The Black Migration to Philadelphia
A 1924 Profile

"The city Negro is only now in evolution"—

Charles S. Johnson, Survey, March 1, 1925

As a prominent black sociologist, Charles Johnson was well aware that there had been blacks living in American cities since the seventeenth century. Yet his proclamation in Survey's famous issue on Harlem and the "New Negro" of the 1920s remains accurate, for he was referring to the emergence of large, sophisticated, and cosmopolitan communities of people fully committed to city life. The massive racial transformation of urban America through black migration was concentrated in the half century framed by the First World War and the riots of the late 1960s. Perhaps because of the racial unrest which soon followed, the exceptional circumstances surrounding the start of the mass movement from the South around 1916 have been fairly well chronicled. The post-World War II movements are more exhaustively documented. But the crucial years of the early 1920s—the real onset of a self-sustaining migration—have been relatively unexplored. This article analyzes responses to an unusually comprehensive survey conducted in Philadelphia in 1924 of over 500 recently arrived black migrants. At the time, Philadelphia still had the nation's second largest urban black population. Thus, the survey illuminates an important part of the process which changed not just Philadelphia, but most of America's great industrial cities.

The picture which emerges is richly textured, providing us with extraordinary detail about the experiences of people too often lost to history. This article will examine the migrants in the South, before they came to Philadelphia, and study who they were, where and how they lived, and what kinds of jobs they held. It shall then investigate the

1 Charles S. Johnson, "Black Workers and the City," The Survey 53 (March 1, 1925), 642.
2 The ten original worksheets onto which the data from individual houses were transcribed came to Temple University's Urban Archives in 1969 as part of the records of the Housing Association of Delaware Valley, formerly the Philadelphia Housing Association. Related correspondence and minutes, and a typescript of the final survey report were also deposited.
process of migration, including the reasons people gave for coming North, and which families came together. In Philadelphia itself, the survey allows us to study the migrants' housing conditions, neighborhoods, occupations, individual and family incomes, church membership, and attitudes towards life in the northern city. A statistical analysis will also reveal a number of intriguing patterns, both within the black migrant community and in comparison with the community development of contemporary European immigrants.

The Philadelphia survey recorded one of the most striking developments in America's modern social history. In 1915, the nation's black people were overwhelmingly rural and southern. The 1910 census had shown that 73% lived in rural areas and, more strikingly, that 89% (down little from 91.5% in 1870) still lived in the South.³ There had been considerably greater black migration in those four decades to the trans-Mississippi South and West than to the Midwest and the Northeast. That pattern was reversed abruptly by the northern demand for labor during World War I and the simultaneous boll weevil epidemic in southern cotton fields. Northward migration then continued as a result of the post-war industrial boom of the twenties, the virtual end of immigration from southern and eastern Europe, and the southern agricultural contractions. Both blacks and poor whites streamed out of the South, with the black migration proportionately larger. Between 1910 and 1920, the net outmigration of blacks from the eleven states of the Southeast was about 554,000, nearly 7% of the area's total black population. In the 1920s the net outmigration rose to about 902,000, a little over 10% of the remaining blacks and three times the white rate.⁴

While the 1916-18 migration was primarily a response to World War I, the renewed migration after 1921, concentrated in the early twenties, clearly grew out of long-term trends in both the southern and northern economies. According to the Department of Labor, during the height of the migration between September 1922 and September 1923 nearly half a million blacks left the South.⁵ By 1930, the proportion of


America's 12 million black people in the South had fallen to 78.7%, and there were over two million blacks in the metropolitan areas of the northeast and the midwest.6

Though Philadelphia had previously had a large black population, this new "Great Migration" affected the city profoundly. As of 1910 the 84,459 black Philadelphians comprised 5.5% of the population. This was more than the slightly under 4% which had prevailed from the 1860s to the 1890s, but it was below the range of 7.4-9.5% found in the first half of the nineteenth century. Between 1910 and 1920 the black population rose to 134,224, or 7.4% of the city's total, with most of the increase coming between 1916 and 1919.7 The rise of the 1920s was considerably greater, with migration peaking between 1922 and 1924 at more than 10,000 per year.8 A net increase of just over 85,000 raised the city's black population to 219,599, or 11.3%, by 1930. Thus, it was only in the 1920s that a new level was reached by Philadelphia's black community in terms of both absolute numbers and proportion of the city's population. In fact, the growth rate for the 1920s was 63.5%, compared to 58.9% on a much smaller base for the 1910s. By 1930, only 30% of the city's black people were Pennsylvania-born; while Virginia, the traditional leader in out-of-state origin, had 18.9%, South Carolina 13%, and Georgia 10.6%.9 Migrants from these three Southern states made up most of the respondents in the 1924 survey.

There had been several earlier surveys of black migrants to Philadelphia in the twentieth century. The Philadelphia Housing Association, the Armstrong Association (local affiliate of the Urban League), and the Traveler's Aid Society investigated the World War I migration, primarily in terms of housing and overcrowding.10 In 1921, Sadie T. Mossell (later Alexander) of the University of Pennsylvania became the first black woman in America to earn a doctorate for her survey of the living standards of 100 migrant families.11

6 Jones, 50
8 Committee on Negro Migration, July 1923 report, in Negro Migration Study collection, Urban Archives, Temple University
10 Records of the wartime activities are in the Housing Association collection, Series II, (1917-20), folders 120-126
surveys were also taken of black migrants to other cities, and in 1930 Louise Venable Kennedy based her classic *The Negro Peasant Turns Cityward* on nineteen surveys done since 1917 of urban social and economic conditions.\(^{12}\)

Yet there are several unique features of the 1924 Philadelphia survey. First, the original worksheets have survived, whereas for almost all the other surveys only the summaries remain. The individual answers to the dozens of questions asked in 1924 can be studied, analyzed, and compared in detail. Second, the survey covered a very wide range of issues about migration and about life in both the South and Philadelphia. Few studies of black migration deal with the particulars of either the southern background or the migration itself, usually because the data have been unavailable. Many of the surveys used by Kennedy described northern housing and employment in detail, but discussed an almost undifferentiated "South." Third, modern scholars have given relatively little attention to the 1920s in comparison to the World War I migration, perhaps assuming that by 1920 the foundations of the northern ghettos were firmly in place. The 1924 survey therefore offers a detailed profile of the whole process of migration at a crucial yet underreported moment in time.

The origins of the survey were complex. As migration to Pennsylvania increased sharply in 1922 and 1923, various public and private agencies began to conduct research and to hold discussions as they had during the war. In August 1923 the Philadelphia Housing Association, a fourteen-year-old private reform group, issued a report on "Housing Negro Migrants" which grew out of the work of an interagency Committee on Negro Migration. That fall, work began on a statewide plan, and on January 3, 1924 the state convened a "Conference of the Needs of the Negro Population in Pennsylvania" with Governor Gifford Pinchot as the keynote speaker. Pinchot appointed a Statewide Interracial Committee and ordered a survey as the first order of business. The Housing Association, still a classic Progressive-era organization in its faith in the value of detailed social research, offered to develop and test the survey instrument. William D. Fuller, a Wharton School sociology student assigned as a researcher to the Association, directed the survey in the spring and finished his report on June 1, 1924.\(^{13}\)

\(^{12}\) Kennedy, 60-67.

