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Race and Destination Choice: Factors Driving Reverse Migration

Introduction

What factors predict destination choice for black migrants leaving the Rust Belt?

Scholars have begun to identify processes related to black migration from the industrial North to the South (Frey and Liaw 2005; Lee and Roseman 1999). However, few studies have sought to identify the factors that shape migration choice for black migrants. My research looks to evaluate the role of social capital, a factor that leads to divergent migration selection between racial and ethnic groups, against educational attainment, a variable which is usually associated with migration convergence.

Literature Review

The migration of African-Americans has historically been deemed less responsive to economic forces than white migration (Bramhall and Bryce 1969), and contemporary research suggests racial and ethnic minorities continue to rely more on social networks than whites for destination selection (Frey & Liaw 2005). Social capital, when measured as the percentage of coethnics in a destination, is more vital to destination selection for Blacks migrating to the South in part due to the community's "long-standing roots" in the region (Frey & Liaw 2005: 218). To the contrary, migration literature also posits educational attainment as an important factor for migration destination selection. The literature suggests that educational attainment leads to convergence in migration behavior between blacks and whites, eroding the differences in migration destination (Fulton 2007; Frey 1993; Sandefur and Jeon 1992). Scholars have noted similar effects for Latinos and migration behavior (South, Crowder and Pias 2008; Stamps and

Bohon, 2006). My research will test the relative importance of education compared to social network ties in predicting migration choice. There are good reasons to think both matter, but which drives destination choice in today's economy?

Methods

To address my research question, I will rely on 5% census Integrated Public Use Microdata Samples (IPUMS) for 1980, 1990 and 2000, as well as 1970 for contextual starting-point data. I restricting my focus to areas designated by the U.S. Census Bureau as metropolitan statistical areas determined to be high manufacturing metro areas. Using 1970 data (IPUMS extract), metro areas that are approaching one standard deviation above the national average (of 24.9%) for percent of workers employed in manufacturing fit this criteria.

To measure migration behavior I will use a 5% Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample (IPUMS) for 1980, 1990 and 2000. These data inquire about residence five years prior to the census, allowing users to assess migration flows from five years prior to each census year. IPUMS also allows users to determine how many individuals have migrated from one location to another within the previous five years of the census. I will use a multinomial regression model to predict several possible outcomes that are categorical but more than two. I recode and combine those that indicate residence in one of my selected industrial metro areas 5 years prior to census (MIGMET5) with those who indicate a different area of residence by 2000 (METAREA). This allows me to look specifically at those who did reside in the metro Rust Belt 5 years earlier but who by the time of the census no longer reside in the same place; or more specifically, at "out-migrants" only. The new variable looking only at "out-migrants" will be entered as a covariate, with "region of current residence" entered as the dependent variable.

My independent variable will focus on race to measure black migration to the South, with attention given to whether or not educational attainment attenuates social capital for southern-bound black migrants. Important control variables as determined by the literature will include age, sex, and marital status the first multinomial regression, followed by a second regression analysis that takes educational attainment into consideration. Education is categorized as having less than a high school education, having a high school degree, having “some college” experience, having a Bachelors degree, and having post graduate experience or higher.

Key Findings and Implications

The migration odds for blacks from the urban industrial North to the South remain higher than for whites for each year. The inclusion of educational attainment *increases* the likelihood of black migration to the South, contrary to literature asserting migration convergence should occur. The implications suggest that changing macroeconomic factors increase the importance of social capital for migration decisions, leading black migrants to flee industrial cities in favor of the South where cultural considerations are more salient.

The nature of service employment differs from manufacturing, the once dominant form of economic activity in the urban North that facilitated the original Great Migration. The high degree of interaction inherent to service employment has led employers to pursue “emotion management” of employees who must convey the proper attitude to customers. Studies of employer attitudes reveal concerns over “black dialect,” stereotypes about black “hostility or oversensitivity,” and other behavioral and attitudinal traits that have an elevated importance in the new economy (Moss and Tilly 2001:240). The ability to appeal to customers was not an important factor for employers when making hiring decisions for factory work, where there was a greater reliance on “hard skills” such as experience, training and technical knowledge.

As employers in the rapidly-growing service sector feel the need to hire workers who have personal characteristics most likely to appeal to the greater public at large, blacks may find the long-established, normative presence of African-Americans operating within southern culture to be more conducive for gaining service employment. Indeed, the manner in which black workers are incorporated into the service economy may be twofold, as “worker characteristics such as race and gender determine not only who is considered desirable or even eligible to fill certain jobs, but also who will want to fill certain jobs and how the job itself is performed.”(MacDonald & Sirianni 1996:15) Employers seek individuals who will satisfy customer expectations. At the same time, workers may feel compelled to situate themselves where their emotional labor is most likely to resonate. For many in the African American community, that place is the South.