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BETWEEN RETURN AND ONWARD MOVERS

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This study explores the premise that particular sequences of migration select particular types of persons, whose decisions to move are colored by a spectrum of motives, personal capabilities, and information sources. Longitudinal micro data are used to demonstrate that migrants who venture out and promptly return are distinctively different from other migrants. They are comparatively less educated and less skilled, recently unemployed, and less inclined to plan ahead or avoid taking risks. These findings broaden a traditional demographic perspective on migration by emphasizing the diversity of purposes that may operate, depending on where a particular move falls in a sequence of migration.

Americans have long been noted for their readiness to migrate, whether in search of opportunity or to escape confining circumstances. Migration thus serves both economic and social functions. Economically, it equilibrates regional labor supply and demand, moving workers from areas where jobs are dwindling to areas where workers are needed (Greenwood, 1981; Mueller, 1982). Sociologically, migration promotes occupational mobility and socioeconomic advancement (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Wilson, 1981)—as it generally did, for example, for blacks who migrated away from the rural South.

As a prism separates light into its constituent colors of the spectrum, so does migration, upon examination, appear to *select* distinct "bands" of people—types of migrants whose decisions to move are colored by a spectrum of motives. Not all moves, of course, are strictly voluntaristic (about two-fifths are made under conditions of substantial constraint, according to Sell [1983]). More often than not, however, migration is a sorting mechanism: It filters and sifts the population as its more deliberate members seek to elevate their

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status, or enjoy more abundant amenities, or simply go back to where they came from because a previous move did not work out as expected. This "filtering model" extends certain ideas embedded in the perspective on migration entertained by cultural geographers (Zelinsky, 1973; Johansen, 1967). Emphasizing the element of purposeful choice in most moves, they point out that areas which grow primarily through migration often come to possess a distinctive regional character stemming from the common motives and expectations of their original settlers and perpetuated by continuing selective migration. (Familiar examples are Mormon Utah, Yankee New England, and more recently California's "Silicon Valley.")

"Filtering" may be more descriptive than explanatory, however. It complicates theoretical interpretation because of an ambiguity noted by Blau and Duncan (1967). Does migration actively launch amorphous groups of people on an upward path to achievement by freeing their energies? Or does it do no more than passively select certain types of persons who would have improved their status whether they migrated or not?

We explore this intersection of economic, sociological, and geographic perspectives on migration using a unique body of longitudinal data: the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID). We examine particular *sequences* of migration, seeking indications of how they select and filter particular types of people. Our focus is on several dimensions that are measured on our data set: socioeconomic characteristics (education and occupation), unemployment experience, and attitudinal and personality indicators.

Our premise is that persons who make particular sequences of moves may be identifiable by particular sets of characteristics, reflecting the interplay between the functions that migration performs and migrants' particular motives or constraints, personal capabilities, and information sources. For example, migrants who are drawn to a new destination almost surely act on motives that differ from those of migrants who decide to (or must) move back to a place they recently left—in effect "undoing" the preceding move. How are we to interpret this sequence of "rapid return"? One explanation is that it reflects disequilibrium, perhaps owing to a new job that failed to work out as expected, possibly because the migrant lacked sufficient or sound information before the move. How does such a sequence compare with, say, an equally rapid move *onward* to a new area, or with a return move undertaken after a much longer absence?

Methods

Data. The University of Michigan Panel Study of Income Dynamics enables us to compare the characteristics of individuals who follow these distinct migration sequences. The PSID is a longitudinal annual survey which followed a national sample of approximately 5,000 families since 1968 to assess their

economic fortunes over time (Institute for Social Research, 1972). A unique feature of the study is its follow-up of respondents when they move, thereby disclosing the *sequences* of migration that conventionally measured moves comprise.

We use the eight-year PSID file, which spans 1968 through 1975 and contains 5,725 records. Each is on a family that was both (1) a member of the initial 1968 sample (or formed from a family in the initial sample) and (2) surveyed in the eighth year (1975). In each such family in the sample, one person (usually the husband, in the case of married couples) was specified as the family head, designated as the respondent, and administered an extensive questionnaire. Our working sample here is restricted to these family heads.