\(^{13}\) *Housing Association* collection, Series III (1921-50). Folder 259, and *Negro Migrant Study* collection, folders 1-3.
do not know whether Fuller, who was white, worked with any black assistants from cooperating organizations like the Armstrong Association or Mercy Hospital, although a check of handwriting reveals that the survey was a group effort.

But was all their work worthwhile? Is the survey a valid, useful, and representative picture of the migrant community? The Housing Association and Fuller were aware of potential pitfalls and, specifically, of the need to get honest answers from a representative sample. Addresses of recent migrants were culled from the files of the Housing and Armstrong Associations, the Traveler's Aid Society, and the all-black Mercy Hospital. A total of 435 addresses were visited, and usable information was obtained from 87. The response rate of only 20% was not encouraging to Fuller; further, it raises questions about the usefulness of the survey today. But the explanations provided in Fuller's report restore some confidence in the findings. Aside from unusable and largely uncompleted forms, the non-respondents were explained primarily as people who had moved or returned South (118 addresses), were "alleged not known" (101), "did not respond" (37) or were away at the time of the visit (26). The last category probably explains the under-representation of single people, especially males, in the survey. The numbers having moved or returned South are consistent with findings elsewhere. Fuller explained the 138 "not known" or "did not respond" answers by the fear of money collectors or, even more immediately, of vaccination. The 1923 migration had been followed by a smallpox outbreak, accompanied by 28,000 vaccinations and the quarantining of 303 predominantly black blocks. Some of those surveyed might easily have suspected that Fuller's survey might be the prelude to another series of vaccinations and quarantines.

The central issue remains whether these factors skew the survey to the extent that it does not represent an accurate sample of the migrant population. Fuller's careful explanations give no indication of a major systematic bias. More crucially, summarized data from the survey about family composition, age, income, time of migration, occupation, rent, and other indicators repeatedly coincide with quantifiable information from such sources as the U.S. Census and similar surveys in

15 Philadelphia Housing Association, Annual Report for 1923 (Philadelphia, 1924), 19
other cities. The results also generally coincide with reliable qualitative testimony about the "respectable," hard-working, family-oriented character of the migrants of the 1920s. Ironically, one of the most persuasive pieces of evidence in favor of the survey's accuracy would not seem to reflect that image. Asked if they had yet joined a church in Philadelphia, 105 of 141 household heads replied they had not. That is hardly the answer that would come from a group that was excessively privileged, hopelessly subservient, or plain dishonest. Instead, it adds credence to the total survey results.

Unfortunately, it is not easy to determine precisely how many different households were surveyed. There were several related families living together and single individuals staying with families. We will use here the figure of 142 households, including 27 single person households, with a total of 510 members. A breakdown of the major types, with average size and age of household head, appears in Table 1. The most striking fact is the dominance of the core nuclear family—a man and wife, with or without children. Since only one of the male-headed families was without a spouse, a total of 103 of 142 households, with 445 of the 510 people (87.3%) conforms to that pattern. Correcting for the probable underrepresentation of single men would have only a marginal impact on these figures. They clearly conform to Herbert Guttman's finding that between 1880 and 1925 the "typical Afro-American family" was "headed by two parents." Guttman found 83% of New York black households in 1925 to be kin-related with a nuclear core; the 1924 Philadelphia survey shows 72.5% to be nuclear, although other relatives perhaps were living nearby. 16 Attached to the 103 husband-wife centered households were only seven other relatives, including four grandparents, scattered among seven households.

Louise Kennedy's picture of a northern black population containing a "preponderance of young adults and a small number of children, and older people" is also confirmed. 17 In the male headed families in Philadelphia, the husband's average age was 33.2; the wife's, 28.5; and there were an average of 2.4 children. Thirty of the 103 couples had no children at all. This small family size is not unusual. Stanley Lieberson noted in A Piece of the Pie: Blacks and White Immigrants Since 1880, that

\[\text{17} \quad \text{Kennedy, 142.}\]
### Table 1: Household Structure and Philadelphia Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Head's Age</th>
<th>Family Size</th>
<th>Head's Daily Income</th>
<th>Family's Daily Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Households</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>$3.55</td>
<td>$4.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Headed-All Families</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>5.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singles</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>5.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Headed-All Families</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singles</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>2.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>3.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singles</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled Male Laborers' Families</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>5.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families with Single Earner</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Spouses</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28.4*</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.90*</td>
<td>5.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*refers to spouse, not household head.
"fertility rates for the first generation black women in the North remained considerably lower than those of the new European immigrant groups as recently as 1940." In that year southern born black women aged 45-54 who lived in the North reported having had an average of 2.2 children, compared to 4.6 for Italian-born women of the same age and 3.1 for Russian-born women. The group that does appear unusual in our survey is the female headed families in which the average age of the head of household was 41, with a very small number of children, and with no family exceeding three.

While the overall demographic features may not be surprising, the southern backgrounds of the migrants are more complex than is sometimes assumed. As the figures in Table 2 demonstrate, the migrants cannot simply be classified as tenant farmers driven off the land or as displaced unskilled workers already adapted to city life. Instead, tenant farmers and unskilled workers formed the largest groups, and a whole spectrum of intermediate and tangential individuals and families existed as well. Since time of residence of those coming from southern cities in unavailable, we cannot investigate the issue of gradual adaption to urban life. Origin was more concentrated by state than by size of place or occupation and showed the clear shift from the Upper to the Deep South as the source of Philadelphia's black migrants. Georgia (59) and South Carolina (45) accounted for over a hundred households, with Virginia (11), North Carolina (10), and Maryland (8) providing almost all the rest. A significant proportion of Georgia's migrants (26 of 59) came from the large cities, and that state also provided more than half of all the single people surveyed (14 of 27). South Carolina's migrants, in contrast, came overwhelmingly from communities with less than 10,000 inhabitants (36 of 45).

The occupational diversity of the rural and small-town south was reflected in the northward migration. All occupational categories were represented among the people from those areas. Even considering only the communities with under 2,500 people, non-agricultural work accounted for 21 of the 48 employed households heads. Most of these rural workers were drivers, carpenters and other craftsmen, and general laborers who worked at least sometimes in the fields as well as the towns and villages. To the extent that they all depended on agricultural

18 Stanley Lieberson, A Piece of the Pie: Blacks and White Immigrants since 1880, (Berkeley, Calif., 1980), 194.
### TABLE 2  SOUTHERN OCCUPATION AND RESIDENCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Head’s Occupation* in South (N)</th>
<th>Size of Southern Residence</th>
<th>Home Tenure in South</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>under 2500</td>
<td>2500-10000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer Owner (6)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenant Farmer (44)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm Laborer (3)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled Worker (40)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic (12)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services (10)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled Work (12)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Owner (1)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL (128)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For purposes of putting people in occupational categories, “domestics” are considered those strictly in personal service (cleaning and washing; butlers and maids), while “services” includes non-personal jobs like waitress, building janitor, fireman, driver, and restaurant worker. “Skilled Work” includes foremen, mechanics, carpenters, teachers, plasterers and paperhangers. This analysis was used for Philadelphia as well as the South. Most unskilled labor is described simply as “day” or “general labor”, though occasionally plants are named. The pay rate usually makes the level of skill apparent.
conditions, they were caught up in the crisis that had shaken the South since the advent of the boll weevil around the turn of the century. Between 1920 and 1925, with the boll weevil ravaging Georgia and South Carolina and with soil erosion taking an added toll, the number of black tenant farms declined from 704,000 to 636,000, and black-owned farms declined from 218,000 to 195,000.\textsuperscript{19} City workers were subject to different economic cycles, but one pattern prevailed in both the rural and the urban south. In most cases, all of the family’s adult members worked at least part of the time. This was naturally true on the farm, where “sharecropping was in essence a family based system.”\textsuperscript{20} But even figures from married male laborers in the South show that 28 of 35 had working wives, all but one of whom were domestics.

