

Up Here and Down Home: Appalachians in Cities

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Preface

This paper is one in a series to be published by the Research Committee of the Urban Appalachian Council as part of our effort to document the urban and rural realities of Appalachian life.

In 1972, the Urban Appalachian Council was organized to act as a regional resource and educational center for Appalachian affairs and to promote pride in cultural heritage among Appalachians in an urban setting.

The Urban Appalachian Council functions as an advocate and catalyst. It is a fundamental commitment to the concept of cultural pluralism which directs our work in research, advocacy, community organization; cultural affirmation and program development.

Migration from the Appalachian Region has declined significantly since mid-century. The region had a net-out migration of approximately 1.1 million people during the 1960's compared with 2.2 million the previous decade (2).¹ Migration has benefited both people and region. Appalachians, however, are stereotyped as people who gain relatively little from moving and are net social costs to the cities. Social isolation within kinship networks and residential instability are considered contributing factors symptomatic of their cultural, as well as geographical schizophrenia.

Such characteristics are naïve. The research which this paper reviews clearly demonstrates that the Appalachian “problem” is a minority of recent migrants in lower class neighborhoods of the central city, and long-term residents with limited access to urban opportunities. Such characteristics are important, however, because they are common to public policies for population distribution and the development of lagging regions.

Migration, Income Benefits and Urban Social Costs

The majority of people who leave Appalachia migrate to urban places. Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit and Cleveland are among the cities which traditionally have received large numbers of migrants from selected parts of the region. The inclusion of Appalachia within the in-migration fields of specific cities is a principal characteristic of the region’s external geography (14; 15). Consequently, migrants are conventionally assumed to be the major link between rural poverty in Appalachia and a host of urban crises. In their report to the President’s Commission on Rural Poverty, for example, Kain and Persky summarized (16, p.294):

...Southern-born white and Negro migrants are ill-prepared for life in metropolitan North. In particular, they are likely to be poorly educated, have high levels of unemployment and low incomes, and place disproportionate demands on welfare and public services.

The view is that migration is counterproductive. It adversely affects the region of origin because migrants are young and relatively well-educated; the migrants’ benefits are small because of their disadvantages compared with urban populations; and they are net social costs in large, congested cities to which they frequently move. Although none of the hypotheses was tested, this conception of the relationship between Appalachia and urban America is basic to development policies designed to solve America’s North-South problem (6; 11; 12; 13).

Contrary to the conventional wisdom, migrants from the rural South to the urban North significantly increase their personal incomes and, at the same time, reduce their chances of being poor and aid-dependent. Recent empirical research shows that black males and their families have the greatest relative advantage in terms of increased personal incomes; black females, especially family heads, have the least (3; 26).² Southern black migrants are significantly better off than comparable groups of non-migrants and, in some cases, are less disadvantaged initially than blacks born and raised in the city. Although relative benefits are less in large cities, the advantages of migration to blacks are clearly great.

White migrants have similar benefits. Personal income gains are greatest for males and their families; and benefits increase with city size (3; 19; 26). However, migrants to large cities generally have larger proportions in poverty and receiving public assistance income than whites who were born in or are long term residents of the city, and those from other regions. Special tabulations from the 1970 census show that 13.4 percent of the white

families in Chicago who lived in the South in 1965 were poor compared with the 4.5 percent of the city's long-term residents; and 5.1 percent of recent migrant families had public assistance income (17).³ Disadvantages of Southern birth are greater initially for whites than for blacks. However, whites achieve higher levels of income through economic mobility in the city whereas marginal migrants often return home (8; 22). Families headed by women also benefit in the adjustment process, although their levels of poverty and public assistance are three times those of white males and their families (17).

