"Southern Girls Awake":
Rural-to-Urban Migration from the U.S. South and Women's Economic Mobility, 1920-1940

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Abstract:
During the 1920s and 1930s, women's outmigration from rural Southern farms to the cities exceeded men's. Driven cityward by expectations of independent wage work, marriage opportunities, and autonomy, I explore to what extent migration led to women's economic mobility across race and region of destination. I compare sisters who stayed on the farm to those who left: migrants completed more years of education, improved their educational attainment above their mother's level, were more likely to be in the labor force, and earned more than those who stayed. While all women were able to improve their economic standing compared to their rural sisters, White women entered the urban labor force significantly behind their urban native counterparts. Black women, who had fewer job opportunities available to them due to racial discrimination, were entering the urban workforce in similar jobs to those already there. Finally, I find that cities afforded women better marriage opportunities: migrants' husbands were in higher occupational income ranks than their sisters' husbands and were similarly positioned in the urban labor market as the husbands of urban women.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the first half of the twentieth century in the United States there was a sizable shift of the rural farm population to the city and, in particular, the increased migration of women. Following a farm crisis, environmental disasters, and reduced farm tenure mobility, women in the South were over 2.5 percentage points more likely than men to migrate from rural farms to urban areas during the 1920s and 1930s (Withrow, forthcoming). Migration to the city meant increased education and work opportunities for women and more control over marriage timing and partner selection compared to the farm, where economic mobility was often tied to marriage at an early age. This link between the labor market and the marriage market would be a key motivation in women's migration.

For many of these migrating women, a move to the city would also be the first time they were away from close family members. This physical separation dramatically altered a woman's relationship with her family. No longer participating in unpaid farm labor, migrant women married into smaller households, worked wage jobs outside the home, and experienced a completely new environment of expanded work and leisure opportunities (Jones 1985; Meyerowitz 1988). Despite these dramatic changes, social norms continued to dictate where women could work, and any gains in terms of access to jobs or higher earnings were overshadowed by persistently lower wages than those of their migrant male counterparts. This combination of freedom and persistent wage discrimination was compounded by racial discrimination, as Black women faced stricter limits on which jobs they could work and where they could move. In highlighting the conflicting experiences of Black and White women undertaking the same off-farm migration, this paper emphasizes the role of institutional discrimination on the basis of race in restricting economic mobility.

In this paper, I examine the gains for women of migration from farms to urban areas. I focus on migrants from and within the South to better capture the role of race in conditioning migration outcomes.[2] I differentiate between moves to urban areas[3] within the South and to those outside of it. To date, most studies of migration during this period have focused on men, but recent advances in linking census data to include women have led to a growing body of work

[2] While Black farmers also existed outside of the South, their numbers were far lower, making statistical analyses more challenging.
[3] The Census Bureau defined urban areas as places with 2,500+ inhabitants.

about women's migration (Berger et al. 2025; Andersson 2025; Withrow Forthcoming) and their role in intergenerational mobility (Althoff et al. 2025; Jácome et al. 2025; Buckles et al. 2023; Olivetti and Paserman 2015). This paper places women's economic mobility at its center, relying on the concrete historical example of young women's off-farm exodus in the South to illustrate how the intersection of gender, race, and location influenced economic outcomes both within and across generations. It also adds nuance to our understanding of the Great Migration, most often studied in the context of out-of-South moves, by examining how outcomes for Black women varied across shorter moves within the South compared to the North, and how White women fared in comparison.[4]

I follow women from their homes on rural Southern farms in 1920 to urban areas in both the South and non-South in 1930 and 1940 using the Census Tree dataset (Price et al. 2021; 2023; Buckles et al. 2023).[5] My main analyses compare migrants to their non-migrant sisters, a common strategy to control for selection into migration based on family or household characteristics (Abramitzky et al. 2012; Collins and Wanamaker 2014; Ward 2022). I complement these quantitative results with qualitative sources from both women who migrated and the various social services groups concerned with the exodus of women from farms. These include studies done by the Southern Women's Educational Alliance, migrants' own writings for coursework at the Summer School of Women Workers in Industry, and oral histories. In these sources, many discuss how families decided to send one sister to the city to earn money or increase her education in order to send money back home, while her siblings were needed on farm to assist in harvesting or other farm work. This arrangement would thus set these women on two different paths that had significant implications for their economic mobility later in life.

I first examine how migrants compared to their non-migrant sisters in their labor force participation, the types of off-farm occupations they held, income, and weeks worked. I find that, after controlling for marriage status, migrants are over 20 percent more likely to be in the labor force, 25 to 40 percent more likely to be employed, and worked more weeks for pay. Migrants also earn significantly more than non-migrants who held off-farm job. White migrants earned

[4] In addition to differences in region of destination, it is notable that over 33 percent of female migrants moved to urban areas with a city center or metro area of fewer than 100,000 people. (21.59 percent of Black migrants and 36.25 percent of White migrants)

[5] Notably, the Census Tree dataset relies on user-generated links from FamilySearch.org to help include a representative sample of linked women, who were previously difficult to track across time due to last name changes after marriage.

between 3-8 percent more within South and 26 to 36 percent more if they left the South. Black migrants out of the South working the majority of the year earned 45 percent more per week than their non-migrant sisters.[6] However, Black migrants within the South and those who worked fewer than 40 weeks a year regardless of region, did not earn more than their non-migrant sisters. These wage differences highlight how region of destination was an important determining factor in the gains to migration, especially for Black women, and the long reach of racial discrimination in hiring and pay.

I also focus in on migrants' gains in terms of education. Rural schools in the South often did not extend beyond the eighth grade, and even if more advanced education was available, the work required of children during harvesting season meant many were unable to complete more than and elementary or middle school education. (Margo 1990; "Autobiographies, Various School Districts" 1933). I first compare migrants to their non-migrant sisters in terms of highest grade achieved. I find that migration led to increased years of education regardless of region of destination. Second, I measure the intergenerational mobility of these migrants in terms of education by measuring the relationship between a mother's highest grade and her daughter's. I find that migration helped decouple the relationship between a mother's education and a daughter's, and because migration increased years of education over non-migrant sisters, migration was an engine for intergenerational mobility in education. These results underscore the importance of the rural/urban divide in education opportunities that was especially prevalent in during the early- and mid-twentieth century.

Third, I focus on whether migrants were able to catch up to their urban counterparts in terms of occupational rank. I find that Black female migrants worked occupations very similar to urban natives, falling less than one decile below them during both 1930 and 1940. There were also few differences between regions. This is primarily a result of the compression of Black women toward the bottom of the occupational income distribution, regardless of location. White women, on the other hand, were farther behind their urban counterparts: they held occupations over two deciles below urban natives on average. I find that while migrant White women in Northern cities were able to close some of the gap with their urban counterparts between 1930 and 1940, they were still over one decile lower on the occupational ladder.

[6] On average, Black female migrants worked 23-28 weeks per year and White female migrants worked 14-17 weeks per year (Appendix Table A1).

Finally, I examine men's marriageability and marital sorting as an outcome. A key refrain from women during this time was the role of migration to an urban area in improving their marriage market outcomes (Hatcher 1930; Southern Women's Educational Alliance 1930). The life of a farm wife was often considered undesirable, especially by the standards of the cult of domesticity. Long hours, difficult work outside, and few modern amenities on farms had many women seeking to delay marriage or pursue "better" marriage partners. As a woman's own economic mobility was tied to her future husband's, migration for marriage could be a key factor in her outcomes once in the city. I measure to what extent migrants did "better" than their non-migrant sisters in terms of husbands' labor force participation, occupational rank, and weeks worked. I find that in 1940, husbands of migrants were actually less likely to be employed and worked fewer week than the husbands of non-migrants, as the farm served as a form of employment insurance during the difficult years of the Great Depression (Boone and Wilse-Samson 2023). For those whose husbands were working, however, husbands of migrants were in occupational income deciles one to three deciles higher than their non-migrant counterparts. I also measure to what extent the husbands of the migrants were similar to those of urban natives, and find that migrants married men who were occupationally similar to the husbands of women already in the city.

This paper adds to our understanding of migration as an engine for intergenerational mobility during the early twentieth century and builds upon prior work on this period. For example, Ward (2022) compares migrant to non-migrant brothers to show how internal migration within the U.S. improved occupational rank of sons over their fathers by over three times that achieved through one additional year of education. Buckles et al. (2023) show how intergenerational mobility in the U.S. was similar between sons and daughters born between 1840 and 1910, despite women's limited avenues for mobility. They emphasize that this similarity is the result of high levels of assortative mating: women were marrying men from families similar to their own. Althoff, Gray, and Reichardt (2025) emphasize that increases in economic mobility from 1850 to 1950 in the U.S. were primarily driven by improvements in access to education and a decline in the reliance on mother's human capital. Jácome, Kuziemko, and Naidu (2025) provide some of the first estimates for intergenerational occupation mobility for Black women. They show that intergenerational elasticity and income rank-rank mobility has increased over time for 1910s to 1940s birth cohorts, but that the inclusion of Black women

lowers overall estimates of mobility during this period. This paper adds evidence on the role of migration in economic mobility and emphasizes the role of both marriage and education in women's mobility in particular. At the same time, it highlights how racial discrimination was a key determining factor in just how beneficial this migration was for those who left. Finally, it also qualitatively explores an additional benefit of migration: increased autonomy for women.

2. HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Gender equality and marriage as pull factors

Many migration studies centering the role of gender address recent national and international gender migrant streams from and within developing countries. Although they examine more recent periods, they provide a framework through which one can analyze any gendered migration flow, keeping in mind the history of each place and time. For example, Huh (2017) shows how female immigrants to the United States between 1980 and 2006 from countries with low levels of gender inequality were more likely to migrate if they had more years of education, emphasizing how not just wage inequality but gender equality in receiving areas can incentivize women to migrate to places where their human capital is better rewarded in the labor market. Fan and Huang (1998), using a structural approach to understand migration motivations, argue for migration for marriage as a way for more disadvantaged women to achieve not just economic but social mobility in the context of rural China. They show how for rural Chinese women, migration out of peasant rural areas to achieve household status in more economically developed areas can lead to increased employment opportunities and other social benefits. The benefits are determined by the historical conditions dictating both women's role on the farm compared to other households and employment benefits based on place of birth.

Marriage opportunities through migration are an important way for rural young women to take control over their futures and directly affect their social and economic mobility. "Better" marriage partners in terms of economic resources allowed a woman more control over her work life, especially in her ability to limit her non-household work life should she choose. The amount of field work required especially of poorer farm women was a major push factor for migration. That reality, coupled with the fact that many women who engaged in field work had no control over the monetary fruits of that work, led to a dual hope for many women who took part in rural-

turban migration: opportunity for independent wage work in the short run, and opportunity for a marriage that would allow them not to work in the long run.

The cult of domesticity argued that women belonged to the domestic sphere and the presence of a wife who did no labor outside of the home beyond charity work was the pinnacle of family social achievement. Additionally,

> A woman's labor force participation also reflected on her husband or father. Since poor families were more likely than wealthier families to send their wives and daughters into the workforce. . . a woman who worked for pay signaled a husband's or father's failure to provide adequately for his family. Married women's labor force participation thus acquired a social stigma. (Amott and Matthaei 1996, 302)

For Black women, it was often not possible to stay out of the paid labor force, as persistent wage and occupational discrimination against Black men made it difficult to support the household on just one income. Despite this reality, Black organizations such as the Urban League promoted Black women's economic reliance on men. As Banks (2006) outlined in her analysis of the Urban League in Philadelphia between 1916 and 1930, the League encouraged the White ideals of the cult of domesticity for Black households as an avenue toward racial uplift.