The units of analysis in this study are "person-years," which represent one-year segments of respondents' lives during which the person may or may not have moved. (For details on how this unit was derived from the PSID and attendant limitations, see DaVanzo and Morrison, 1982, Appendix A.) These one-year segments are derived from as many years of a given person's life as are tracked by the data while that person is the head of his or her family (hereafter, a "same-head" segment). ("Same-head" segments spanning less than two successive years are excluded since they do not disclose moves.)

Definition and Measurement of Moves. The PSID identifies location by the person's county of residence. Consistent with the emphasis most theories place on labor force migration, we focus on migration among labor market areas, approximated here by combining counties into a mutually exclusive and exhaustive set of 229 Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSAs) and 374 other nonmetropolitan State Economic Areas (SEAs), both as defined in 1970. Henceforth our use of the terms "migration," "area," and "move" will refer to migration at this geographic scale.

Conceptually, any move a person makes can be classified as either a *primary* (first-time) or a *repeat* move. Repeat moves can be further subdivided into *return* and *onward* (nonreturn) moves. Repeat moves can also be characterized according to the *tempo* of remigration (how soon after moving the person moves again). That tempo can be indexed by the *migration interval* (MI), defined as the elapsed time since departure from some previous area. Thus, an "MI:1 return migrant" is a person who returned to an area after an absence of one year; if this same person instead moved on to a new area, he would be an "MI:1 onward migrant."

A complete residential history would show all the moves a person ever made, enabling the analyst to classify and characterize all moves in this way. The PSID, however, is incomplete, since it only records the respondent's area of residence annually between 1968 and 1975, and also the area where the person lived when "growing up" (the exact wording used on the questionnaire). (The time span covered by "growing up" cannot be defined precisely beyond

inferring that it is an early period of life.) We measure moves as year-to-year changes in the recorded area of residence between 1968 and 1975. However, any moves made after "growing up" but before 1968 are missed in the data. The longest specific repeat migration interval (MI) our data can measure is six years (an initial move in 1968-69 and a repeat move in 1974-75).

Selectivity of Migrants by Sequence

Selective migration can be examined from several alternative perspectives depending on the question posed. Our perspective views migrants in comparison with everyone else who might have made such a move but did not. For example, we compare actual primary migrants with other potential primary migrants (i.e., persons who have never moved); and actual return migrants with potential return migrants (i.e., persons who previously left some other place) who did not move again.

Extending this logic, one can distinguish any specific migration sequence of interest and compare migrants with stayers for that sequence. For the MI:1 repeat sequence, for example, we compare persons who migrate in one year and again the next with all persons who migrate but then stay put the next year. We then subdivide these MI:1 repeat migrants into returnees and onward migrants to enable comparisons between these two distinct types. Such comparisons can reveal whether and how a particular sequence of migration selects distinct types of persons.

The data presented below are structured so as to depict "mover-stayer" comparisons within several differently defined universes of risk to particular types of moves. The first universe, labeled "all moves," is the most inclusive; it consists of all "person-year" observations in our sample; within it, we distinguish migrants (of any type) from stayers. Comparisons made for this inclusive universe are a useful reference point, since the migration differentials they reflect come closest to approximating those that typical one-year U.S. migration data would reflect.

Within the "all moves" universe, two mutually exclusive and exhaustive subuniverses—primary and repeat—can be distinguished. The subuniverse of "primary moves," is restricted to those person-years at risk to first-time moves, i.e., those that show no history of previous migration. Within it, we distinguish primary migrants from stayers. Primary migration can be regarded as the purest instance of selective migration: It arises out of the first-time act of deliberate migration whereby, within a set of people who have never moved before, migrants distinguish themselves from stayers.