The experience of Appalachians in Northern cities is analogous to that of whites from the rural South.⁴ Kain and Persky reported that Appalachians were particularly disadvantaged urban migrants because of their lack of educational opportunities. However, recent studies of migrants from Eastern Kentucky to Lexington and Cincinnati (1; 4; 8; 18), southwestern Ohio (24), and Appalachians (primarily from West Virginia) in Cleveland (21; 22) clearly demonstrate the personal economic advantages of moving to the city. Families significantly increase their income benefits and, consequently, a much smaller proportion is poor and receives public assistance income than non-migrants and return migrants at origin. Income benefits increase with city size and length of residence in the city. Recent migrants have slightly lower incomes than Appalachians who have lived in the city for some time. However, poverty and public assistance income are characteristics of only a small minority of each group.

The studies also challenge the assumption that migrants are net social costs to cities. Morgan and Bordeaux (18) report that recent migrants from Eastern Kentucky to Lexington are not a net social cost in terms of public services. They require outlays for local schools, but that cost is balanced by taxes they pay for other city services.⁵ Petersen and Sharpe report similar findings for Southern migrants in Cleveland's low-income areas (25, pp. 261-2):

We find little in these data to nourish the lingering notion that the arrival of Southern migrants per se signals the imminence of additional drains on governmental budgets through increase in public dependency or delinquency, greater numbers of managerial headaches generated by having to deal with an inept, unwilling or undependable work force, or cataclysmic declines in neighborhoods.

The fact that out-migration from Appalachia is selective by age and education, whereas marginal (e.g. those with less education and lower skill levels) people dominate return migration are contributing factors (8; 22). Appalachians act selfishly to maximize their present income benefits and, as a group, do not become net social costs in terms of public service in urban areas. The preponderance of evidence supports these conclusions despite assumptions to the contrary (19; 21; 23).

In his analysis of poverty among rural-urban migrant, Bacon concludes that (3, p. 131):

...poor, transplanted rural Southerners may be highly visible in the North, but they constitute a minority of poor living there.

There is no compelling evidence that Appalachians are disproportionately represented among the poor, or public welfare recipients; and they significantly improve their personal income benefits. The advantages are greatest for families that settle in small towns on the periphery of metropolitan areas. This may include the majority of urban migrants (22; 24). Those that settle initially in central city poverty areas, however, suffer greater disadvantages, especially upon their initial period of residency.

Appalachian Settlement in Central City Poverty Areas

Chicago's Uptown, Cleveland's West Side, and Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine are conveniently stereotyped as hillbilly ghettos. They are popularly considered to be places in which large numbers of poor, recent migrants are concentrated; they are the location of a city's Appalachian "problem". Appalachians are segregated within the city by socioeconomic status as well as social class origin. Photiadis (22) has clearly demonstrated significant differences between West Virginians who are in Cleveland's low-income area and those in small suburban towns on the metropolitan's periphery. Appalachians may constitute a large minority of the population in low status areas of the central city.⁶ They also suffer problems of accessibility to socioeconomic opportunities analogous to those of other groups in poverty areas.

The paradox of Appalachians who settle initially in the central city is their location in marginal residential areas with disadvantaged groups whom they perceive as having privileged status. Appalachians prefer to live near their kin and friends, or at least in neighborhoods with large numbers of people from the same region or state (22, pp. 224-27).⁷ However, their urban settlement patterns often place them in competition with blacks (not from Appalachia), Chicanos and other culturally distinct minority groups for a limited supply of low-cost housing. The problems of discrimination which Appalachians routinely face from other whites and working-class ethnic groups are compounded by alienation from more recent ethnic newcomers, as well as institutions which serve them.⁸ This contributes to transient attitudes toward the initial location. Appalachians assume that economic mobility will afford them a means of geographical mobility, and permit them to move into better residential areas in the suburbs, or in the periphery of the metropolitan area (21, pp. 203-5, 210; 22, p.227). In the interim, methods of coping with the uncertainties of the urban environment are important aspects of Appalachians' behavior in cities.