The farm crisis occurred at a pivotal moment in the evolution of women's wage work, as the decline of the cult of domesticity began around 1920 and both single and married women were entering the workforce in greater numbers. The entrance of many women into the paid workforce during the World Wars as well as an increasing reliance on store-bought rather than home-made goods and services, began to normalize married women's presence working outside the home. For the women migrating to the city, they were met with these, in some ways, conflicting pressures: a desire for independent wage work and economic independence as well as a search for a well-off husband that would allow them to conform to society's ideals of the cult of domesticity. As Jones (1985) wrote,

> For most of these [single, working] women, marriage would mean a radical retreat from their brief social and economic independence. But for a few months or years, they experienced a way of life never encountered by their mothers, who, as young women, had gone directly from their father's cabin to their husband's cabin. (159)

2.2 Women's education, urban work, and discrimination

This paper also contributes to a large body of scholarship on the history of women's labor force participation, particularly in wage labor outside the home, and migration for economic

gain. Leading up to and during the years of the farm crisis, women began completing high school in greater numbers. Often, education is seen as something achieved before migration and dictates how well immigrants do after they arrive at their destination. In the case of women leaving farms for urban areas, the migration itself might allow them to achieve higher levels of education, which in turn could allow for better access to employment. In the following analyses, I look at education as an outcome of migration, not as a characteristic influencing migrant selection. On farms, education was much more difficult to complete. Schools were often a long distance away and the labor needs on farms during harvesting season that led to many young children missing months of instruction. Many rural children could only continue or complete their education through migration (Margo 1990; Wilkerson 2010; "Autobiographies, Various School Districts" 1933) The records of the Southern Women's Educational Alliance show that many young White women cited continuing their education as a major motivation for considering a move to the city from rural Virginia in the 1920s and 1930s (Hatcher 1930).

Both White and Black women were also likely to pursue work in towns or cities. Racist and sexist attitudes played a key role in determining with whom, where, and for how long a woman could work. Black women faced a much more limited set of job opportunities outside of agricultural work. While World War I had opened doors into factory work for them due to high demand, after the War, Black women were once again largely shut out. A significant share of rural Black women was employed in agriculture, single Black women were often domestic servants, and job prospects outside of farm and domestic work were further limited by the Great Depression (Blackwelder 1997). This period of migration also aligns with the feminization of many jobs, particularly for White women. This meant that traditionally male occupations such as clerical work paid less and were created in a way that assumed the clerical worker would leave upon marriage (Goldin 1990; England and Boyer 2009).

For women, migration often meant going from a scenario where they had few or no opportunities to earn an independent wage to many opportunities to do so in the city, although the jobs were often low-paying jobs or considered temporary. But, as highlighted above, any analysis of the gendered aspects of migration must also recognize how other identities, such as race, determine to what extent these expectations of greater equality or opportunity were realized. Curtis White (2005), in one of the few studies of selection and economic outcomes for Black compared to White women during the Great Migration, explores racial differences

between White and Black South-to-North migrants in 1920, 1940, and 1970. She finds that Black women who migrated out of the South were more likely to be employed and in jobs with lower socioeconomic index scores than White women, and that this gap was wider between migrants than between non-migrants. This is despite lower overall inequality in the North and is a result of White women's expanded occupational opportunities in Northern urban industries. Additionally, unlike their White counterparts, continuing education was not likely to help Black women obtain access to higher-paying work opportunities. As emphasized by Hine (1991) when discussing Southern migrants to the Midwest during the interwar years, this outcome was not unexpected by Black female migrants:

> None were so naïve as to believe that genuine equality of opportunity actually existed in the North or the Midwest, but occasionally black women migrants did anticipate that more awaited them in Cleveland and Chicago than an apron and domestic servitude in the kitchens of White families, segregated hotels, and restaurants. (139)

How successful a woman would be post-migration was heavily determined by her starting characteristics. In Withrow (Forthcoming), I find that White women were positively selected on individual characteristics such as literacy and school attendance, and family characteristics such as parent literacy, into rural-to-urban migration both within and out of the South from 1900 to 1940. White women on family-owned farms, however, were less likely to leave. Black women were also positively selected on individual characteristics such as literacy and school attendance, but this positive selection was limited to those women who left the South for the North. Importantly, Black women from family-owned farms – a relatively rare occurrence as Black families were often not allowed to own land – were more likely to leave the South for the North, but not to move within the South. Both greater resources and stronger networks help enable these moves. For Black women, it is likely that Southern cities did not offer the perceived economic and social mobility that was promised in Northern cities. The Southern city still presented a chance for economic mobility, but the better-off Black women on family-owned farms in the South may have decided to stay due to poor opportunities for economic mobility.

How well migrants did in comparison to women who were already in urban areas will add important nuance to the "gains" from this migration. For example, Andersson (2025) shows that female migrants from the Swedish countryside to urban areas never caught up economically to their urban counterparts, in part due to the lack of transferability of rural job skills and negative selection. While the city offered more job and education opportunities and these women

had better outcomes in terms of earnings or occupation mobility than those who stayed, it is possible female migrants were relegated to lower-paying occupations than their urban counterparts.

2.3 Urbanization, anonymity, and autonomy

Finally, urban areas presented women the anonymity to behave in ways that might be barred in rural areas, and autonomy in the form of opportunities for work, activism, entertainment, and sexual freedom all awaited women in the city (Hall 2019; Hartman 2019; Hunter 1998; Fine 1990; Meyerowitz 1988). Dissemination of information from urban areas to women in rural areas helped to increase expectations of those opportunities. Serialized romances in newspapers, radio, and letters and stories from sisters, cousins, and friends who made the trek cityward all helped to create an image of an urban land of opportunity for women off-farm. The opportunity and anonymity of the city allowed a blurring of the boundaries between the public and private spheres, and as more places emerged for women in cities, such as settlement houses, women's clubs, and department stores, opportunities were slowly emerging for women to be on their own (Spain 2014).

Studies that center gender in the migration narrative combat the conventional framework of the autonomous migrant as male. In that framework, it is only within family migration that we observe women (Morokvašic 1984). When a woman is the autonomous migrant, she is often not just in search of better employment opportunities or economic mobility but also the social mobility that may come with improved gender equality in receiving places. Tienda and Booth (1991, 53) identify four mechanisms through which migration can alter gender asymmetries: "(1) access to productive resources and/or ownership of the means of production; (2) control over the labour process in both domestic and market spheres; (3) mode of remuneration (in kind or cash) [to which women have direct access]; and (4) consciousness about inequities in power and authority in the public and private domains." For young rural farm women during the farm crisis, the city offered avenues toward greater autonomy through the four mechanisms above. In rural areas, women's access to farming was most often only through marriage, they were usually supervised by their father or husband and had no control over the monetary fruits of that farm labor, and they were brought up with the social norm that their unpaid work on the farm was for the greater good of the farm family. The city offered independent wage-earning opportunities,

freedom from patriarchal supervision at both work and at home for single women who migrated without their parents or relatives, and exposure to burgeoning public spaces open to women in cities, which allowed them greater autonomy.

Women's in-migration can also alter gender asymmetries in the places that receive them. Watkins-Owens described how migration from the Caribbean to New York City opened up more opportunities with greater status for Caribbean women through opportunities for leadership positions in benevolent associations (1996, 73–74). In a study of internal migrants, Meyerowitz (1988) chronicles White women who lived away from their families in Chicago between 1880 and 1930. She discusses how working-class women created their own communities away from their families and shifted cultural norms about women's sexuality. Similarly, Fine (1990) tells the story of how White clerical workers in Chicago between 1870 and 1930 sought to legitimize their work through the development of clerical education and organization of local charities and groups to help place women in these jobs. In the yearly scrapbook from the Southern Summer School for Women Workers in Industry held from July to September 1927 in Sweet Briar, Virginia, many White girls recounted their participation in various strikes at different factories across the South. One, Ruth Caully, penned a song to the tune of "Jingle Bells" that described how she felt about the importance of labor movements:

> Southern girls awake, Southern girls arise
> Better conditions make, get your share of the prize
> Although there's work it's true, if we will dare and do
> We'll get a decent living wage and a little surplus too. (Caully 1927, 16)

These women, moving from rural communities to urban environments, helped challenge popular ideas of where, when, and with whom a woman should be seen.

3. DATA

To create a sample of women who migrated off-farm and those who stayed, I use the 1920, 1930, and 1940 full count Decennial Censuses (Ruggles et al. 2020) and the Census Tree dataset (Price et al. 2021; Buckles et al. 2023; Price et al. 2023), which links both men and women across these years. I begin with never-married girls and young women aged 0-25 living on farms in the South in 1920 linked to 1940. I then add 1930 Census information for those who also had a link to the intervening year. I reweight these linked individuals to be representative of

the broader population in 1940 following Bailey et. al. (2020).[7] I assign a binary indicator of migrant equal to one if the individual was living on a farm in the South in 1920 and was living off-farm in an urban area[8] in 1930 or 1940. Non-migrants are those still living on a farm in the South in the end year.

I rely on two main samples for my analyses. My first sample is all linked women 1920 to 1940. The second is a "sister sample," which identifies sisters based on who was living in the same household. I take a broad approach to who qualifies as "sisters." I keep all female individuals whose relation to the household head was either child, niece, or grandchild and who had none of their own children in the household (to exclude situations such as where both mother and daughter were living with the mother's father (household head). Intergenerational families and extended families commonly lived together on farms, so this expanded definition aims to include these extended family arrangements. Results using a more exclusive definition of sister (those whose relation to household head was "child" only), are similar. My outcome variables of interest are in three categories: (1) occupation, (2) education, and (3) family characteristics.

Occupation and income variables

My occupation variables of interest are: (1) a binary indicator for whether an individual is in the labor force (employed or looking for work), (2) a binary indicator for whether she is both in the labor force and employed in an off-farm occupation, (3) the number of weeks worked, and (4) wage income and occupational rank.

Wage income and occupation rank require additional processing beyond what is available in the decennial census. I use two different measures of wage income as recorded in the 1940 census. The first measure closely follows Goldin and Margo (1992) and Collins and Niemesh (2019): I divide wage income by the number of weeks worked and retain only those values for individuals who worked for 40 weeks or more in a year and had a weekly wage of $6 or more. My second measure is less stringent, as women worked on average fewer weeks a year than men. For this measure, I use the same definition above, but set the minimum number of weeks worked to 1.

[7] I weight based on age, age squared, length of first and last name, first and last name commonness, family size, birth state, whether the individual was residing in a different state than their birth state, current state of residence, and whether they owned their home. The results of this reweighting are shown in Appendix Tables A4 and A5.
[8] Places with more the 2,500 inhabitants

I next create a measure of occupational rank that includes farmers and apply it to both 1930 and 1940. The 1940 Census was the first to collect wage information.[9] There were some key gaps in coverage: there is no wage information for self-employed individuals, and the wages of farm laborers, owners, and tenants are not systematically collected. I follow Collins and Wanamaker (2022), who impute self-employed and farmer earnings using the 1960 census for self-employed individuals, and additional information on farm ownership and earnings for farmers. Imputations are at the sex by race by region level. From these wage data, I am then able to construct occupation income ranks by three-digit occupation code at the race by region by sex level for 1930 and 1940.