The subuniverse of "repeat moves" is restricted to person-years at risk to a repeat move, i.e., where the person is known to have moved before, including between "growing up" and their first year in the panel. Within this subuniverse, we distinguish between those who made return or onward moves and those

TABLE 1
Means of Socioeconomic and Unemployment Status Indicators for
Migrants and Stayers

Type of Move	Educational Attainment (years)	White Collar (%)	Salaried Professional and Managerial (%)	Unemployed before Move in Question (%)	Unemployed before Initially Migrating (%)
All moves					
Migrants	12.4	44.7	26.8	5.4	NA ^a
Stayers	10.4	36.8	17.5	2.6	NA
Primary moves					
Migrants	12.1	43.9	27.7	7.5	NA
Stayers	10.2	33.9	14.4	2.9	NA
Repeat moves					
All types					
Return	12.5	37.6	22.2	4.8	NA
Onward	12.6	49.0	28.8	4.5	NA
Stayers	10.7	40.4	21.4	2.4	NA
MI:1					
Return	12.1	27.5	13.7	9.9	24.3
Onward	13.4	52.3	38.6	8.3	10.5
Stayers	12.6	47.9	26.2	6.0	3.6
MI:2-6					
Return	12.9	33.3	23.3	5.4	0.0
Onward	13.0	50.0	32.5	10.3	2.9
Stayers	12.4	48.4	26.6	3.3	2.4

SOURCE: Panel Study of Income Dynamics analysis file.

^aNA: Not applicable.

who stayed. Person-year observations at risk to any type of repeat move are further subclassified into two separate (although not exhaustive) subuniverses: (a) those at risk to a repeat move with a one-year migration interval (MI:1) and (b) those at risk with a two- to six-year migration interval (MI:2-6).²

²These two "at risk" subuniverses do not include certain kinds of observations included in "repeat moves, all types": (1) observations eligible to return to an origin they left before their first year in the panel, for which MI cannot be precisely measured; (2) observations eligible for return to a foreign place; and (3) observations eligible for several returns simultaneously, e.g., a person who lived in a different area in each of the last six years and is eligible in the seventh year to return to any one of them.

We have restricted our analysis to person-years for which the individual is at risk to *exactly* one short-interval return to enable us to avoid complications that would arise if some observations were at risk to only one return but others were at risk to multiple returns. This restriction limits us to approximately three-fifths of all of the short-interval return moves registered in our data set. Nearly all these short-interval returns are also returns to origin. (We also consider a few cases at risk to only one short-interval return whose "origin" is unknown.)

We would have liked to consider each MI separately, but beyond MI = 1 sample sizes are too small to permit further differentiation.

TABLE 2
Means of Attitude and Personality Indicators for Migrants and Stayers

Type of Move	Anticipated Job-Related Move before		Efficacy-Planning Index (7 = most effective planner)	Risk Avoidance Index (9 = most cautious)
	Move in Question (%)	Initially Migrating (%)		
All moves				
Migrants	29.5	NA ^a	3.65	4.90
Stayers	4.0	NA	3.37	4.61
Primary moves				
Migrants	23.9	NA	3.36	4.67
Stayers	3.0	NA	3.36	4.54
Repeat moves				
All types:				
Return	28.2	NA	3.71	4.76
Onward	33.8	NA	3.80	5.13
Stayers	5.3	NA	3.36	4.68
MI:1				
Return	31.0	18.9	3.46	4.19
Onward	51.7	55.3	4.05	5.11
Stayers	15.6	23.0	3.74	4.73
MI:2-6				
Return	29.7	30.0	3.67	5.47
Onward	34.5	27.5	3.75	4.79
Stayers	14.2	22.0	3.66	4.77

SOURCE: Panel Study of Income Dynamics analysis file.

^aNA: Not applicable.

Each of these subuniverses corresponds to a common sequence that is well measured by our data. Other types are not separately distinguished because they are poorly delineated (e.g., MI: > 6) or intractable (e.g., repeat moves that involve several potential destinations of return).