Recent migrants depend heavily upon their social communication networks as resources in migration. Petersen and Sharpe, for example, describe their importance for Southern migrants to Cleveland's low-income areas (22, pp. 258-9):

At each of several junctures, these informal social networks intervene between the migrant and larger society, mediating the shocks and strains of adjustment. More often than not, migrants have been encouraged to move to Cleveland by friends and relatives, spent at least their first night

in the city with them, got help in finding the first Cleveland job (and only slightly less often in finding later jobs) and counted on them as potential sources of financial emergency.

Migrants depend upon their primary kinship group as a buffer to the outside world, and their network of friends is limited in number and location in the city (21, pp. 224-7). This is a logical source of support for adjustment when economic resources are limited and other sources are relatively inaccessible.⁹ The accessibility of a kin group may, in fact, result in avoidance of formal, public institutions. The pride of mountain families, and a suspicion that state employment agencies, public assistance and social agencies give blacks and ethnic newcomers preferred treatment simply reinforces the use of the best-known, most reliable and most accessible resource support system.

Frequent visits down home and temporary resettlement in Appalachia is another common adjustment pattern. This is frequently interpreted as a peculiar nostalgia for the hills, and evidence that Appalachians are unprepared for, or at least unhappy with, urban life. But it is also a method of maintaining familiar patterns of interaction and communication which facilitates adjustment and prevent the disruption of valuable social relationships under the stress of migration (22, pp. 101-05; also 18). Migrants visiting in Appalachia account for the majority of the trips. And this may include temporary resettlement under adverse economic and social conditions in the city. Compared with black migrants from the South, Appalachians' urban destinations are closer to their region of origin, and economic differentials may not be so great that temporary return is ruled out for some.¹⁰ Permanent resettlement in Appalachia is reportedly not desirable, however, unless economic incentives are similar to the benefits which the migrant has in the city. (1).

Visitation and temporary resettlement in Appalachia are, according to the conventional wisdom, significant determinants of residential instability associated with Appalachians. Frequent interaction between city and country contributes. However, it neither merits description as aimless wandering nor is it a principal cause of high rates of residential mobility among Appalachians in central city poverty areas.¹¹ The location of urban renewal, model cities and public works demolition in traditional ports-of-entry have reduced the supply of housing for which Appalachians must compete with blacks and recognized ethnic minorities. Residential mobility rates for Appalachians are higher than for other groups of similar socioeconomic status and tenure, but they also move longer distances (22, pp. 52-4; 23).¹⁰ Compared with blacks, they have a wider range of residential opportunities available to them which increases their accessibility to better jobs. But compared with whites, Appalachians are frequently segregated by class and regional cultural origins to neighborhoods with lower socioeconomic status.

Public Policy and Future Migrations

Continued decline in the volume and rate of migration from Appalachia is expected. Changes in demographic structure of the region (a decline in fertility, for example) will reduce out-migration whereas regional development, in addition to reducing the income

benefits of potential migrants, may also accelerate return migration of skilled workers. On the other hand, an increased proportion of the large number of Appalachians who leave the region will come from its poorest areas, especially the Central Subregion.¹² This prospect is of concern to public policy planners.

Future migrations from regions such as Appalachia are significant to national growth policies. Policies which implicitly promote continued urban growth are opposed by advocates of regional development who favor rural industrialization to improve social welfare, and reduce out-migration from depressed areas. The Administration's position is ambivalent. The Commission on Population Growth and the American Future, however, has endorsed a policy which combines manpower training for people in poor regions with programs to redirect their migration from large, congested metropolitan regions to intermediate-size cities near their origin (6).¹³ According to Hansen, migrants should move to the centers which do most in relation to their size to increase migrants' lifetime incomes (migration centers) and which have rapid rates of population growth (growth centers). Thus migrants will increase their benefits in places which they prefer, and reduce net social costs of migration to large cities. Human resource development and relocation assistance to intermediate sized cities in which public investment is concentrated are, in Hansen's view, matters of economic development. People who remain in the region, and do not have jobs, are problems of social welfare.