Education

I examine both a continuous measure of education (highest grade achieved in one-grade increments) and multiple binary indicators of education: some high school (greater than or equal to nine years of school), high school or more (greater than or equal to 12 years of schooling), and college or more (greater than or equal to 16 years of schooling). I also examine the intergenerational transmission of education from mother to daughter.[10] Because education level is not first measured until 1940, I attach this information to the daughter by linking the mother from 1920 to 1940. A key assumption I make is that a mother's education level did not change between 1920, when I observe her with her daughter on a farm in the South and 1940, when I first observe her education level.

Family Characteristics

I also look at six family characteristics in the end year: (1) married, and if married: (2) the number of children, and husband occupation variables: (3) in the labor force, (4) weeks worked, (5) wage, and (6) occupational rank. Wage and occupational rank are determined as described above, where income is adjusted for number of weeks worked and occupational rank is determined for farm workers and self-employed individuals using the 1960 Census.

[9] The income question also faced intense pushback from individuals who considered the question an invasion of privacy and government overreach, prompting some to give inaccurate income information or refuse to answer the question (Bouk 2022).
[10] Mother-daughter relationship is established using the momloc variable created by IPUMS.

4. SUMMARY STATISTICS

Table 1 outlines the key demographic summary statistics, split by my two samples: all linked women and sisters. My two samples are very similar on major demographic characteristics as measured in 1940 such as age, share migrant, and share never married. Black women in my samples are more likely to be never married, more likely to have migrated off-farm, and more likely to have migrated out of the South than White women.

[Table 1]

Initial descriptive statistics comparing those who migrated and those who stayed among all linked women highlight some key features of the outcomes for women who migrated. I begin by comparing movers' and stayers' relationship to household head. This will give some indication as to what share of movers are living outside of the patriarchal family household. Table 2 shows the distribution of never-married women in 1940 by relationship to household head. Migrants were more likely to be living independently. While "living with a parent" was the largest group among both migrants and non-migrants, among migrants, a significant portion (16.03 percent of Black women and 20.74 percent of White women) lived as lodgers. Over a third of migrants were either head of household or not living with a family member as household head. In contrast, of those who stayed in the rural farming community, over 90 percent of Black and White women were living with a family member. These descriptive results highlight one of the key ways in which city migration allowed for women to achieve some degree of autonomy. Just as U.S.-born and immigrant women of the nineteenth century found avenues for freedom, activism, and protest within the Lowell mills and shoe factories of New England, by moving out from under the patriarchal household head, these migrant women had more opportunity to engage in work and recreational opportunities, and (though perhaps not their original motivation) find their voice through activism (Dublin 1979; Blewett 1991; Gordon 2002).

[Table 2]

In Tables 3 and 4, I compare the top ten largest occupational categories outside of unpaid family farm work for Black and White movers and stayers. These shares underscore the

occupational segregation between White and Black women, and also show the variety (or lack of variety) of jobs available to women in both urban and rural areas. Unsurprisingly, my data show that Black women were predominantly relegated to the domestic service sphere, especially those who were migrants. White women who did not face racial discrimination in the labor market were much more likely to be in occupations such as manufacturing, clerical, nursing, or teaching. Among Black women who remained in rural farming communities and engaged in wage work, there was slightly more diversity of occupations, and a significant portion held positions in teaching or farm wage work. Among White women, there was less diversity of occupation in rural areas as compared to urban areas.

[Table 3]

[Table 4]

I next take the occupations of migrant versus non-migrant single women and order them by occupational income score. I then overlay the distributions of the two groups (migrant and non-migrant single women). Figure 1 shows these distributions by race and region of migration. These figures underscore what is also apparent from Tables 3 and 4, which is that there is more occupational diversity among White women in urban areas compared to both White non-migrants and Black women, and that Black non-migrant women have slightly more diversity of occupation than Black migrant women, due in part to the option of farm wage labor and access to the higher-paying occupation of teacher.

[Figure 1]

Because the pull factors for women's migration included not only their own ability to rise up the occupational ladder, but also the potential to find a more "marriageable" husband, I conduct this same exercise using husbands' occupations. Table 5 shows the most common occupations for migrant women's husbands based on region of destination.

[Table 5]

Black women's husbands were overwhelmingly classified as laborers or operative and kindred workers. White women's husbands on the other hand, had more diversity of occupations available to them: laborers and operative kindred workers are also the most common occupations among these White men, but large shares were also in White collar work such as managerial or sales roles. Notably, White husbands in Southern cities were more likely to be in managerial roles than those outside of the South.

[Figure 2]

Figure 2 shows that for both Black and White women, there was occupational upgrading in terms of husband's occupations for women who migrated. This was largely due to the fact that farmers, even farm owners, are ranked lower in terms of occupation score than other occupations more common in urban areas. Importantly, a greater share of the distribution of White husbands in the South had higher occupation income scores, reflecting what is in Table 5: these husbands were more likely to be in managerial roles. Conversely, Black husbands out of the South are doing better in terms of occupational rank than those in the South.

5. EMPIRICAL STRATEGY

With these patterns in mind, I formally test to what extent migration was associated with improved economic mobility for women. I begin by looking at the returns to migration for women who migrated off-farm to an urban area, following similar work such as Abramitzky et al. (2012), Collins and Wanamaker (2014), and Ward (2022) who compare migrant and non-migrant brothers. By comparing sisters, I control for family-level factors that may influence selection into migration. For these rural-urban migrants, addressing selection at the family level is especially important as previous work found family characteristics, such as being on a family-owned farm rather than a rented farm or having a literate parent, were important predictors of migration (Withrow Forthcoming). I first look at measures of intragenerational mobility: education, labor force participation, and family formation. I then look at the effect of migration on breaking the intergenerational transmission of educational attainment between mothers and daughters. Finally, I look at migrants' labor market assimilation compared to urban natives and the occupational status of their husbands.

5.1 Intragenerational Mobility

Using Equation 1, I measure differences in 1940 outcomes between sisters:

$$Y_{it+10} = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 Migrant_{it+10} + NonSouth_{it} + X'_{it} + \sigma_{jt} + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

I measure two sets of outcomes (Y_i). The first set I measure for all women: (1) an indicator variable showing whether a woman is employed in an independent wage-earning occupation, (2) her log weekly income if employed, and (3) her highest achieved grade. $Migrant_i$ is a dummy variable equal to 1 if the individual was an off-farm migrant between 1920 and 1940. $NonSouth_{it}$ is a dummy variable equal to 1 if the migrant moved out of South and represents the Non-South premium or penalty over a within-South move. σ_j are household fixed effects and absorb variation in returns to migration that are a result of family background characteristics, such as farm tenure status, parents' literacy, or geographic location of the household. X'_i are individual characteristics that can vary within household: age and birth order and whether the sister is married in 1940[11]. I then limit my analyses to sisters who have both married by 1940 to examine differences in number of children as well as husband characteristics: labor force participation, weeks worked, and occupational income rank.

5.2 Intergenerational Mobility: Education

I next examine whether migration improved the intergenerational mobility of educational attainment between mothers and daughters. Many young women in their accounts of leaving the farm emphasized the greater opportunity for educational attainment outside of rural areas. I measure the effect of migration on the intergenerational correlation of education using 1940

[11] I use marriage status in 1940 as an individual control variable rather than an outcome variable for several reasons. First, in my main sample, which focuses on women I see in 1920 and 1940, I cannot determine whether migration occurred before or after marriage. Second, marriage status is likely to have a large influence on whether a woman in in the labor force in 1940. Finally, using my sample of sisters that I see in 1920, 1930, and 1940, I directly measure whether migration predicts marriage by 1940. In Appendix Table A6, I look at migrants who moved between 1920 and 1930, but who were still never married in 1930, and their never-married non-migrant sisters. I then compare those women to their non-migrant sisters in 1940 on marriage status. I find no significant correlation between being never-married in 1940 and migration status.

education levels for the daughters and, when available, education attainment for mothers, assuming that the mother's education did not change from 1920, when I observe mothers and daughters in the same household, and 1940, when highest grade achieved is first measured:

$$Y_i = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 Mom_i \times Migrant_i + X'_i + \sigma_{jt} + \varepsilon_i \ (2)$$

where Y_i is (1) year of education as measured in 1940. Mom_i is the mother's education level and $Migrant_i$ is a dummy variable equal to 1 if the individual was an off-farm migrant between 1920 and 1940. X'_i are individual controls such as age and σ_{jt} are household fixed effects. When household fixed effects are included, the mother's main effect drops out.

5.3 Labor Market Assimilation

Finally, I ask whether these migrant farm women were able to "catch up" to their city-born counterparts in terms of education, labor force participation, wages, and husband's wages by 1940. I look specifically at farm women who migrated first to an urban area by 1930 and measure their ranks in 1930 and 1940. This also allows me to explore whether the Great Depression slows down migrant women's catching up. For this sample, I look at all women and do not limit to the sister sample. I measure this following Equation 3, where $Migrant_{it} = 1$ if a woman migrated to an urban area between 1920 and 1930 (t), $Rank_{it}$ I is her occupational income rank in time t=1930 or t=1940:

$$Rank_{it} = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 Migrant_{it} + \varepsilon_i \ (3)$$

I also measure the same equation but for migrants' husbands. $Rank_{it}$ instead measures husbands' occupation rank (regardless of their migration status) in 1930 and 1940. For both sets of outcomes, I also separately examine women who migrated within South or out of South and stayed in their destination region (South or Non-South) throughout 1920-1940.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Intragenerational Results: Sisters

I first compare sisters across a variety of outcomes in Table 6. The coefficient on Migrant compares non-migrants to rural-urban migrants within the South. The coefficient on Non-South (which is only defined for migrants, as all stayers are still in the South), shows the premium or penalty for a longer move out of the South. The coefficient on Migrant plus the coefficient on Non-South shows the difference between non-migrants and out-of-South migrants.

For all migrants, migration away from the farm predicts an increase in labor force participation, having an off-farm occupation, number of weeks worked, and number of school grades completed. For non-South migrants, however, the benefits in terms of increased labor force participation, having an off-farm occupation, or weeks work (particularly for White women) are less than for those who stayed within the South.

[Table 6]

For all migrants, however, moving out of the South conferred higher wages. I measure two versions of weekly wage. The first is for women who reported working at least one week out of the year and made over $6 per week. The second is a more stringent measure that requires a woman to have worked over 40 weeks in the year and again have an average wage of over $6 a week. For Black women, migration off farm does not predict higher wages for those who worked at least one week in the past year, whether or not that move was within or out of the South. For those who worked 40 or more weeks, however, a move out of the South is associated with an increase in weekly earnings of 37.2 log points, or about 45.1 percent.[12] For White women working both short term and long term over the course of the year, there was also a significant wage premium to moving out of the South. White women working at least one week in the past year earned between 3.87 percent (within South) to 26 percent (out of South) more than non-migrants who were working off-farm, and those working at least 40 weeks in the past year earned between 8.5 percent (within South) and 36.5 percent (out of South) more than non-migrants. Finally, I find that women who migrated off farm had fewer children than their non-migrant counterparts. Figure 3 shows the non-South premium and penalty graphically across all outcomes.

[12] Percent change $=(e^{\text{log points}}-1) \times 100$

[Figure 3]

For both Black and White women, migration out of the South meant increases in their wage income. However, the estimates on wage gains for Black female migrants are smaller than those shown in Collins and Wanamaker (2014), who compare Black migrant and non-migrant brothers during the first wave of the Great Migration from 1910-1930. They find a nominal earnings benefit for the brother who left of about 89 log points (143 percent increase), meaning Black women gained less than Black men in terms of earnings from migration (236). Overall, jobs in urban areas appeared to be paying women more than in rural areas, but these moderate gains underscore that the diversity of jobs available to women in both locations was quite low.

