

Black Population Trends in Southern Nonmetro Counties, 1990-2000

The analysis of Black migration trends since 1995 must await the availability of more detailed data from the 2000 Census of Population. By considering the early results of this most recent Census, however, we can examine overall 1990-2000 Black population change from net migration and surplus of births over deaths combined. We found that the larger the proportion of the county population Black in 1990, the lower the Black population growth in the next 10 years.³ In nonmetro counties with Black majorities, the total population grew by slightly less than 7 percent, whereas growth was about 14 percent in counties where less than a third of the population was Black.

³In the Census of 2000, respondents were allowed to report being of more than one race, whereas only one race was reported in 1990. This change did not make much difference for our population, however, since only 1.5 percent of nonmetropolitan Blacks in the South reported more than one race in 2000. We counted as Blacks all persons who reported Black either as their sole race or in combination with one or more other races, for we think this probably conforms the closest to 1990 data. We also calculated the results including as Blacks in 2000 just those who reported Black as their only race. The patterns are virtually identical to those shown here for all persons reporting Black race, with the percentage changes about 1 to 3 points lower. In general, the percentage of multiple-race entries was noticeably highest in counties where Blacks are comparatively few in number.

We hypothesized a regional difference in this effect, because of the known deeper nature of poverty among Blacks in the South Central States than in the more vigorous economies of the South Atlantic region. This supposition proved correct, as figure 8 clearly shows. In the States west of Georgia, counties gained 9 percent overall in their Black population between 1990 and 2000, while counties in the South Atlantic States gained 13 percent. According to the bars in the figure, for each subregion the predominantly Black counties had lower growth than those that were less than one-third Black. (Differences are 10 versus 16 in the South Atlantic States and 5 versus 12 in the Other South). Thus, Black growth levels were associated with both region and racial composition. Of counties with a majority of Black residents, 11 that had absolute Black population decline were west of Georgia and 4 were in the South Atlantic States.

The contrast in trends indicates that Blacks in the Mississippi Valley and Alabama are in areas where conditions are still widely unfavorable to retention or acquisition of population and where the historic trend of outmovement is the least altered. In the eastern South, though, large numbers of rural and small-town Blacks live in areas that are now commonly being evaluated as attractive for employment and residence rather than as areas to leave.

Figure 8
Black percent change 1990-2000, nonmetro areas of the South Atlantic and Other South States, by county percent Black in 1990