Appalachia is of special importance because of its large population and migration patterns. On the basis of locational preferences of graduating seniors from the poorest part of Eastern Kentucky, Hansen concludes that they are not only responsive to economic incentives in migration but also consistently prefer cities which are intermediate between Appalachia and large metropolitan areas such as Chicago and Detroit. The students preferred to remain in Eastern Kentucky only if it had the highest wage rate (12, pp. 94-11, 125-30). The analysis of recent migration from Appalachian counties to all U.S. metropolitan areas, however, concluded that whereas large number of migrants were (12, p. 149):

...increasing their incomes by moving into SMSAs within the Appalachian region, the long term prospects of the places into which they are moving are often stagnant at best.

Charleston, West Virginia, and Knoxville and Chattanooga are examples. Consequently, Hansen argues, redirection of migration to intermediate cities such as Lexington, Kentucky, and Huntsville, Alabama, will be difficult. In his view, the Appalachians' dependence upon social networks in the migration process contributes to their moving either to regional SMSAs, or to large cities which they do not prefer. Relocation assistance and job market information are meant to accomplish changes in the destination as well as auspices of migration.

Reduction in out-migration in the last decade, in fact, was accomplished by significant redirection of Appalachian migration streams. Intermediate-class cities such as Columbus, Cincinnati and Lexington had a larger share of the declining number of

migrants as the flow to large distant cities dropped off by as much as 43 percent (for example, Chicago and Cleveland). The relative importance of Southern cities on the periphery of Appalachia as migrant destinations also increased. This suggests that the locational preferences of potential migrants from Eastern Kentucky are closely related to actual changes in migration and information about socioeconomic opportunities in cities from friends and relatives.¹⁴ Migrants to cities such as Lexington and Cincinnati are successful economically and generally satisfied with their move (1). They are close enough to Appalachia to maintain their social networks with a minimum of disruption. They are also settling more frequently in middle class sections of the city and small towns on the metropolitan periphery rather than in traditional ports-of-entry (22, pp. 106-15; 24, pp. 121-25).

The distribution of migration from Appalachian to intermediate growth centers has changed without public policy designed explicitly for that purpose. Evidence suggests that migrants profit economically in the city and, if they are better-educated in Appalachia, their urban socioeconomic opportunities also increase. Policies of human resource development, however, are intended to encourage and assist out-migration, especially from the poorest areas. They commonly assume that the “problem” of lagging regions is because people lack education or skills, or live in the wrong places. Consequently, investments are concentrated in people who are potentially most mobile; in skills for urban job markets; and in places near but not in lagging regions. They also argue that the objective is not to force out-migration but to give people a genuine choice consistent with their locational preferences. However, Appalachians may find little demand for their education and skills except in urban centers outside Appalachia where expansion is stimulated by selective public investment policies.

Future migrations of this type have important consequences for the Appalachian community. Selective out-migration would increase the concentration of better-educated, more highly skilled groups as a minority in urban centers outside the region. The accelerated urbanization of Appalachians, in turn, would further reduce the potential for socioeconomic development in Appalachia. Rural industrialization policies have stalled because the costs to industry of relocating in depressed areas are high and public investments to subsidize moves are too low. Public investment has generally increased the ability of corporations and government to exploit Appalachia’s natural resources rather than improve the social welfare of its people (20, esp. pp. 10-11, 19-23).¹⁴ Despite the assertion that human resource development is designed specifically for people, the apparent willingness to consider those who remain in Appalachia as social welfare problems is ominous indeed. They have little choice.