For Black women, job opportunities were similar in both rural and urban areas (with the exception of farm wage work). However, those in rural areas who were living on-farm but working off-farm were more likely than migrants to be teachers. Black teachers in rural areas in the South earned a median wage of $12.50 per week. If a migrant went on to be a teacher in an urban area, she could expect to earn, based on the median weekly wage, $15.14 and if she left the South, $32.59. Domestic service, however, was the most common occupation for rural-to-urban Black migrants. Domestic servants earned a median of $7.69 in the rural South, $7.23 in the urban South, and $10 in the urban non-South. For Black women who were considering moving within the South, the job opportunity of domestic servant would not bring many gains in weekly wages.[13]

White women who were wage workers in rural areas were more likely to be teachers – a well-paying job – than to be in any other occupation. However, White women were much less likely to be employed in rural areas and instead were mainly doing unpaid farm labor. Once in the city, paying jobs for White women that did not require as much education were available (such as factory work). This work, however, paid less than teaching. Rural White teachers in the South were making $21.88 per week, but they were making $26.67 within Southern cities and $37.50 outside the South. For factory work, White women could expect to make $15 out of the South but only $12 within the South, whether in a rural or urban areas.

[13] Jobs that provided housing, such as live-in domestic service, while paying rather low wages, facilitated migration for women who arrived in a city with little money for a room in boarding house and few known relatives with whom to stay (Meyerowitz 1988).

For both White and Black women, these wages could be used for their own support and enjoyment, but often at least a portion of a woman's wages went to support her family. In "Rural Girls in the City for Work," a study conducted by the Southern Women's Educational Alliance about young girls who left rural Virginia for nearby cities, 37.6 percent of the 230 White respondents used some money to support their families. Most of these women were living with their families in the city at the time. Notably, "only about one-fourth listed any expenditures for recreation" (Hatcher 1930, 64). Though migration did not always lead to better jobs, it could lead to improved life satisfaction. This idea is reflected in the accounts of White girls and women who made the move. Among White girls who moved to either Durham or Richmond from rural areas and who were interviewed by the Southern Women's Educational Alliance, a large majority said their status (defined not just economically, but in terms of their social and recreational life, educational resources, religious resources, and balance of free time and home duties/chores) had improved, despite the sometimes low-status or low-paying work they found themselves performing:

> When it is remembered that in almost every case these girls were holding low grade positions yielding poor or rather poor earnings and long working hours, the fact that 86 percent of them felt that they had materially improved their lot by coming to the city for work, will convey some idea of the loneliness and barrenness of their lives in the country and of the hard work expected of them there. (Hatcher 1930, 84)

Black women also expressed the view that the city offered some respite from farm life, but these benefits were often eroded by the conditions that awaited them, especially as domestics in White households. The aspiration expressed in 1926 by Rossa Cooley, an advocate of Black women's education, was not always realized:

> The gauge that freedom set to these Negro women of the southern countrysides was not to become housemaids to be had for wages by city dwellers; but to become home-makers and mothers... (Cooley 1926, 81)

Despite the absence of large gains in terms of wages, moving did increase both Black and White women's ability to earn money at all. This was a major draw for many women off-farm, either in order to help their families back home, to earn their own spending money, or just to have the "freedom" of being out from under the patriarchal supervision of farm labor.

Finally, both Black and White women who migrated finished between one and two more years of schooling than those who didn't migrate. Whether these education gains translated into

more job opportunities for Black women, though, is unlikely given discrimination. Melnea Cass, Black civil rights activist, described this reality,

> I couldn't get a job when I came out of school, I told you, in any of the stores or any place else. The only resort for most black people was domestic work. . . You always could make a living. But it wasn't always what you wanted to do. But you had to do it. . . . I could have gone in as a trainee in some of these offices, receptionist, and all these things I see people doing now, I could have easily done it in my young days. But they wouldn't hire me, because I was a colored woman. . . That's how they [Black women] educated their families and did everything else, doing domestic work. (Wolcott 1996, 65)

While education was a strong motivator for migration, the payoff for Black women was not realized in access to better-paying jobs as it was for White women.

6.2 Intragenerational Results: Sisters: Education

Many migrants cited access to education as a major motivation because their rural schools did not extend past a certain grade, or they wished to pursue specialized education such as in nursing. I look at three binary indicators: finished some high school, high school plus, and college plus. As above, the coefficient on Migrant = 1 compares non-migrants to rural-to-urban migrants within the South and non-South indicates the premium or penalty associated with the longer move.

[Table 7]

I find that for Black women, migration within the South is associated with a 6.5 percent increased likelihood of getting some high school education, 3.2 percent increased likelihood of have a high school education or more, and a 1 percent increase of college or more. Moving out of the South further increases the likelihood for some high school and high school plus, but actually decreases the likelihood of completing a college education compared to non-migrants. Few universities in the North accepted Black students. Many of the colleges and advanced programs open to Black women were founded and located in the South at the time. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and land grant colleges open to Black students were primarily located in the South. For example, Spelman College, founded in 1881 in Atlanta, Georgia, was the first Black college for women.

Among White women, both within- and out-of-South moves were associated with an increased likelihood of completing all levels of education, with out-of-South moves only differentially improving the completion of some high school but not other levels of education compared within-South moves. Figure 4 shows the non-South premium or penalty across all education outcomes.

[Figure 4]

The struggle in rural farming areas to provide more than an eighth-grade education during the early twentieth century is well documented. Despite advances made in improving schools for White children in the South after 1900, Black primary education was severely underfunded within the South. In 1917, there were only 64 public high schools for Black children in the South (Margo 1990, 20). Private schools often were the only option for secondary education for southern Black children, but these schools were more often located in towns or cities, making them difficult for Black children on farms to attend. Combined with the strict labor requirements for children on farms – especially cotton farms – during harvesting season, education was particularly difficult for Black children to attain. Towns and cities, regardless of region, offered rural children more in terms of education.

6.3 Intergenerational Mobility: Mother's Education

In Table 8, I show the relationship between mother's highest grade achieved and her daughters. A positive coefficient on mother's education means the two measures are correlated, with 1 meaning that a mother's education perfectly predicts her daughters. A negative interaction on Mother's Education X Migration indicates that migration is disrupting the association between the two. In Panel A Columns 1 and 2, I look at the simple relationship between a mother's education level and her daughters by 1940. A positive and significant coefficient shows that mother's education predicts 45 to 47 percent of her daughter's education level. Columns 3 and 4 interact mother's education and migrant status. A negative coefficient means that migration is decoupling a mother's education from her daughter's. In Columns 5 and 6, I am once again including household fixed effects. I find that looking at migrants within-South and out-of-South combined, migration reduces the mother-daughter correlation. As I find that migration improves

women's education over non-migrants, migration appears to earn an education above what their mothers were able to achieve.

[Table 8]

Next, I look at whether region of destination matters. Panel B compares non-migrant sisters to their within-South migrant counterparts and Panel C compares non-migrant sisters to their out-of-South migrant counterparts. While migration was effective for White women's education attainment compared to their mothers' across both regions, only Black daughters who left the South were able to improve their education over their mother's. In this case, as migrants gain more years of education than their non-migrant sisters, migration can be an engine for educational mobility above the mother's education. These results show that while educational attainment was increasing across the board for rural children, migration to an urban area could accelerate these rural women's education. This acceleration could have had important implications for the children of migrants compared to non-migrants, which is an area for future research.

6.4 Migrants' Occupational Rank and Labor Market Assimilation

I next look at to what extent these rural-to-urban migrants were able to "catch up" to their city counterparts over time. Figure 5 shows the coefficient on my migrant dummy variable predicting occupation rank in 1930 and 1940. I focus on migrants who first arrived in the city in 1930 and whether their rank with respect to urban natives improved by 1940.

White migrants who arrive in urban areas were in occupations between one and two deciles below that of their urban native counterparts. This disparity was highest in Northern cities. While those in Southern cities show some improvement compared to urban natives, the Depression years increased the gap for those in the North. By 1940, White rural-to-urban migrants were still occupying occupations over a decile below their urban counterparts on average. These results also highlight that even though migrants positively selected on education and literacy into migration both within and out of the South, the lack of education available in farming communities, lack of transferrable skills from family farm labor to urban work, and

fewer job network connections for migrants compared to urban natives, likely made it harder for these women to catch up.

[Figure 5]

Black migrants, however, arrived in cities in occupational ranks very similar to their urban counterparts: Black migrants were overall less than one decile below urban natives in 1930. There is some decline in mobility from 1930 to 1940, especially for non-South cities. In Southern cities, however, Black rural-urban migrants are holding similar occupations to urban women and are not differentially affected by the Depression. While these results might signal greater occupation mobility for Black migrants than White once in the city, it instead is likely a result of the few opportunities and jobs that were afforded to Black women, regardless of whether she was from the farm or the city. As shown earlier in Table 3, the overwhelming majority of Black migrants were working in domestic service. That migrants were not sorting overwhelmingly into different jobs than those already in the city indicates that they were direct competition for urban workers. This is similar to work by Boustan, Fishback, and Kantor (2010), who show how during the Great Depression, migrants to cities reduced work opportunities to existing residents.

6.5 Men's "Marriageability" and Husband Characteristics

After education, a greater supply of "marriageable" mean was a common discussion point among both the migrants themselves and the various governmental and non-profit organizations concerned with women's exodus. In this section, I measure whether those women who left the farm may have found themselves in "better" marriages, as described by their husband's occupation: his hours worked, wages received, and occupation rank compared to both farmers and the husbands of urban natives.

Comparing migrant sisters' economic mobility based on husband's occupation and income poses some challenges: farming as an occupation is fundamentally different than wage- and salary-based occupations in terms of how the Census collected income information. In Table 9, I compare husband's earnings and work across migrants and non-migrants via multiple measures to give a more holistic picture of whether the "marriageability" of off-farm men,

defined as whether they may provide economic mobility for their partner, is supported by what measures are available.

[Table 9]

In Table 9 Columns 1 and 2, I first examine labor force participation and weeks worked as presented in the 1940 Census. Looking at differences in Census-reported weekly income, however, may overstate urban husbands' earnings and understate farmer husbands' earnings because farm owners and tenants, like those who were self-employed, would have reported no wage income. Additionally, farm laborers as well as owners and tenants often received non-monetary income such as in-kind payment or housing. Wage income that was reported may refer to non-primary employment. To correct for this, I follow Collins and Wanamaker (2022), as described above, to assign occupation income ranks to all husbands, adjusting for farmer income and farm ownership. In this way, I measure to what extent migration within her region may improve a sister's income rank (as measured by her husband).[14] These results are presented in Column 3 in Table 9.

I find that Black migrants married men who were at least 2.8 percentage points less likely to be in the labor force, and worked 6.2 percent fewer weeks than the farmer husbands of non-migrant sisters. Among White women, migrants married men who were about 1 percentage point less likely to be in the labor force and worked 0.7 percent fewer weeks. For those White women who left the South, their husbands worked even fewer weeks than those who stayed in the region (2.5 percent fewer weeks than non-migrants' husbands). These results highlight the role of the farm as a form of informal insurance for the family during the Great Depression. While work was especially hard to find in cities during the 1930s, the farm could serve as an outlet for men and families to remain economically productive during high unemployment (Boone and Wilse-Samson 2023). For White women's husbands, it is also possible that network connections were stronger in the South, leading to better outcomes in terms of employment than those who made

[14] These measures do not account for variation in earnings within region/race/occupation. This means, for example, that all White farm owners in a region are considered to have the same rank. These results thus compare whether a farm wife (by ownership status) is better positioned within the income distribution in a region than a husband's urban job in her migrant sister's region.

the move North, especially during the competitive employment environment during the Depression.

