national black-to-white earnings ratio prior to 1960 (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1986; Smith and Welch, 1989). This research, however, has not addressed a fundamental question: if leaving the South was so profitable, why wasn't the Great Migration greater early on? The answer to this question involves elements of supply and demand. The long-term trends in black schooling and migration were causally related, and changes over time

in black schooling explain a numerically significant share of black migration from the South. But if the nonfarm demand for black labor outside the South had not increased during the world wars, fewer blacks would have left the South. The results of the chapter, therefore, support a selective combination of the human capital and institutionalist models, as did the results of Chapter 6.

By the early twentieth century, disenfranchisement had led to racial inequality in educational opportunity, and these inequalities measurably reduced black schooling levels. By limiting the flow of black labor from the rural South, educational discrimination helped perpetuate the traditional existence of a supply of low-wage labor well into the twentieth century, a fact that the southern white elite was keenly aware of (Wright 1986). In the final analysis the Great Migration could not be stopped; the white elite could not prevent successive generations of black children from becoming better-educated than previous generations. Schooling, in turn, helped each new generation of black children enter a world of wider opportunities.

Appendix
Migration and Prior Urban Residence

This appendix evaluates the hypothesis that the schooling-migration relationship is merely a proxy for a positive relationship between migration and prior urban residence. Urban blacks were more likely to leave the South than were rural blacks. But, because urban schooling levels were higher than rural schooling levels, the effect of schooling on migration could be overstated. The logit regressions in Table 7.3 do not control for prior urban residence, because prior urban residence was not reported in the census samples.

I begin by examining the possible bias in 1900. Suppose that (a) the true effect of literacy on the probability of outmigration is zero; (b) the outmigration rate of rural blacks is zero (only urban residents migrate); and (c) urban residence prior to migration is unobserved. Under these assumptions, what would the *observed* difference be in outmigration rates between literate and illiterate blacks?

The following two equations can be used to answer this question:

$$m_L\alpha + m_{IL}(1 - \alpha) = m \tag{1}$$

$$m_L/m = \beta \tag{2}$$

where m_L = observed migration rate of literates; m_{IL} = observed migration rate of illiterates; m = overall migration rate; α = overall proportion literate; and β = observed proportion of migrants who were literate. Note that the

observed effect of literacy on migration is simply $m_L - m_{IL}$. The parameters α and m can be calculated from the 1900 census sample: $\alpha = 0.47$ and $m = 0.053$. From assumption (b) it follows that β is the literacy rate of urban residents who migrated. Assumption (a) implies that literates and illiterates have the same probability of migration; thus an estimate of β is the proportion of urban blacks in the South in 1900 who were literate: $\beta = 0.61$ (calculated from the 1900 census tape). Inserting the values of α, β, and m into equations (1) and (2) gives $m_L - m_{IL} = 0.03$, or 50 percent of the difference in the outmigration rates of literates and illiterates (0.06) (see Table 7.2). It is clear that 50 percent is an upper bound, even if assumptions (a), (b), and (c) were true, because urban literacy rates were lower than 0.61 before 1900 (the literacy rate of those who migrated would have been less than the rate in 1900).

The procedure can be repeated for 1940 and 1950, and the results indicate that the bias in those years is at most equal to 25 percent of the effect of schooling on migration reported in Table 7.2. Hence the conclusion in the text: the schooling-migration relationship among southern blacks cannot merely be a proxy for an unobserved relationship between migration and prior urban residence.