Conclusion

The assumption that Appalachian migration is a determinant of urban problems is an article of conventional wisdom frequently used as doomsday prophecy in debates over social welfare programs. Recent demands to limit proposed increases in public assistance in Ohio, for example, were supported by the claim that “any other course will invite

every other dreg and deadbeat into Ohio from Kentucky and Tennessee while the ultimate bankruptcy of Ohio will be visible on the horizon.”¹⁵ The fact remains that migration has significant benefits for most migrants; and there is no convincing evidence that Appalachians are a significant social cost to their urban destinations although in cities such as Cincinnati a large proportion live in lower status neighborhoods. Human resource development policies favor programs to accelerate urbanization of Appalachians outside of the region as a means of economic development, with social welfare for those without jobs and who do not wish to migrate. Thus the real issue of future migrations is regional development policy which advocates the separation of Appalachian people from the Appalachian region.

Footnotes

¹ These statistics are for the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) area. The net migration rate for 1950 to 1960 was -12.7 percent and, for 1960 to 1970 was 18.2 million people, an increase of 2.7 percent for the previous decade.

² The recent empirical research on the interrelationships between migration, public welfare and poverty is reviewed by Morrison (19), Price (23) and Shannon and Shannon (25). The advantages for black migrants are great primarily because of the low income blacks in the rural South. Despite significant gains in personal income, blacks in the city still have incomes below those of whites, and fewer opportunities for economic mobility than whites.

³ Detroit and Washington, D.C., each cities with large Appalachian minorities, had statistics similar to Chicago.

⁴ The census definition of Southern whites includes whites who are not from Appalachia, and excludes blacks who are from the region. It also excludes ARC areas in southeastern Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York state. The studies of Appalachians in cities which this paper cites are of migrants from the Southern Appalachians (24).

⁵ Because the majority of migrants are in young families, they are age-specific public “burdens” in local school services only. Estimates of the impact of Appalachian migrants on public service costs in large cities are not available. Consequently, the assumption that they are net social costs, directly or indirectly to the city, has no empirical basis.

⁶ Using public elementary school enrollments as an indicator, approximately 40 percent of Appalachians in Cincinnati are in neighborhoods with low socioeconomic status. Appalachians are approximately 35 percent of the city’s population.

⁷ The role of the social communication network in the migrants’ locational decisions, including residential location in the city, is explained by Fowler and Davies’ studies by migrants in Indianapolis (7; 9).

⁸ Appalachians' concern about prejudice and discrimination against them is a major factor in their dissatisfaction with the city (1; 5, pp. 313-419; 10; and 22. pp. 224-27).

⁹ Shannon and Shannon state that (25, pp. 56-57) "the migrant comes to the city with little in the way of marketable skills...but with kinship attachments that will enable him to survive...while he becomes acquainted with the simplest demands of urban life." Schwarzweller, Brown, and Mangalam explain in detail the Appalachians' use of social networks in migration (24). Women and young men, and migrants to central city poverty areas depend most heavily upon this type of support.

¹⁰ The migrants' feelings for Appalachia are eloquently described by case studies in Coles (5, especially pp. 315-25) and Gitlin and Hollander (10).

¹¹ Photiadis (22, pp. 105-06) reports that Appalachians in Cleveland's low-income areas return for visits less frequently than those in peripheral suburbs.

¹² The Central Subregion, which includes Eastern Kentucky and much of West Virginia, had a net population loss of 164,051 from 1960 to 1970 primarily as a result of the net out-migration of 324,400 persons. This was 29 percent of the Appalachian Region's total out-migration.

¹³ This policy, as developed by Hansen (11; 12; 13), is reviewed by me in the Annals, Association of American Geographers, Vol. 64 (December, 1974, forthcoming).

¹⁴ Hansen (11, pp. 22-38; 12; 13) states that the policy he proposes includes manpower training for people in regions such as Appalachia as well as some rural industrialization. However, he ignores specific recommendations for rural economic development and concentrates instead on arguments against rural industrialization.

¹⁵ Louisville Courier-Journal, May 3, 1971, p. 6. The quotation is attributed to Frank Mayfield, Dale Schmit and Chester Cruze, Hamilton County representatives to the Ohio state legislature.

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