However, for those husbands who were employed and working in 1940, I find there were significant gains to migration. Urban migrant sisters' husbands are in higher occupational ranks, with considerably higher-ranking husbands for those who moved out of the South. For many this echoed the common complaints of farm women at the time, who bemoaned the lack of electricity, running water, and other modern amenities that were difficult to afford or come by in rural areas. An urban move would allow access to these benefits in addition to access to urban entertainment such as movies, dinners, and access to museums and other cultural institutions, especially so given the higher wages afforded to their non-farmer husbands.

Finally, in Figure 6, I look at whether the husbands of these rural-urban migrants are similarly situated within the occupation distribution as the husbands of those women who grew up in the city. I once again compare migrants who moved by 1930 and whether their husbands fell behind during the Great Depression.

[Figure 6]

I find that migrants' husbands are at lower occupation ranks than husbands of women who were already in the city. However, the differences between these migrant husbands' ranks and urban native husbands' ranks is smaller than that between migrant women and their urban counterparts. There is also little evidence of the Depression differentially affecting migrant families based on husbands' earnings compared to non-migrant families in the cities.

Correlation between migration and higher-earning husbands highlights how more "marriageable" men were a major pull factor for women's migration. As women's access to socioeconomic standing, even outside of farming, was dependent on her husband's earnings (not just her own), making a "good match" in terms of marriage could be one avenue toward mobility. This was especially true in rural farm communities, where there was a high correlation between childhood economic status and married household economic status, indicating little upward mobility through marriage (Charlton 1954, 28–29). For Black female migrants, whose partners in rural farm communities were mainly sharecroppers whose ability to earn and collect the capital necessary to become farm owners was severely limited by racism, migration to urban

areas could provide an opportunity for "better" marriage partners. Black men had a wider range of better-paying jobs (including manufacturing jobs) available to them than they did in a rural farm community. White women, whose potential marriage partners in rural areas were much more likely to be able to rise up the farm tenure ladder to farm owner, did not see as large gains from migration in terms of husband occupational upgrading, though significant upgrading was possible. Urban areas were thus more important for Black women than for White women in providing access to "marriageable" men, since their potential husbands were not bound by the same constraints of racism in cities. Still, in both rural and urban areas, marriage was more likely to bring economic mobility for White women.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper explores to what extent women who left the farm fared better in terms of access to independent wage working opportunities, earnings, relative socioeconomic status, and education than those who stayed. It also asks whether those who married secured more "marriageable" partners in terms of spousal occupational rank. I find that there were significant gains: both Black and White single women who left the farm for the city were more likely to have an independent wage occupation and to earn 35-45 percent more in nominal wages. They were significantly more likely to finish high school. When comparing women who were already in the city to those who arrived between 1920 and 1940, I find that migrants had occupation scores below urban natives. This disparity was greater for White women than for Black, which underscores how Black women had fewer occupations that were open to them. For women who married, I confirm what many women mentioned in their accounts of why they left the farm, which is that the city offered "better" marriage partners. Women who migrated had husbands two occupational deciles above non-migrant women who married farmers. These results underscore the connection between the labor market and the marriage market, and how for women, whose mobility was as much or more tied to who they married rather than their occupation, migration takes place at the intersection of the two.

These results point to more questions necessary to understand the role of rural-to-urban migration in women's economic mobility in the early twentieth century. Urban backlash against these migrants during the Great Depression, societal expectations about who among these migrants was deserving of social services or aid, and legal limits on mobility that fell along race

and gendered lines likely had an important role in the extent to which migration afforded mobility. In future research I will also explore the intergenerational mobility between women who made this migration and *their* daughters and granddaughters. It will quantify to what extent mother's migration and subsequent increases in education, labor force participation, and wages had significant effects on their daughter's and granddaughter's income and educational attainment to the present day.

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Tables

Table 1. Demographic Summary Statistics in 1940

	A. All Linked Women		**B. Sister Sample**	
Share Black	0.145		0.091	
Average Age	27.269		27.669	
Median Age	26		26	
Share Never Married	0.357		0.331	
Share Movers	0.361		0.339	
Share South	0.779		0.800	
Share NS	0.221		0.200	
	Black	White	Black	White
Average Age	25.639	27.545	25.721	27.865
Median Age	24	26	24	27
Share Never Married	0.589	0.317	0.572	0.307
Share Movers	0.468	0.343	0.418	0.331
Share South	0.645	0.809	0.635	0.821
Share NS	0.355	0.191	0.365	0.179
N	135,278	1,005,263	44,119	512,338

Notes: Table shows the demographic characteristics of the linked sample of 1920s farm women to 1940. "All linked women" refers to my linked sample of individuals who were age 20 to 45 in 1940 and who were unmarried and living on a rural farm in the South in 1920. "Sister sample" refers to the main sample limited to individuals whose also had a sister in the linked dataset.

Table 2. Relationship to Household Head, Migrants and Non-Migrants 1940

	Black, Non-Migrant		Black, Migrant		White, Non-Migrant		White, Migrant	
Rank	**Relate**	**Pct.**	**Relate**	**Pct.**	**Relate**	**Pct.**	**Relate**	**Pct.**
1	Child	84.09	Child	45.76	Child	88.45	Child	43.47
2	Sibling	5.32	Lodgers	16.03	Sibling	4.91	Lodgers	20.74
3	Head/householder	2.33	Head/householder	11.49	Sibling-in-law	1.16	Head/householder	8.67
4	Niece	1.42	Sibling	8.39	Head/householder	1.14	Sibling	6.14
5	Lodgers	1.30	Sibling-in-law	3.74	Lodgers	0.96	Sibling-in-law	4.64
6	Grandchild	1.29	Niece	2.89	Niece	0.80	Niece	1.91
7	Sibling-in-law	1.21	Servant	2.56	Grandchild	0.57	Maid	1.88
8	Stepchild	0.98	Maid	2.26	Stepchild	0.56	Nurse	1.76
9	Cousin	0.44	Cousin	1.47	Housekeeper	0.28	Partner	1.56
10	Servant	0.36	Roomer	1.14	Boarders	0.22	Servant	1.43

Notes: Table shows the top ten most common relationships to household heads by race and migration status in 1940 among never-married women.

Table 3. Top 10 Most Common Occupations in 1940, Black Women

	Migrants, South		Migrants, Non-South		Non-Migrants	
Rank	**Occupation**	**Pct.**	**Occupation**	**Pct.**	**Occupation**	**Pct.**
1	Private household workers (n.e.c.)	59.24	Private household workers (n.e.c.)	57.53	Farm laborers, wage workers	31.96
2	Laundresses, private household	6.40	Operative and kindred workers (n.e.c.)	9.90	Private household workers (n.e.c.)	28.47
3	Operative and kindred workers (n.e.c.)	4.90	Service workers, except private household (n.e.c.)	4.37	Teachers (n.e.c.)	11.97
4	Service workers, except private household (n.e.c.)	4.35	Waiters and waitresses	3.23	Laborers (n.e.c.)	9.14
5	Teachers (n.e.c.)	4.02	Housekeepers, private household	2.97	Laundresses, private household	5.63
6	Cooks, except private household	3.32	Laundry and dry cleaning operatives	2.93	Housekeepers, private household	3.17
7	Laundry and dry cleaning operatives	2.80	Barbers, beauticians, and manicurists	2.01	Operative and kindred workers (n.e.c.)	2.08
8	Laborers (n.e.c.)	2.65	Laborers (n.e.c.)	1.88	Cooks, except private household	1.65
9	Housekeepers, private household	2.48	Clerical and kindred workers (n.e.c.)	1.42	Service workers, except private household (n.e.c.)	0.67
10	Waiters and waitresses	1.15	Teachers (n.e.c.)	1.28	Laundry and dry cleaning operatives	0.57

Notes: Table shows the top ten most common occupations by race and migration status in 1940 among never-married women.

Table 4. Top 10 Most Common Occupations in 1940, White Women

	Migrants, South		Migrants, Non-South		Non-Migrants	
Rank	**Occupation**	**Pct.**	**Occupation**	**Pct.**	**Occupation**	**Pct.**
1	Operative and kindred workers (n.e.c.)	25.77	Operative and kindred workers (n.e.c.)	18.88	Teachers (n.e.c.)	23.56
2	Stenographers, typists, and secretaries	9.65	Waiters and waitresses	8.82	Operative and kindred workers (n.e.c.)	20.94
3	Salesmen and sales clerks (n.e.c.)	8.92	Private household workers (n.e.c.)	8.78	Farm laborers, wage workers	6.36
4	Teachers (n.e.c.)	6.49	Salesmen and sales clerks (n.e.c.)	8.24	Salesmen and sales clerks (n.e.c.)	5.78
5	Nurses, professional	5.95	Stenographers, typists, and secretaries	7.92	Private household workers (n.e.c.)	5.31
6	Bookkeepers	5.34	Nurses, professional	5.91	Laborers (n.e.c.)	4.89
7	Waiters and waitresses	5.25	Clerical and kindred workers (n.e.c.)	5.69	Stenographers, typists, and secretaries	4.42
8	Clerical and kindred workers (n.e.c.)	4.75	Bookkeepers	3.45	Housekeepers, private household	4.04
9	Private household workers (n.e.c.)	3.53	Teachers (n.e.c.)	2.88	Clerical and kindred workers (n.e.c.)	3.51
10	Barbers, beauticians, and manicurists	3.18	Barbers, beauticians, and manicurists	2.80	Bookkeepers	2.39

Notes: Table shows the top ten most common occupations by race and migration status in 1940 among never-married women.