As a result of the multiple incomes, the average family income of those having cash wages was not very low by the minimal standards of the early twenties. The 47 male headed families averaged $3.60 per day. More detailed analysis reveals that 52 male household heads, including singles, made $2.55 per day, while 38 working spouses averaged only $1.18, a few cents less than single women. These figures remind us that “the basic southern unskilled wage did not differ greatly between black and white workers.”\textsuperscript{21} For example, in Virginia in 1928, daily laborers’ wages were found to be about $3.49 for whites and $3.07 for blacks.\textsuperscript{22} In terms of agricultural income, Georgia and South Carolina figures for the twenties indicate a day farm labor wage of about $1.00 for all workers.\textsuperscript{23} Per capita tenant farm income was about $150 per year in cash crops, to which must be added home grown produce.\textsuperscript{24} While southern blacks were certainly poor, they were not very much poorer than the immense number of whites in similar occupations.

The migrants’ southern housing conditions reflected their range of incomes and occupations. Of 134 reporting households, 43 owned

\textsuperscript{19} Horace Hamilton, “The Negro Leaves the South,” \textit{Demography} 1 (1964), 283
\textsuperscript{20} Gavin Wright, “The Strange Career of the New Southern Economic History,” \textit{Reviews in American History} 10 (December, 1982), 173
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Ibid}, 175
\textsuperscript{22} Arnold Taylor, \textit{Travail and Triumph: Black Life and Culture in the South since the Civil War}, (Westport, Conn, 1976), 97
\textsuperscript{23} Kenneth Kusmer, \textit{A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930}, (Urbana, Ill, 1976)
\textsuperscript{24} Migration and Economic Opportunity, 131
houses and 85 rented them, paying in either cash (51) or crops (34). Table 2 outlines the relationship between house tenure and southern occupation. The 50 reported rents average exactly $10 per month, considerably lower than in Philadelphia. Overcrowding was also less of a problem than in the North, with 4.24 rooms per household and just under one person per room. Of course, most of the rural houses, even if fairly large, were primitive shacks or cabins without indoor water or adequate toilet facilities, so that meaningful comparisons beyond simple room counting are difficult to make.

The living standards, occupations, and incomes of the migrants in the South indicate that they should be described as the working poor, rather than the destitute. The group’s respectability is reflected in the fact that 85% of household heads were church members, a statistic valuable for illustrating social attitudes—100% membership existed among the 12 skilled workers. While the attitude of the northern black elite was probably summarized in Mossell’s assertion that “the migration retarded the steady progress of the colored people of Philadelphia,” more optimistic views came from white observers. The Housing Association reported that the 1921-24 migrants “seemed well supplied with funds” and were “of a better grade” than their wartime predecessors. Lieberson concludes that available data “indicate a high degree of positive self-selection from those living in the South.”

But why did these people “self-select” to migrate? Since the twenties most writers have agreed that the primary motives were economic, and that, as Howard University economist Edward Lewis wrote in 1932, “both the ‘push’ of agricultural disorganization and the ‘pull’ of industry were important influences in the movement of the Negro.” The push out of cotton-dominated states like Georgia and South Carolina resulted from the boll weevil epidemic, which made the debt-based crop system unworkable, and from the associated diversification away from labor-intensive cotton production. The pull was the well-publicized lure of regular and relatively high wages paid by northern industries, faced in 1922 and 1923 with a booming economy and the

25 Mossell, 216
26 Housing Association collection, Series II, folder 259, Philadelphia Housing Association, Annual Report for 1923, 17
27 Lieberson, 220
collapse of European immigration. The number of immigrants fell from 652,000 in 1921 to 216,000 in 1922; the number of incoming Italians, a major source of unskilled labor, fell from 222,000 to 40,000. Southern blacks were so aware of and eager to meet the resulting demand that a return to the 1916-18 labor agent recruiting system was unnecessary. Fuller noted that there was "not a single case in which the negro had a job in Philadelphia before his coming," because migrants felt they could choose among jobs after their arrival.

The primacy of economic motives does not mean that social oppression in the south was unimportant. But as early as 1923, Charles Johnson noted that there was no correlation between migration and oppression when specific counties were examined. Kennedy stated in 1930 that social conditions were "secondary and contributing causes" of the migration, and Vickery's elaborate statistical analysis four decades later found that the migration was "just too rational economically" to be explained any other way. Nevertheless it is also true that the racial situation formed the context in which economic forces quickly led to mass migration. As Fuller put it, blacks may have had a longing to escape the South, but "the cotton crop is the one thing which has exerted pressure upon the negro to fulfill this desire."

The primary reason for migration offered by the surveyed group both confirms and modifies the common interpretations. Philip Taylor wrote in *The Distant Magnet* that the motives of European immigrants were "a delicate balance between several forms of persuasion." The point applies to black migrants as well. The migration occurred not as a simple push/pull process. Some migrants were mainly pushed; others, mainly pulled. But a third group was directed by several forces. Occupation was the best predictor of motivation; 30 of the 53 farmers and farm laborers cited the boll weevil as their reason for coming North. Social conditions, another "push" factor, were also cited as a reason by the agricultural sector which provided five of the six household heads

---

30 Fuller, 66.
32 Kennedy, 52; Vickery, 135.
33 Fuller, 15.
34 Taylor, *Distant Magnet*, 59-60.
who advanced that reason for migrating. The non-agricultural migrants, more inclined to “pull” factors, had a wider range of motivations. A quarter of all migrants reporting cited a vague wanderlust or alienation which appears on the survey forms as “Took a Notion,” “See the North,” and similar statements.

Various demographic and locational factors not illustrated in Table 3 further illuminate migrant motivation. Almost half of the single people (13 of 27) indicated a sense of wanderlust or alienation while a similar proportion of female family heads (5 of 11) referred to contacts in Philadelphia. Conversely, among 104 male headed families, the boll weevil (30) and a lack of work (17) were disproportionately important. There were also distinctions by age. Those looking for more money (30.6) or citing reasons like a “notion” (29.5) were younger, on the average, than those who left because of a lack of work (34.0) or the boll weevil (36.4). This predictable correlation of “push” factors with older respondents incidentally helps confirm the validity of the answers given in the survey. More unexpectedly, for those with cash wages, the average family incomes of migrants citing a lack of work ($3.54) or the desire to make more money ($3.37) were higher than those who mentioned northern contacts ($2.71) or the wanderlust/alienation reasons ($2.96). Thus, those who already had higher incomes were most conscious of wanting even more. Finally, there were some variations by location aside from the rural emphasis on the boll weevil and social conditions. Most notably, contacts with people in Philadelphia were offered as the prime motivation by only 5 of the 52 residents of areas with under 2500 residents, but by 11 of the 38 from cities having over 50,000. Larger populations apparently generated a self-sustaining network of people moving North to the same city, as most studies of migration have shown.