Table 5. Migrants' Husbands' Occupation, by Migration Region

	Black, South		Black, Non-South		White, South		White Non-South	
Rank	**Occupation**	**Pct.**	**Occupation**	**Pct.**	**Occupation**	**Pct.**	**Occupation**	**Pct.**
1	Laborers (n.e.c.)	35.61	Laborers (n.e.c.)	37.95	Managers, officials, and proprietors (n.e.c.)	11.55	Operative and kindred workers (n.e.c.)	14.78
2	Operative and kindred workers (n.e.c.)	8.00	Operative and kindred workers (n.e.c.)	8.69	Operative and kindred workers (n.e.c.)	11.40	Laborers (n.e.c.)	12.76
3	Truck and tractor drivers	6.12	Porters	7.25	Laborers (n.e.c.)	8.07	Managers, officials, and proprietors (n.e.c.)	6.44
4	Porters	4.85	Janitors and sextons	5.51	Salesmen and sales clerks (n.e.c.)	7.46	Truck and tractor drivers	5.47
5	Private household workers (n.e.c.)	4.83	Truck and tractor drivers	4.72	Truck and tractor drivers	6.48	Salesmen and sales clerks (n.e.c.)	4.30
6	Janitors and sextons	4.50	Private household workers (n.e.c.)	2.14	Clerical and kindred workers (n.e.c.)	3.66	Clerical and kindred workers (n.e.c.)	3.84
7	Farm laborers, wage workers	2.95	Service workers, except private household (n.e.c.)	1.89	Carpenters	3.01	Machinists	2.59
8	Deliverymen and routemen	2.16	Mechanics and repairmen, automobile	1.79	Mechanics and repairmen, automobile	2.84	Foremen (n.e.c.)	2.31
9	Cooks, except private household	2.08	Farm laborers, wage workers	1.74	Foremen (n.e.c.)	2.41	Carpenters	2.18
10	Carpenters	1.73	Waiters and waitresses	1.64	Bookkeepers	1.87	Mine operatives and laborers	2.11

Notes: Table shows the top ten most common occupations by race and migration status in 1940 among never-married women

Table 6. Migration Outcomes, Sisters

	In Labor Force	Has Occ	Weeks Worked (Log)	Weekly Wage (Log)	Weekly Wage, 40+ (Log)	Highest Grade	Has Child
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Panel A. Black						
Migrant = 1	0.303**	0.441**	0.148**	-0.109	0.112	0.730**	-0.126**
	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.027)	(0.080)	(0.135)	(0.073)	(0.011)
Non-South = 1	-0.059**	-0.099**	-0.029	0.070	0.260**	1.019**	-0.020
	(0.019)	(0.017)	(0.038)	(0.067)	(0.055)	(0.117)	(0.015)
Mean Dep. Var	0.513	0.411	3.530	2.335	2.297	7.215	0.359
HH FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nb. of Observations	41,952	41,952	14,688	1,940	788	40,509	41,952
R2	0.671	0.702	0.691	0.686	0.745	0.775	0.703
	Pabel B. White						
Migrant = 1	0.215*	0.244**	0.086**	0.038**	0.081**	0.568**	-0.085**
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.017)	(0.012)	(0.002)
Non-South = 1	-0.025**	-0.027**	-0.050*	0.193**	0.230**	0.140**	-0.026**
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.029)	(0.025)	(0.005)
Mean Dep. Var	0.255	0.229	3.571	2.689	2.665	9.106	0.555
HH FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nb. of Observations	494,541	494,541	66,906	31,964	14,958	478,571	494,541
R2	0.653	0.656	0.646	0.701	0.741	0.799	0.758

Table shows the relationship between migration between 1920 and 1940 and various 1940 outcomes. Migrant = 1 if the individual left the farm for an urban area in the South between 1920 and 1940. Non-South = 1 if the individual migrated out of the South. Sample is limited to sisters. In labor force, Has Occupation, and Has Child are dummy variables. Robust standard errors clustered at the household level in parentheses $^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table 7. Migration Outcomes: Education, Sisters

	Some High School	High School +	College +
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Panel A. Black		
Migrant = 1	0.065**	0.032**	0.010**
	(0.011)	(0.008)	(0.003)
Non-South=1	0.105**	0.057**	-0.017**
	(0.017)	(0.014)	(0.005)
Mean Dep. Var	0.309	0.143	0.010
HH FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nb. of Observations	40,509	40,509	40,509
R2	0.733	0.726	0.581
	Panel B. White		
Migrant = 1	0.083**	0.089**	0.010**
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)
Non-South=1	0.013**	0.002	-0.002
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.002)
Mean Dep. Var	0.527	0.292	0.023
HH FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nb. of Observations	478,571	478,571	478,571
R2	0.749	0.741	0.604

Table shows the relationship between migration between 1920 and 1940 and education level in 1940. Education variables are dummy variables where the reference category is all education levels below. Migrant = 1 if the individual left the farm for an urban area in the South between 1920 and 1940. Non-South = 1 if the individual migrated out of the South. Sample is limited to sisters. Robust standard errors clustered at the household level in parentheses $^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table 8. Intergenerational Mobility: Mother's Education

Outcome Variable: Highest Grade Achieved

	Panel A. All Regions					
	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Mother's Highest Grade	0.428**	0.478**	0.449**	0.475**		
	(0.010)	(0.002)	(0.012)	(0.003)		
Migrant X Mother's Highest Grade			-0.108**	-0.076**	-0.112**	-0.038**
			(0.019)	(0.004)	(0.030)	(0.005)
R2	0.155	0.221	0.188	0.246	0.784	0.799
N	27,581	350,698	27,581	350,698	26,653	343,523
HH FEs	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes

	Panel B. Within-South Migrants		*Panel C. Out-of-South Migrants*	
	Black	White	Black	White
	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Migrant X Mother's Highest Grade	-0.069	-0.031***	-0.250***	-0.081***
	(0.036)	(0.006)	(0.051)	(0.014)
R2	0.787	0.801	0.810	0.800
N	23,649	321,645	19,654	232,840
HH FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: Table shows the coefficient on Mother's Highest Grade and the interaction of Mother's Highest Grade and a binary indicator for migrant between 1920 and 1940 following Equation #. Inclusion of household fixed effects absorbs the main effect of Mother's Highest Grade. Panel A examines sisters regardless of region of destination, Panel B looks only at stayer sisters and those who moved to a city within the South, and Panel C looks only at stayer sisters and those who moved to a city outside of the South. Robust standard errors clustered at the household level in parentheses $^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table 9. Migrant Outcomes: Husbands, Sister Comparison

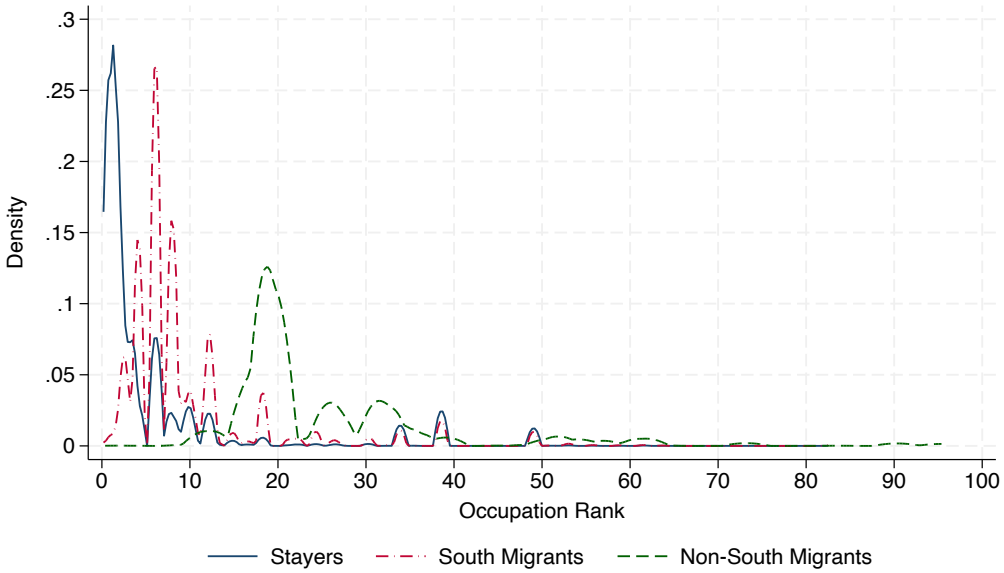
	In Labor Force	Log Weeks Worked	Occupational Income Decile
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Panel A. Black		
Migrant = 1	-0.028*	-0.062**	0.380**
	(0.012)	(0.023)	(0.040)
Non-South = 1	-0.023	-0.013	1.546**
	(0.016)	(0.035)	(0.094)
Mean Dep. Var	0.956	3.771	1.389
HH FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nb. of Observations	8,120	7,040	7,614
R2	0.570	0.569	0.824
	Panel B. White		
Migrant = 1	-0.009**	-0.007*	1.752**
	(0.001)	(0.003)	(0.018)
Non-South = 1	0.003	-0.018**	0.960**
	(0.003)	(0.006)	(0.035)
Mean Dep. Var	0.967	3.778	3.773
HH FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nb. of Observations	280,089	251,256	267,508
R2	0.492	0.547	0.699

Notes: Table shows the return to migration in terms of husband labor market outcomes within South (Migrant=1) and out of the South (Non-South=1) based on the sister sample. Occupation ranks are calculated as described in Section 3. Robust standard errors clustered at the household level in parentheses $^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

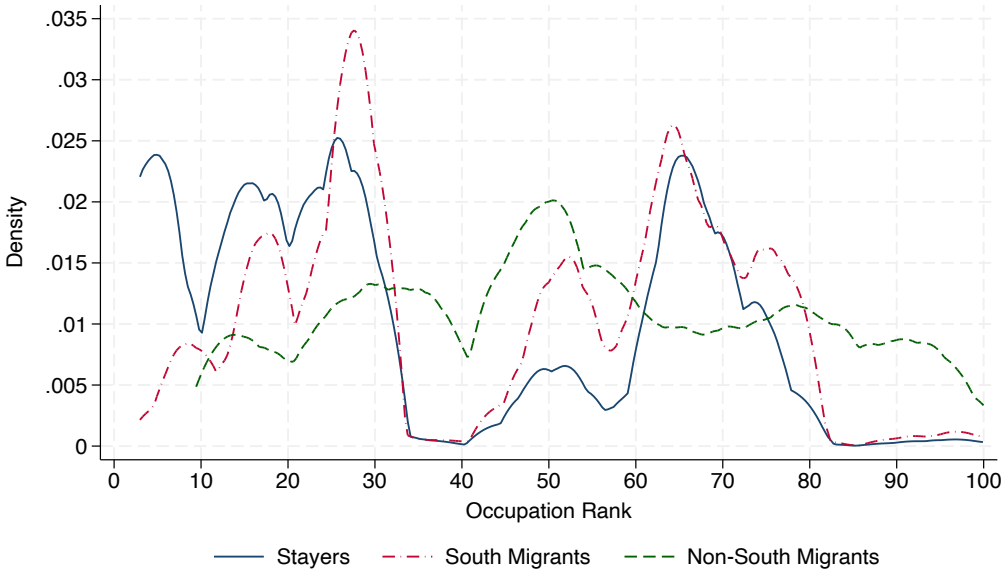
Figures

Figure 1. Occupation Percentile Rank in 1940, Migrants and Stayers

A. Black



B. White

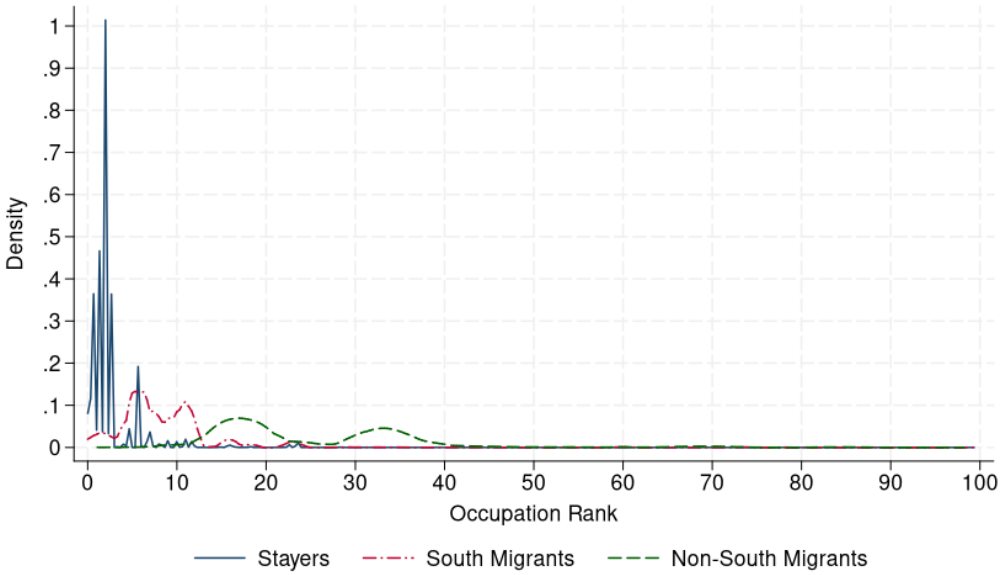


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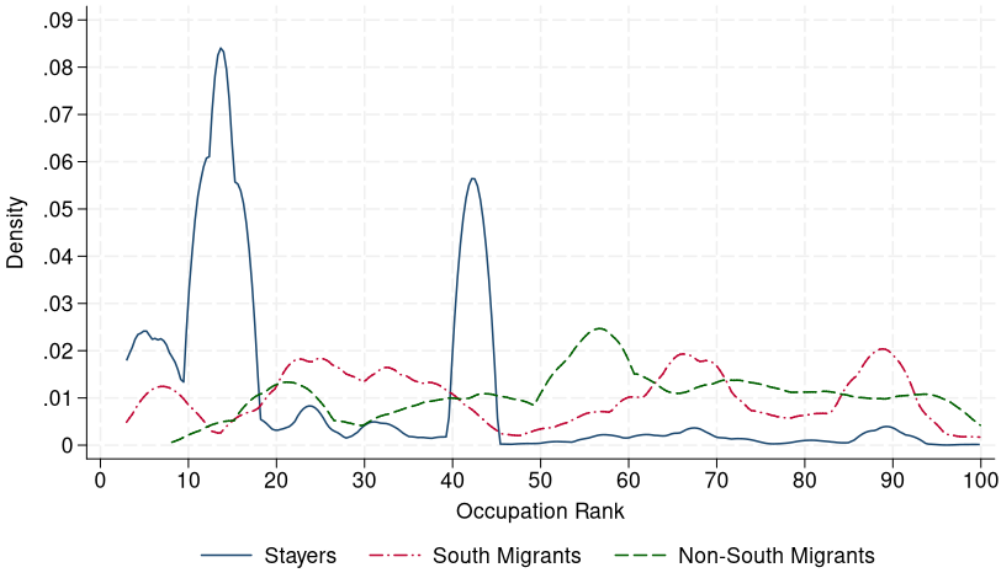
Notes: Figure shows density plots of the occupation ranks of female Black and White stayers and migrants by region. Occupational rank is calculated as in Goldin and Margo (1992) and Collins and Niemesh (2019) and described in Section 3.

Figure 2. Husband Occupation Percentile Rank in 1940, Migrants and Stayers

A. Black

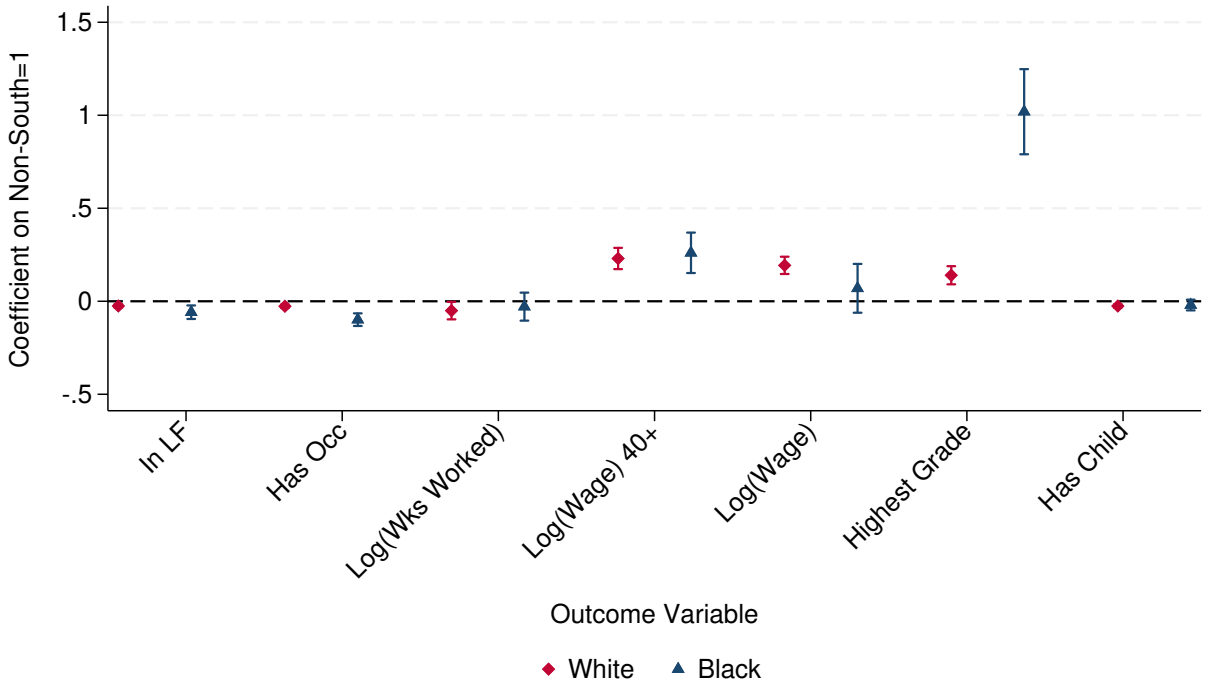


B. White



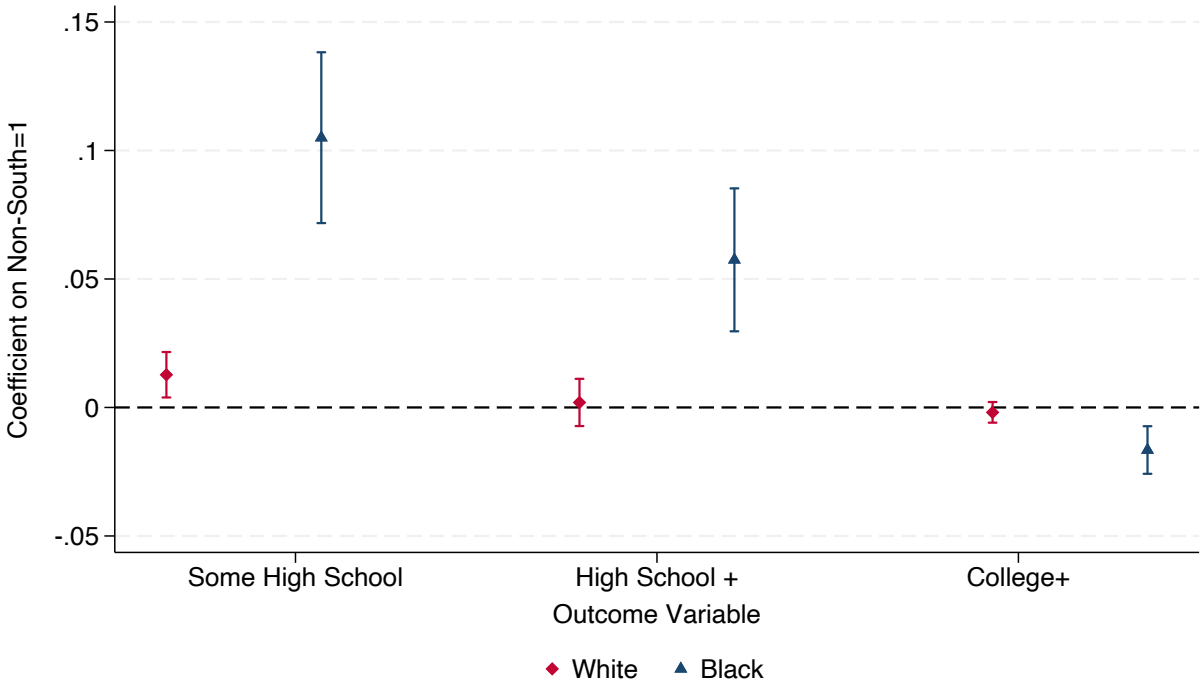
Notes: Figure shows density plots of the occupation ranks of the husbands of female Black and White stayers and migrants by region. Occupational rank is calculated as in Goldin and Margo (1992) and Collins and Niemesh (2019) and described in Section 3.

Figure 3. Regional Differences in Migration Gains



Notes: Figure shows the differences in migration gains between sisters who moved within South or out of the South. Points show the coefficient on NonSouth = 1 with 95 percent confidence intervals by race. Robust standard errors are clustered at the household level.

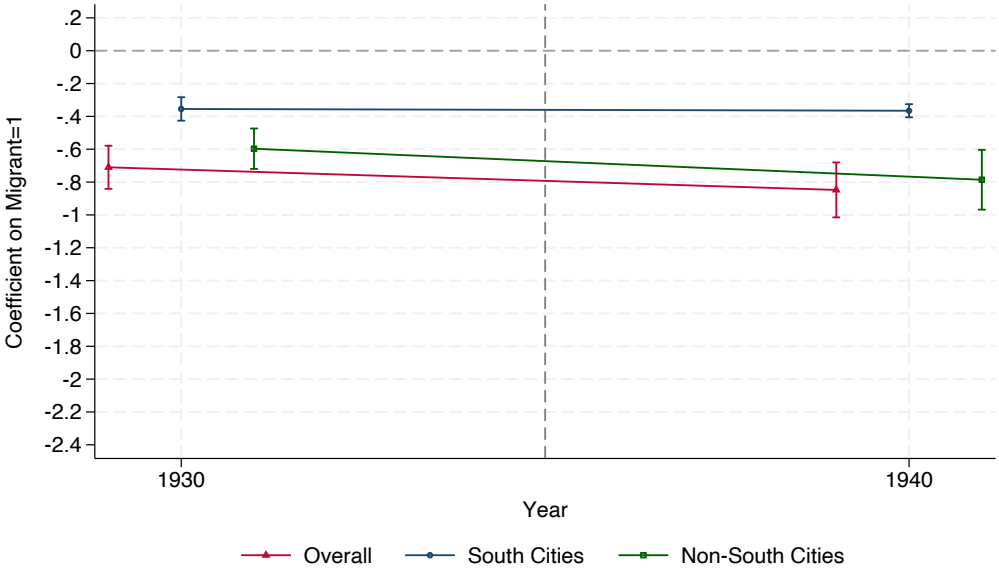
Figure 4. Regional Differences in Education Gains for Migrants



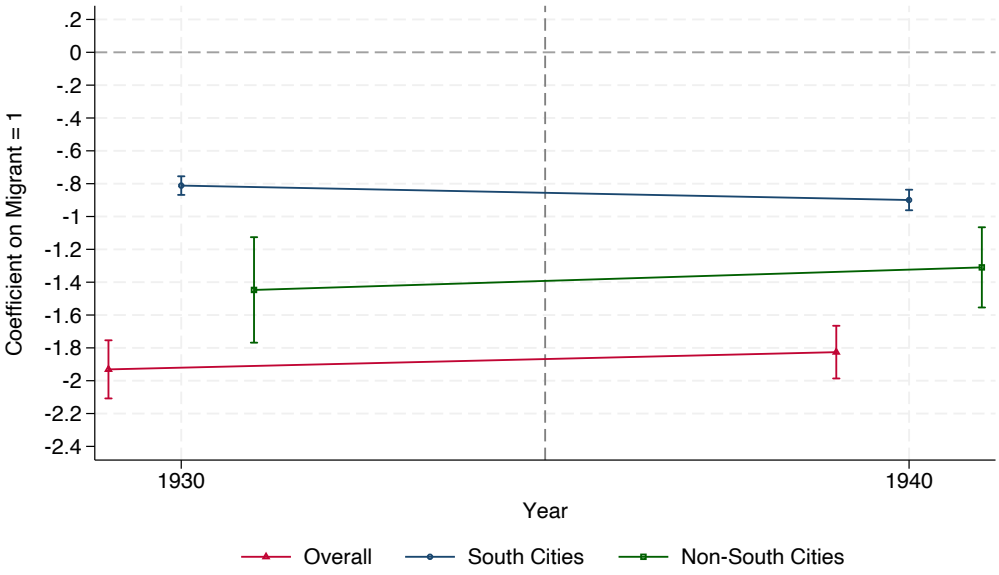
Notes: Figure shows the differences in migration gains between sisters who moved within South or out of the South. Points show the coefficient on NonSouth = 1 with 95 percent confidence intervals by race. Robust standard errors are clustered at the household level.