The importance of contacts reminds us that the process of migration is as complex as the motivation. As in the national pattern, almost all of the household heads surveyed had arrived in Philadelphia between spring 1922 and fall 1923. There were two main waves, peaking in the fall of 1922 and, more prominently, the spring of 1923, when half of all the migrants arrived. Migrants from rural and urban areas showed the same seasonal pattern. But a key question is whether whole families came together, as with most Russian Jews, or whether the household head came first to get work, as with most Italians and Slavs. While four
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Head's Occup. in South (N)</th>
<th>Boll Weevil</th>
<th>&quot;Took a Notion&quot;</th>
<th>Lack of Work</th>
<th>Contacts in Phil.</th>
<th>More Money</th>
<th>Social Conditions</th>
<th>Family Came Together?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farmer Owner (6)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenant Farmer (42)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm Laborer (3)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled Worker (38)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic (11)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services (9)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled Work (12)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Owner (1)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL (122)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 3  MIGRATION—MOTIVATION AND PROCESS
fifths of all migrants—and 88% of all farmers—had acquaintances in Philadelphia before their migration, there were important variations in the way families migrated. As with motivation, occupation is the most reliable determinant. The relationship is clear in Table 3. However, two variations by population should be noted. In contrast to tenant farmers, fourteen unskilled laborers' families came North together from places with under 50,000 population; only five families did not. But for families from big cities, the division was equal, eight to eight. One explanation might be that people with weak economic and psychic attachments to the local social pattern—like rural laborers, domestic and service workers—would be more willing to make an abrupt break than tenant farmers, urban laborers, or skilled workers.

Another common pattern of migration is several families moving together to a new location. An analysis of households from the same place in the South living at the same address in Philadelphia indicates that even after at least nine months in the North 54 of the 142 households can be so linked to one or two others. Of these, 21 were from cities of more than 50,000 and 33 from smaller places. Only ten families in five groups—four from rural areas—were obviously related by blood, though the likelihood of undetected cousinhood is high. The length of time since migration, the unreported addresses, and the lack of data on the 1916-19 migration make it virtually certain that a large majority of households, not just the 54 obvious cases, were closely linked to other families that had migrated to Philadelphia. The identified linked households do not differ significantly from the entire surveyed population in terms of location or occupation in either the South or Philadelphia. However, there was a notable demographic difference. Over half the single women (8 of 15), compared to 36% of the rest of the group, were part of a group of households which came from the same place in the South and settled together in Philadelphia.

The overall settlement pattern of the migrants in Philadelphia challenges some common beliefs about both the distribution and the concentration of urban blacks. Many writers have maintained that migrants concentrated in already established black neighborhoods and that the more prosperous blacks sought newer areas. Certainly this

35 See for example, Thomas J. Wootter, Jr., *Negro Problems in Cities*, (Garden City, N.Y., 1928), 39; Franklin, 1920.
model could have fit Philadelphia, which already had one of the North's few ghettos before World War I. Fortunately, unpublished Philadelphia data available from the 1920 and 1930 censuses enables us to test this theory. The 1920 figures give population by race for each of over 1500 Enumeration Districts (EDs) while the 1930 data are at the much larger Census Tract (CT) level still in use. For each household, the black percentage of its 1920 ED or 1930 CT was calculated, resulting in what Lieberson called an "isolation index." These averages appear in Table 4 and mean, for example, that the average surveyed family in North Philadelphia was living in 1924 in a 1920 ED which had been 20.5% black and a 1930 CT which was to be 27.3% black.

36 Lieberson, 254-257.
TABLE 4 PHILADELPHIA DISTRICTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District (N)</th>
<th>Unskil. Lab.</th>
<th>Domestic</th>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Skilled</th>
<th>Owner</th>
<th>Head's Income</th>
<th>Family Income</th>
<th>Family Size</th>
<th>1920 Black% (EDs)</th>
<th>1930 Black% (CTs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ghetto (42)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$3.36</td>
<td>$4.24</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>61.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Phil. (41)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Phil. (41)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Phil. (18)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL (134)*</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Eight household heads reported no occupation in Philadelphia.
The four-district division used here provides a sense of the overall settlement pattern. The Ghetto refers to the heavily black area on either side of South Street, including all of the 7th and 30th wards and the northern fringes of the 26th and 36th wards, an area in which all the EDs were at least 35% black in 1920. The vast majority of black migrants in South Philadelphia, outside the Ghetto, lived in the poor Italian, Jewish, and Polish neighborhoods east of the main black concentration. Thus the “South Philadelphia” defined here was overwhelmingly white, but also quite poor. In more prosperous North and West Philadelphia the migrants generally lived in the same areas as the rest of the black population. But there are several differences between the migrants’ city wide distribution and that of the black population as a whole. For both groups, only about 29% lived in the Ghetto. North Philadelphia had about 43% of the overall black population but 29% of the migrants and, similarly, West Philadelphia had 20% of all blacks but only 13% of the survey group. In contrast, South Philadelphia held 29% of the migrants and only 8% of all black Philadelphians. As observers like Thomas Woofter noted at the time, blacks took over as Jews and Italians left their worse neighborhoods. But that black vanguard apparently consisted of migrants, not of longstanding residents dispersed out of the nearby Ghetto. One result of these realignments was that by 1930 blacks were more concentrated together—segregated from others—than Russian Jews or Italians. This had not been true in 1920, but the white immigrant groups were able to move to some degree into non-immigrant white areas, an option closed to blacks because of discrimination.

The geographic distribution also produces an unexpectedly low overall isolation index for the migrants. Of the 142 households, 60 (42.3%) lived in 1920 EDs less than 10% black, 40 of which were in South Philadelphia. Only 36 (25.4%) were in EDs over half black, while 46 (32.4%) were in areas 10 to 50% black. Remarkably, the 1930 census figures indicate that the surveyed migrants were probably less segregated than the whole black population. In 1930 the average black Philadelphian lived in a tract that was 34.7% black, little different from the surveyed migrants who in 1924 were in tracts that would be 33.7%

37 Thomas J. Woofter, Jr., Negro Housing in Philadelphia, (Philadelphia, 1927), 5; Fuller, 23.
black in the next census. So Lieberson's calculated 6.5% increase in the ward level isolation index in the 1920s was probably not due primarily to the migration but to broader black-white interaction, in particular to the effects of racism as manifested in restricted housing choice for blacks.\textsuperscript{38}

Outside the Ghetto, the surveyed migrants were in areas experiencing marked increases in the 1920s over previously low black populations. While not everywhere part of the vanguard as in South Philadelphia, neither did the migrants lag behind the citywide black movement. Because two different units are used, it is impossible to compare 1920 ED figures directly with 1930 CT figures. However, the pattern of increased concentration is clear, especially in South and West Philadelphia. Despite the larger area and consequent dilution of ethnic concentrations, 36 of 41 South Philadelphia households were in CTs that were to be 10% to 25% black in 1930, as compared to 40 of 41 in the 0% to 9% category in 1920 terms. For West Philadelphia, a range of low figures in 1920 terms translates into 16 of 18 households living in CTs 26% to 50% black in 1930.

Few variations in concentration and distribution can be explained in terms of demography, southern origins, or the migration process. Both single people (in 1920 EDs 31.1% black) and female headed families (32.9%) lived in more heavily black areas than did male headed families (28.3%). The most prominent variations by district were in West Philadelphia where 17 of 18 households were male headed, with 13 of those 17 headed by former tenants farmers. West Philadelphia had significantly older male family heads, averaging 39.8 years of age compared to 33.1 for the rest of the city. The widest range of southern occupations was found in the Ghetto, but that district also contained as unusually low number of tenant farmers (7) and a high number of former domestics (8) among the 38 reporting households.

The size of the southern place of origin did have some effect on settlement patterns, with migrants from smaller communities tending to settle in areas with high white populations. Of 52 households from places with under 2500 residents, 30 settled in 1920 EDs less than 10% black, primarily in South and lower North Philadelphia. Migrants from cities with over 50,000 population were concentrated in the Ghetto and adjacent South Philadelphia, with none in West Philadel-

\textsuperscript{38} Lieberson, 288.
phia. Those from cities between 10,000 and 50,000 settled mainly in North and West Philadelphia (10 of 17). Their 1920 isolation index was 27.4% compared to 24.7% for rural migrants and 34.7% for those from large cities. Some aspects of the way people came North also affected place of settlement in Philadelphia. Only 28 household heads reported having no friends in Philadelphia, and 22 of them lived in the Ghetto (12) or North Philadelphia (10), the two largest black communities. Blacks without contacts stayed away from mostly white South and West Philadelphia. The ghetto was also the only district in which a majority of male headed families had migrated together, another indication of its function as the preferred sanctuary of the uprooted and the friendless.

The occupational breakdown of the migrant group was strikingly simple compared to this complex settlement pattern. Regardless of family structure, age, southern origin, or Philadelphia residence, the overwhelming majority of males were unskilled laborers and almost all the working females were domestics. Figures for household heads and for all working family members are given in Tables 4 and 5. Other breakdowns reinforce the basic picture. Of 104 male family heads, 74 were unskilled laborers, as were 8 of 9 single men. Of 11 female family heads, 8 were domestics. Of 36 working wives, 34 were also domestics, 27 of whose husbands were unskilled laborers. However, in Philadelphia only 20 of 73 married mothers worked, a number ten fewer than those having wage income in the South, and not counting those who worked in the fields. The total of 36 spouses working out of 103 coincides with the 39% of black homemakers employed citywide in 1930. As Lieberson found, “black women were more likely to be employed away from the home than women from the new European ethnic groups,” continuing the southern work pattern. The occupational distribution for working children, who averaged 18.5 years of age, was the same as for adults. Of 22 males, 16 were in unskilled labor, and 14 of 16 females were in domestic service.

While remarkable in its homogeneity, the migrant occupational breakdown was not very different from that of all Philadelphia blacks or from black migrants elsewhere. For male workers, World War I had marked a decisive advance from services into industrial employment. But in the 1920s they could not advance further and break

39 Ibid., 178.
through the "job ceiling" keeping blacks in unskilled work. Kennedy concluded in 1930 that blacks were "still largely confined to unskilled labor and positions which are closely allied to domestic and personal service." She added that this was especially true in the Northeast. In Philadelphia, the largest groups of unskilled black workers were employed in iron and steel mills, machine shops, shipyards, car works, and general construction. Certain major companies were known as willing employers of blacks, including the Pennsylvania and Reading Railroads, United Gas, Baldwin Locomotive, Philadelphia Rapid Transit, Midvale Steel, Cramps Shipyard, Westinghouse, Atlantic-Refining, and Lukens Steel. A 1923 Migration Committee report found that these ten companies employed 7,313 blacks or 14.6% of their workforce, and that 5,641 (77.1%) were classified as unskilled.

Occupational variations by district were small, as indicated in Table 4. The Ghetto contained as overrepresentation of domestics and some underrepresentation of unskilled laborers with families (17 of 74) and working spouses (7 of 36). In turn, unskilled laborers lived in 1920 EDs averaging 25.9% black as opposed to 32.0% for domestics and 35.9% for skilled workers. Many of the latter were in trades like carpentry which depended for work on a large black population. The unskilled laborers needed no such base, and 42 of them, out of 83, lived in 1920 EDs less than 10% black compared to only 15 of 51 of the other occupational groups.

These unskilled laborers came from a diverse southern background described in Table 5. The overall picture is one of social compression and deskilling. Whatever the poverty and other difficulties faced by tenant farmers in the South, their work did involve a variety of responsibilities and skills. But only 6 became skilled workers in Philadelphia, 3 of them carpenters, while 27 became unskilled laborers. Previous occupations—as well as places of origin—had little impact on the pattern of male unskilled labor and female domestic service. However, two groups involving twelve cases of occupational mobility—the six tenant farmers who became skilled workers and the six southern skilled workers who became laborers—provide exceptions to

40 Kennedy, 74-75, 80-81.
41 George Haynes, "Negro Migration," Opportunity, 2 (September 1924), 274; Migrant Committee Industrial Report, Negro Migrant Study collection, folder 2.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Head's Occup. in North (N)</th>
<th>Farm Owner</th>
<th>Tenant Farmer</th>
<th>Head's Occupation in the South</th>
<th>Daily Head's Inc.</th>
<th>Daily Family Inc.</th>
<th>Total Family Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Farm Labor</td>
<td>Unsk. Lab.</td>
<td>Domest. Service</td>
<td>Skil. Owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskil. Lab. (83)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic (25)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services (12)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled (10)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner (2)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL (124)*</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Eight employed household heads reported no southern occupation.
the general experience. The first group, former tenant farmers, came north mainly because of the boll weevil, and none of their fairly large families (averaging 5.16 persons) came all together. Four of the six came from places with 2,500 to 10,000 residents, where they may have done odd jobs in addition to farming. None settled in the Ghetto. Despite their high individual ($5.15 per day) and family ($6.40 per day) incomes, five of the six families were either considering or definitely planning to return South.

The six southern skilled workers, including two carpenters and two mechanics, who became laborers in Philadelphia present a very different picture. They were older than the fellow laborers, averaging 37.8 years of age, and five of the six heads initially came north without their families, unlike most southern unskilled workers. Three of the six came from cities over 50,000 population. As a group their 1920 isolation index was a low 20.8%, meaning that they lived in poor white neighborhoods. But we should pause before lamenting their new condition. For their individual daily incomes rose from an average of $3.08 in the South to $3.75 in Philadelphia. Because more family members had worked in the South the increase in family income was less, from $4.24 to $4.65. Nevertheless, four of the six household heads indicated they would definitely not return South. Thus while the economically upwardly mobile families were planning to return, the apparently proletarianized were planning to stay North. Within the limits imposed by the small numbers, we might suspect that culture and upbringing drew farmers back to the land and that those remaining were in Philadelphia were accustomed to making decisions on a more strictly economic basis.