Figure 5. Labor Market Assimilation of Rural-to-Urban Migrants

A. Black



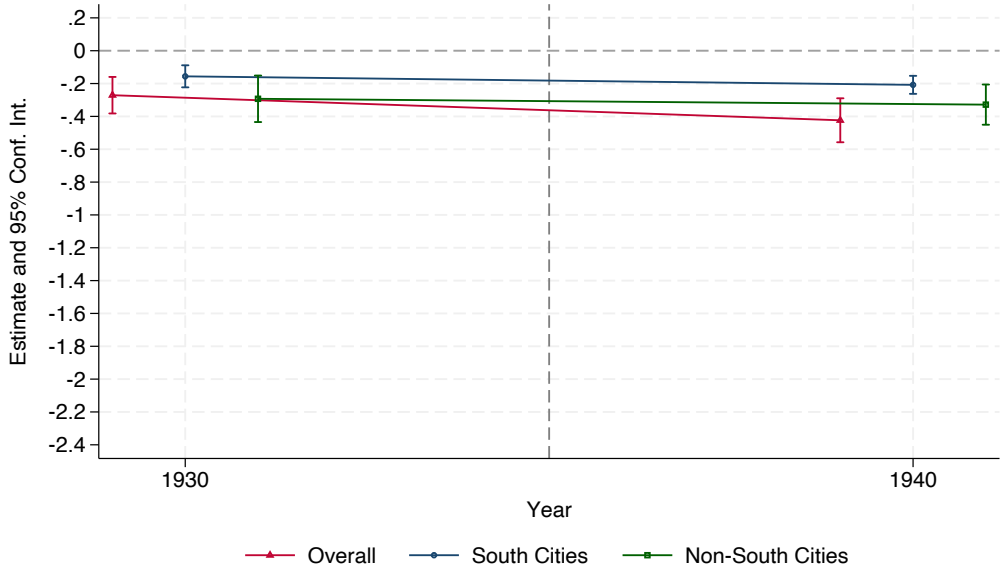
B. White



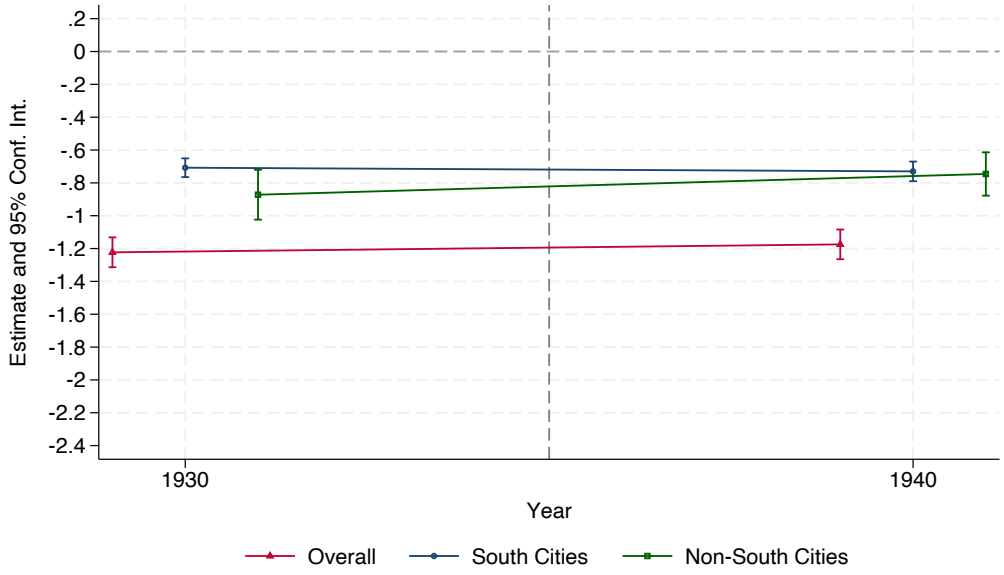
Notes: This figure shows the occupational rank of rural-to-urban migrants in each decade relative to urban natives for all migrants, those in South cities, and those in Non-South cities. Migrants are those who moved from the farm to the urban area in 1930. Coefficients then show the difference in occupation rank between the two groups in each decade. Robust standard errors are clustered at the county-of-destination level.

Figure 6. Husbands' Labor Market Assimilation

A. Black



B. White



Notes: This figure shows the occupational rank of the husbands of rural-to-urban migrants in each decade relative to urban natives for all migrants, those in South cities, and those in Non-South cities. Migrants are those who moved from the farm to the urban area in 1930. Coefficients then show the difference in occupation rank between the two groups in each decade. Robust standard errors are clustered at the county-of-destination level.

Appendix

Table A1. Outcome Summary Statistics, Work – Sister Sample

	Stayers	Migrants, S	Migrants, NS	Stayers	Migrants, S	Migrants, NS
		Black			White	
Share in Labor Force	0.389	0.722	0.644	0.172	0.439	0.376
Share Employed	0.222	0.718	0.625	0.132	0.441	0.383
Weeks Worked						
Mean	15.985	28.833	23.613	8.427	17.894	14.960
Std. Dev.	20.404	22.522	23.065	17.386	22.590	21.485
Median	0	32	20	0	0	0
Weekly Wage Income						
Mean	11.89	10.38	11.99	15.72	16.22	18.32
Std. Dev.	9.24	8.87	8.57	14.66	20.51	19.75
Median	10.00	8.42	10.00	13.46	13.85	15.91
Weekly Wage Income (>=40 weeks worked)						
Mean	10.07	9.14	11.97	13.84	15.48	18.03
Std. Dev.	5.31	4.53	9.14	7.35	7.81	8.96
Median	9.23	8.00	10.00	12.46	13.92	16.15
N	29,704	10,123	4,292	356,528	130,388	25,422

Notes: Table shows the summary statistics for the labor outcomes of interest for the sister sample. Employed is a binary indicator for whether the individual is employed off-farm. Weekly Wage Income is defined as total wage income divided by the number of weeks worked for all individuals who worked one week or more and whose weekly wage is greater than $6.

Table A2. Outcome Summary Statistics, Education

	Stayers	Migrants, S	Migrants, NS	Stayers	Migrants, S	Migrants, NS
		Black			White	
Self						
Highest Grade						
Mean	6.592	7.527	8.863	8.617	10.092	10.005
Std. Dev.	3.245	3.310	2.855	3.042	2.948	2.615
Median	6.000	7.000	9.000	8.000	10.000	10.000
Some High School	0.237	0.343	0.507	0.229	0.428	0.385
High School Plus	0.101	0.161	0.255	0.230	0.435	0.392
College Plus	0.008	0.015	0.008	0.016	0.040	0.028
Mother						
Highest Grade						
Mean	4.403	4.757	5.413	6.088	7.082	7.075
Std. Dev.	2.709	2.849	2.962	2.754	2.957	2.716
Median	4.000	5.000	5.000	6.000	7.000	7.000
Some High School	0.060	0.078	0.111	0.132	0.243	0.180
High School Plus	0.018	0.026	0.041	0.039	0.094	0.078
College Plus	0.002	0.003	0.004	0.003	0.008	0.008

Notes: Table shows the summary statistics for the education outcomes of interest for the sister sample as well as mother's education level.

Table A3. Outcome Summary Statistics, Family Characteristics

	Stayers	Migrants, S	Migrants, NS	Stayers	Migrants, S	Migrants, NS
		Black			White	
Age at First Child						
Mean	19.725	19.590	20.477	21.261	22.066	22.038
Std. Dev.	3.673	3.838	3.735	3.779	3.980	4.027
Median	19.000	19.000	20.000	21.000	21.000	21.000
Number of Children						
Mean	1.142	0.626	0.630	1.502	0.973	1.079
Std. Dev.	1.823	1.241	1.287	1.789	1.298	1.338
Median	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.000	0.000	1.000
Husband in Labor Force	0.952	0.942	0.942	0.969	0.963	0.966
Husband Weeks Worked						
Mean	41.896	40.494	39.216	42.522	44.247	42.472
Std. Dev.	15.820	16.251	17.150	15.242	14.235	14.553
Median	50.000	52.000	50.000	52.000	52.000	52.000
Weekly Wage Income (>=40 weeks worked)						
Mean		13.042	20.176		25.729	30.636
Std. Dev.		4.915	8.774		13.841	14.311
Median		12.000	19.231		23.077	28.571
Husband's Wage Income						
Mean		11.950	19.665		22.819	28.760
Std. Dev.		8.747	12.432		30.709	36.189
Median		11.538	18.462		20.000	26.000
Husband Occupation Income Decile						
Mean	1.033	1.388	3.121	2.969	5.340	6.271
Std. Dev.	0.247	0.735	1.331	1.917	2.743	2.259
Median	1.000	1.000	3.000	2.000	5.000	6.000

Notes: Table shows the summary statistics for the family outcomes of interest for the sister sample.

Table A4. Population vs. Matched Samples, Unweighted

	Population	Linked	Population	Linked
	Black		White	
Age	28.482	32.053	28.478	31.843
Fam Size	4.402	5.546	4.197	4.396
Diff State	0.299	0.223	0.244	0.227
Ownership	0.217	0.319	0.428	0.491
N	3,393,814	303,921	27,383,997	6,997,363

Notes: Table shows the average characteristics for the population and the full linked sample. Weighting is conducted before limiting to the farm sister sample in 1920.

Table A5. Population vs. Matched Samples, Weighted

	Pop	Weighted	Diff	Pvalue	Pop	Weighted	Diff	Pvalue
	Black				White			
Age	28.482	28.670	0.187	0.000	28.478	29.436	0.958	0.000
Fam Size	4.402	4.453	0.052	0.000	4.197	4.175	-0.023	0.000
Diff State	0.299	0.305	0.006	0.000	0.244	0.250	0.007	0.000
Own	0.217	0.221	0.004	0.000	0.428	0.424	-0.004	0.000

Notes: Table shows the average characteristics for the population and the full linked sample after weighting. Weighting is conducted before limiting to the farm sister sample in 1920.

Table A6. Ever-Married Status, Migrant Sisters compared to Stayer Sisters, 1940

	White	Black
	(1)	(2)
Migrant = 1	0.005	-0.028
	(0.018)	(0.067)
Non-South = 1	-0.018	-0.067
	(0.053)	(0.104)
Mean Dep. Var	0.522	0.312
HH FEs	Yes	Yes
Nb. of Observations	92,788	11,298
R2	0.652	0.653

Notes: Table shows the results of migration status and correlation with a dummy variable = 1 if the individual is never married. Robust standard errors clustered at the household level in parentheses $^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$