The search for work reveals some statistically significant variations. Although the demand for migrant labor was high in 1924, the question of whether household heads found it difficult to find work elicited a pattern of responses which suggests the possibility that some of the unskilled workers formed part of a floating proletariat, especially in construction. In terms of occupation, 41% of the unskilled workers (a total of 34) and 44.6% of unskilled family men reported some difficulty finding work, as opposed to 29% (10) of the domestic and service workers and 20% (2) of the skilled workers. Further, there was a clear relationship between the ability to find a job and to keep it. Of the 40 heads who had held four or more jobs in Philadelphia, 21 (52.5%) had
difficulty finding work. In contrast, such difficulty was reported by 22 of 50 (44%) with two or three jobs, and only 8 of 43 (19%) who had never changed their jobs. These findings are paralleled by data for residential change. Among the 63 households which had never moved, 45 heads reported no difficulty finding work. Among the remaining 67 households, only 35 reported having no difficulty. Clearly, there was a group of people who had difficulty finding work, keeping jobs, and establishing a permanent residence. But location was also a factor in job seeking. In both South and West Philadelphia half of the respondents reported difficulty finding work, compared to 30% in both North Philadelphia and the Ghetto. In other words, migrants found work somewhat more easily in the well-established, predominately black neighborhoods than in heavily white parts of the city.

As with occupation, the pattern of individual and family income was also dominated by male unskilled labor and female domestic service. Other factors which helped determine household income were family size and the number of family members working. Tables 1, 4, and 5 break down household head and family income by household structure, location, and occupation. Probably the best means for understanding migrants' income are the figures for the 74 families headed by a male unskilled laborer—$3.90 per day for the head and $5.49 for the average family of 4.36 persons. This group accounted for 323 (63%) of the survey's 510 people. Most observers agree that there was little racial wage differential for non-union unskilled work in the North as in the South. The National Conference Board estimated that 1924 daily wage rates averaged the equivalent of about $4.16 for unskilled labor nationwide, while Paul Douglas calculated about $4.03 for a five and a half day week. In these terms, the surveyed migrants were doing reasonably well for recent black arrivals.

In terms of family income, there were actually two very different patterns among male-headed families. As Sadie Mossell had found with the wartime migrants, the crucial factor was still the number of working family members. The incomes of the unskilled laborers'
families were fairly typical for mid-1920s working class America, mainly because only 32 of 74 unskilled workers' families relied solely on the income of the household head. The average daily incomes of working wives and children was $1.90 and $2.41 respectively. As a result there was a statistically significant correlation between male unskilled workers' family incomes and family size (.35), while the correlation between family income and head's income was insignificant. In sharp contrast, 8 of 11 male skilled workers were the sole earners in their families, as were 8 of 11 male service workers, despite their low wages.

The income of female headed households formed another distinct pattern. Most striking was the persistence of the male-female income gap from South to North. For the 67 households with cash wages in both regions, the daily income of male heads was twice as high as that of female heads in Philadelphia ($3.91 to $1.97), just as it had been in the South ($2.54 to $1.29). In terms of family income gap narrowed in proportion but widened in size, from $3.52 for males and $1.46 for females to $5.26 and $2.62 respectively. But female income in Philadelphia had two other peculiarities. There was a consistent negative correlation of age with the income of single women (-.36), spouses (-.41) and female family heads (-.12). This was not the case for women in the South or men in either region. For the eleven female family heads, there was also a strong negative correlation between family and individual head's income (-.38), but a strong positive correlation between family income and number of children (.49). Both resulted primarily from the fact that only four female domestics were the sole support of their families.

In determining income, as with occupation, the influence of the South was minimal. The main factor was a general increase in cash income experienced by 45 of the 60 families with cash incomes in both the South and Philadelphia and by almost all the ex-tenant farmers. Comparable households heads' cash incomes increased an average of

45 Correlation is the relationship, or association, between two or more quantifiable characteristics, like unemployment rate and Democratic percentage of the vote. The correlation measurement used here (Pearson's r) ranges from +1.00 when two characteristic always move up or down together, to -1.00 when they always move in opposite directions. The first is positive correlation, the second negative correlation. A correlation figure close to 0.00 indicates that there is no real relationship between the characteristics. All of the correlation figures used here are at least 95% certain not to signify merely random relationship.
54.4%, from $2.26 per day to $3.49 per day, while family income rose 39.3%, from $3.05 to $4.25 per day. In terms of southern origin, the 49 reporting households from places under 2500 in population had higher daily incomes in Philadelphia ($4.84) than the 32 from cities with over 50,000 ($4.57). This was the result of more ex-rural family members working, since individual heads' incomes were actually a little higher for those from the big cities ($3.47 versus $3.35 per day). Sex and household type reflect only a slight correlation between family cash incomes in the South and Philadelphia. This surprising result is caused by a combination of chance, the narrow bounds of unskilled wage rates, and the limited overlap of spouses working in both the North and South.

Family size seems the decisive factor in creating the differences in income by district displayed in Table 4. The income figures show the impact of the gap between the Ghetto's 2.9 persons per family and West Philadelphia's 5.3. For male headed families, the difference was 6.2 and $6.57 per day in West Philadelphia compared to 3.5 and $5.07 per day in the Ghetto, the variation due to a slightly higher spouses' income in the latter area. North and South Philadelphia had intermediate male headed family sizes of a little over four. However, the daily income of North Philadelphia's average male headed family was $5.71 compared to South Philadelphia's $4.89, because of the former's high individual daily incomes. These figures may reflect the broader industrial and manufacturing opportunities available in North Philadelphia. The total result is that the pattern of migrants' family incomes—through not individual heads' incomes—conforms to the traditional pattern of black Philadelphia as a whole. West Philadelphia is at the top, followed by North Philadelphia, while the Ghetto and South Philadelphia trail behind. Of the six families earning more than $9 per day, three each lived in North and West Philadelphia, with none south of Market Street.

The fairly logical arrangement of family income by district does not carry over to black concentration. Neither the 1920 or the 1930 figures yield clear patterns or meaningful correlations for either family or individual income. For example, the highest household incomes ($4.84 per day) are in the 1920 EDs 0% to 9% and 51% to 75% black. Incomes were not significantly lower in the predominately black areas than in the heavily white area settled by migrants, notably South Philadelphia.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District (N)</th>
<th>Number of Jobs (Household head)</th>
<th>Number of Moves</th>
<th>Toilet Facil.</th>
<th>Persons/ Monthly rent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 2-3 4+</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
<td>Inside</td>
<td>Outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghetto (42)</td>
<td>24 12 6</td>
<td>23 4 12 3</td>
<td>5 18 19</td>
<td>1.74 $15.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Phil. (41)</td>
<td>10 14 17</td>
<td>12 7 17 5</td>
<td>4 29 8</td>
<td>1.67 12.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Phil. (41)</td>
<td>12 17 12</td>
<td>25 4 10 2</td>
<td>9 12 18</td>
<td>2.07 14.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Phil. (18)</td>
<td>6 7 5</td>
<td>9 5 3 1</td>
<td>9 5 4</td>
<td>2.09 7.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS (142)</td>
<td>52 50 40</td>
<td>69 20 42 11</td>
<td>27 64 49</td>
<td>1.86 13.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Income levels were also related to job turnover and residential mobility, both of which are summarized in Table 6. Ericksen and Yancey have found that black residential mobility by ward was about the same in the 1920s as for foreign-born Irish and Italians, and less than that of Russian Jews. The average migrant household reported .99 moves in the 8 to 20 months that most had been in Philadelphia, with single people having a much lower average (.44) than families (1.08). For a newly arrived family to move once or twice in its first few years in Philadelphia does not indicate any serious instability. The level of job turnover was higher, reflecting the presence of many Philadelphia blacks in fields like building and construction, shipping and other waterfront industries, where each job customarily lasted only for a limited period. Thus the surveyed migrants fit the pattern summarized by Kennedy in 1930 when she wrote that “according to most recent national surveys, Negroes still have a higher rate of turnover than whites.”

The impact on income of job turnover and residential mobility varied. For the unskilled laborers, the largest group, income was independent of both. But for skilled workers, individual income tended to increase with number of jobs held, a result of the craftsman’s independent work pattern. Of the eleven skilled workers, five had held four or more jobs since arriving north, compared to only 22 of 83 unskilled laborers. Domestics, on the other hand, had a strong positive correlation between individual income and the number of residential changes (.60), but no significant correlation between income and number of jobs. Relocation for them may reflect increased or a least stable income, starting from a very low base. Service workers, many of whom were drivers and porters, had strong negative correlations between individual income and number of jobs (-.44) and between number of moves and both individual (-.60) and family income (-.56). In this group, the highest incomes tended to be earned by those who had held only one or two jobs and had never moved once initially settled.

Such interactions between job and residential change are more helpful in distinguishing between different parts of the city than in explaining income variation. For the city as a whole, a linkage between

47 Kennedy, 121.
the two processes is evident, but it is far from an exact correlation. Of the 52 household heads who had not changed jobs, 33 had not moved. But fifteen who had held four or more jobs also had not moved. Similarly, while seventeen heads with four or more jobs had moved at least twice, sixteen others who had moved twice had not changed their jobs. Clearer distinctions emerge on the district level. The contrasts between the stability of the Ghetto, the volatility of South Philadelphia, and the intermediate situations of North and West Philadelphia are evident from Table 6. Figures for male headed families parallel those for the entire survey group. The high job turnover in South Philadelphia is the major factor leading to a negative correlation between the number of jobs and the 1920 black ED population for the whole surveyed group (-.25) and, even more strongly, for unskilled laboring men’s families (-.37). These figures hold even when controlling for such factors as age, family size, household structure, and residential mobility. They contrast with the lack of such correlations between residential change and black concentration.

Interactions between changes in jobs and residence further illustrate the differences between districts. More than a third of Ghetto households (15) had changed neither job nor residence since their arrival in Philadelphia, while nearly a third of South Philadelphia households (13) had changed both at least twice. North and West Philadelphia had less uniform combinations. In the latter, though the totals are quite small, the number of heads who had not moved or changed jobs (5, or 27.8%) accords with the type of older, ex-tenant farmer with a large family attracted to that area. By far the largest group of household heads in North Philadelphia—18, or 44% of the total—also had not moved but had held two or more jobs. As with the district’s relatively high wages, the figure probably represents job availability in this heavily industrial part of the city.

This data about mobility, like that about migration, occupation, and income, was incidental to the main object of the survey—the investigation of living conditions, especially housing. The contemporary view was that residential segregation led to slum overcrowding, considered the main social problem growing out of the black migration. The Public Ledger summarized this view in a July 1923 editorial which warned that while the city’s economy was “absorbing the influx of Negro labor, which is of an excellent grade. . .their character cannot hope to be maintained under living conditions that are degrading to the self-
respect of the newcomers."

Philadelphia was not unique, and Kennedy reported that housing was the most intensively investigated aspect of the migration nationally. On both the local and national levels, it also dominates published reports; here only a few of the many issues addressed in the 1924 questionnaire can be highlighted. In most cases, the responses support the thesis that black urban housing in the 1920s was neither better nor worse than the housing of recent European immigrants and other poor whites.

Philadelphia's row house pattern of course dominated black as well as white housing. Thus 82 of the 87 buildings housing migrants were three stories or less, and the average house held only 2.58 households, including non-migrants. Survey investigators reported overcrowding in 38 of the 87 buildings, the worst problems being the 50 households in one room apartments. The average household rented 2.06 rooms, with male headed families renting 2.34, and the average room size was about 125 square feet. As Table 6 indicates, slightly higher densities of people per room prevailed in North and West Philadelphia than south of Market Street, probably because multiple occupancy was more common in the slightly larger row houses of the two newer districts. But on the whole overcrowding had not reached crisis proportions. As A.L. Manly wrote in an article on Philadelphia in Opportunity in 1923, the probable explanation was the relatively small size of the young migrant families. In fact, the number of rooms correlates well with family size for the whole population (.67) and for male headed families (.59), an indication that larger families were usually able to find larger living quarters.

Apart from gross size, there was often only a tenuous relationship between rent and housing conditions. One of the best gauges of those conditions in the mid-twenties was whether the toilet facilities were indoors or outdoors. The situation is summarized in Table 6. On the district level, the breakdown is similar to that of family income, with West and North Philadelphia clearly better than the other two districts. But that neat pattern does not carry over to specific family incomes. Among 20 households earning less than $3 per day, 5 had indoor toilets.

---

48 Philadelphia Public Ledger, July 10, 1923.
49 Kennedy, 143.
and 10 outdoor, while among the 39 making between $5 and $7 per day, 10 had indoor toilets, but 18 still had outdoor facilities. This anomaly persisted in terms of rent. The average rent in a building with indoor plumbing exclusively was $11.62 per month, but it was $13.23 in those with outdoor toilets only, and $15.20 for building with both.

The whole rent situation is filled with such apparent contradictions. Rent was only weakly correlated with number of rooms, with an average rent of $11.83 for one room and $15.96 for three rooms, which often was an entire small row house. There was also little correlation between rent and household income, even controlling for family size, and between rent and family size itself. For male headed families, there was a slight, and statistically insignificant, negative correlation between rent and family size. Overall, the Housing Association concluded in 1924 that blacks were "paying a slightly higher rent" than whites and that the migration was widening the gap. In 1922-23 rents increased 27.5% for blacks but only 17.8% for whites. Since less than 12% of Philadelphia blacks (as opposed to almost 45% of whites) owned their own homes, these rent increases had a significant impact on the black community. Migrant rents were no higher than the average black rents. The 1926 average of $13.51 which Thomas Woofter calculated was 35% above the 1922-23 average cash rent paid by migrants in the south. This is still less than their average increase in family income in Philadelphia over the South. The district breakdown in Table 6 indicates higher rents in the two major black areas, the Ghetto and North Philadelphia. The abnormally lower rents in West Philadelphia are difficult to explain, unless they resulted from the common crowding of several families in one building and/or the rent-depressing effect of racial transition.

Two other surveyed aspects of the social context of rent were lodging and house owners' nationality. Though the survey phrasing is somewhat confusing, it appears that about 30 of the 142 households took in lodgers and that about 30 were themselves lodging. This is consistent with other figures reported in the 1920s for both Philadelphia and Chicago. Of the 27 single people, 19 were lodgers, so that probably less than a dozen families were lodging. Lodging was a factor in 27 of

51 Housing Association collection, series III, folder 258.
52 Woofter, Negro Problems, 137.
53 Woofter, Negro Housing, 22.
54 Kennedy, 165; Woofter, Negro Problems, 87.
the 42 Ghetto households, but only 5 of the 41 in South Philadelphia, where there were few established black families. In both North and West Philadelphia the number divided equally. The lodgers' rent went to black families who were in turn paying house owners, and the survey found that 14 of the owners were themselves black. The largest number, 51, were Jewish, while 11 were European ethnics and 39 were described as “American.” Nine of the black owners were in the Ghetto and none in South Philadelphia, while 20 Jewish owners and 9 of the 11 ethnics were in the latter area.

Such ethnic complexities remind us that the social environment the migrants encountered in Philadelphia differed greatly from what they had left behind in the South. The survey clearly showed that their hopes for increased educational opportunities for their children in the North were apparently being fulfilled. Of 96 school age children in the surveyed families, 90 were enrolled in the public schools. Citywide black enrollment rose from 19,859 in 1922 to 24,702 in 1924, demonstrating the immediate impact of the migration. As Lieberson found, in terms of education, blacks were “not doing too badly” in the 1920s compared to European immigrants. Black migrants were often assumed to fare somewhat worse than immigrants in terms of health. Nevertheless, the survey found none of the predicted effects of the cool, damp northern climate. Its investigators conscientiously recorded the many complaints of grippe, colds, and other minor ailments, but uncovered no major health problems.

There was, however, an evident crisis in one key area of black social life—church membership. The figures contradict the notion that migrants easily continued church activity after moving north. Instead, church membership was demonstrably affected by such factors as previous urban experience, occupation, and Philadelphia residence. A clear majority of household heads, 83 of 142 (58.5%), reported that they had belonged to a church in the South but did not yet belong to one in Philadelphia. Only a quarter (35) reported church membership in both regions, while 15.5% (22) belonged in neither. The general pattern was most pronounced among migrants from places in the South of between 2,500 and 10,000 inhabitants, with 26 of 33 household

---

55 Franklin, 50.
56 Lieberson, 128.
57 Kennedy, 202.
heads reporting church membership in the South but not in Philadelphia. Church membership was most prevalent in the South in cities above 50,000 in population (35 of 38), and these people remained more inclined to church membership in Philadelphia (13 of 38) than those from smaller communities (23 to 103).

The decline in church membership in the North cut across all occupational lines, except for the skilled workers. As in the South, skilled workers tended to be church members, though a twelve to nothing division in the South became a bare six to five majority in Philadelphia, with all six having been church members in the South. In contrast, more than three quarters of all unskilled laborers (64 of 83) and 84% of domestics (21 of 25) were non-members in Philadelphia, though in each case more than three quarters of these people had belonged to a church in the South. There were also limited variations by district. In each of the two poorer sections, the Ghetto and South Philadelphia, 83% of household heads were not yet church members. North Philadelphia (58.5%) and West Philadelphia (66.7%) had significantly lower proportions of non-members, which accords with their established aura of relative proprietary and respectability in terms of the city-wide black community.

Reviewing the whole social and economic experience of the migrants, William Fuller concluded his survey report on an optimistic note. Though prices and rents were higher in Philadelphia than in the South, the migrants seemed pleased with the relative freedom of the north and satisfied with the increase in their standard of living. A sharp reduction in discrimination had evidently occurred, with greatly expanded cultural and economic opportunities. His finding supports Kenneth Kusmer's conclusion that "the black masses in the northern ghettos in the 1920s could view their status as representing both an absolute and a relative advance over their former condition."

Yet this picture of prosperity and satisfaction is not the entire story. For more than half of the surveyed household heads were either definitely planning to return South or were considering it. Among all household heads, 64 had decided to stay in Philadelphia; 31 to return South; and 45 were undecided. With only about a tenth of the single people and female family heads definitely planning to return South, the

58 Fuller, 80-82.
59 Kusmer, 233.
figures for the male headed families show considerable ambiguity about the North. Only 44 out of 103 were definitely staying in Philadelphia, while 27 had decided to return South and 32 were considering returning. Such breakdowns were by no means unique to blacks. Taylor estimated that between 1908 and 1924 about a third as many Europeans returned home as immigrated to America, with the proportion rising to about half as many for Italians and Slavs. As in their migration process and socio-economic conditions, so in remigration there was initially a strong similarity between black migrants and contemporary European immigrants.

Various aspects of life in the South and in Philadelphia seem to have affected attitudes towards remigration. The tenant farmers’ reluctant migration is echoed in their attitudes towards staying North. Former tenant farmers were more likely to have decided to return (29.5%) than former unskilled laborers (20%) or farm owners (none of six). Conversely, a very large proportion of both the former service workers (7, or 70%) and skilled workers (8, or 66.7%) were definitely staying in Philadelphia, compared to between 34% and 38.5% of the ex-tenant farmers, unskilled laborers and domestics. Over half (16 of 28) of male family heads from large southern cities were definitely staying North, compared to 37% of the migrants from places under 50,000 inhabitants (28 of 75), to whom Philadelphia must have seemed far more intimidating.

In Philadelphia, the only occupational group deviating significantly from the norm was again the skilled workers, five of whom (45.5%), had decided to return South, with only two of twelve committed to Philadelphia. Their division parallels other unusual patterns in the city. The proportion of male family heads planning to return South was higher in North Philadelphia (29.0%) and West Philadelphia (33.3%) than in relatively poorer South Philadelphia (20.7%) or the Ghetto (21.4%). More surprisingly, for male headed families both individual and family incomes were higher among those planning to return South than those planning to stay North. The former had an average individual income of $4.40 per day and a family income of $5.68 per day in Philadelphia, while the figures for the latter were only $3.78 and $5.31 respectively. Of course the different southern experiences of the tenant farmers and the unskilled laborers, who certainly saw higher cash wages

60 Taylor, District Magnet, 105.
in Philadelphia, would have affected these decisions. Nevertheless, in terms of occupation, income, and desirable residence, there was a persistent inverse relationship between economic success and the decision to stay in Philadelphia.

Such unexpected results remind us to be cautious in generalizing from the 1924 survey. Black migration in the 1920s was a complex process in which broad social and economic forces interacted with personal and family situations. Few surveyed households were “average,” and the latitude for individual decision making was considerable. As in most historical research based on the chance survival of records, conclusions based on only 510 people in 142 households have no claim to “scientific” validity. Nevertheless, this does seem to have been a fairly typical group of people, whose experience was probably shared by most of Philadelphia’s contemporary black migrants.

* * * *

What conclusions can be derived from the 1924 survey? The surveyed migrants were predominately in husband and wife families with few children. They came from a variety of southern backgrounds, rural and urban, agricultural and non-agricultural. Both their motives and their methods of migrating varied according to their background. Some were forced to come North by agricultural failure; others were lured from southern cities by high wages. Some family heads came with their families; others explored Philadelphia initially on their own. The migrants settled in several areas of the city and like the overall black population were less segregated from whites than Philadelphia blacks later became. Migrant life varied by neighborhood, ranging from residential mobility and job turnover in white immigrant South Philadelphia to relative stability, or stagnation, in the traditional ghetto around South Street. In contrast to job and residential variations, the occupations of the migrants were everywhere and overwhelmingly unskilled labor for the men and domestic service for the women. But with multiple wage earning common, total family incomes and general living conditions were similar to those of contemporary European immigrants, and certainly marked a distinct improvement over the South. Vastly improved educational opportunities and race relations also seemed evident in comparison to the South. However, many migrants
had ambiguous feelings about Philadelphia, and the survey revealed that a majority were either planning or seriously considering returning South. This ambiguity was prescient, for the subsequent history of the city’s black community, suffering from the effects of racial discrimination, social dislocation, and regional economic decline, was very different from the generally hopeful scene sketched by the survey. Yet that crucial divergence makes the experience of the “Great Migration” all the more important in understanding the history of Philadelphia since the 1920s.

*Temple University*  
Fredric Miller