In the following sections we examine selectivity for these types of moves under three headings: socioeconomic status, unemployment experience, and attitudinal and personality indicators. All variables examined are measured *before* the move. The data to be considered ahead are summarized in Tables 1 and 2, which show mean values for certain comparisons among stayers and various types of migrants we shall highlight. The patterns in these data are presented graphically in the figures that follow, along with 95 percent confidence intervals for the stayers and migrants.³

³We display confidence intervals around each mean, instead of presenting pairwise tests of significance, to enable the reader to judge whether or not apparent differences between *any* two groups in the figure are statistically significant. If a particular pair of confidence intervals do not overlap, the two means are significantly different at the 5 percent level.

Socioeconomic Selectivity. Figure 1 displays three dimensions of socioeconomic selectivity: educational attainment, concentration in white-collar occupations, and concentration in salaried managerial or professional occupations.

Among primary moves, note in panel (a) that migrants average significantly more schooling than stayers (12.1 versus 10.2 years). This two-year difference closely parallels the corresponding difference for "all moves." Both comparisons confirm the well-known fact that migration—and here specifically primary migration—is selective of more highly educated persons. Comparisons shown in panels (b) and (c) demonstrate that primary migration is selective of white-collar workers generally and salaried (i.e., non-self-employed) professional or managerial workers specifically. Salaried professionals and managers, of course, tend more than others to seek employment in job markets whose scope is national.

Considering all repeat moves, migrants (both onward and return alike) again average more schooling than the corresponding stayers. Repeat moves with MI:1, however, display an interesting contrast: The onward migrants average significantly more years of schooling than the corresponding stayers, whereas return migrants average less. Clearly, selection is working in opposite directions for these two types of repeat moves (a finding that is consistent with Miller [1977], with Deaton and Anshel [1974], and with the rate differentials noted in DaVanzo and Morrison [1981:97]). Also, this rapid onward migration appears to compound the initial selectivity of primary migration, yielding "doubly selected" migrants. The significantly lower education for MI:1 returnees persists in multivariate analysis (DaVanzo, 1983). Possibly, the information on which migrants base an initial move is less sound for less educated persons, lowering the success rate of their moves and hence increasing the likelihood of a prompt "corrective" return move.

The occupational selectivity of various types of repeat migration exhibits the same contrast (panels (b) and (c)). For all repeat moves, onward migration is selective of white-collar workers generally and of salaried professional and managerial workers, while return migration is either nonselective or selects oppositely. These occupational differences are even sharper among MI:1 repeat migrants but less distinct for MI:2-6.

Hence, the contrasts here exemplify a general recurrent pattern for the MI:1 (and only that) sequence of moves: *The type of MI:1 sequence (return versus onward) appears to select people differently and sometimes oppositely.*

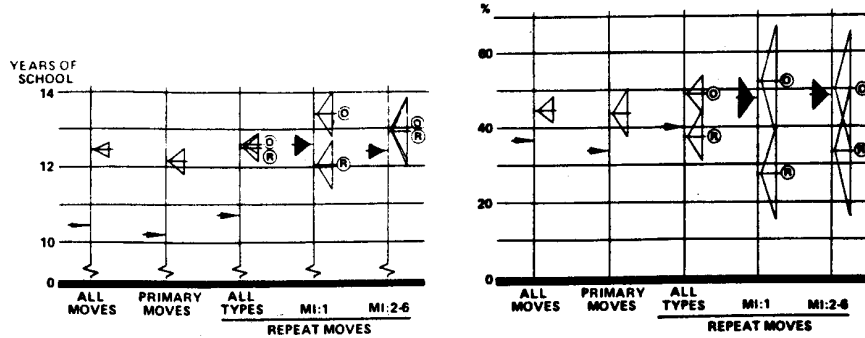
Selectivity by Unemployment Experience. Experience with unemployment is another key dimension of selective migration. Prior to moving, over twice as many primary migrants as stayers (7.5 percent versus 2.9 percent) reported being unemployed (refer to Figure 2, panel (a)). Some of this difference undoubtedly reflects the frequent bouts of unemployment that occur early in adulthood, when the propensity to migrate peaks. The data also elucidate the

FIGURE 1

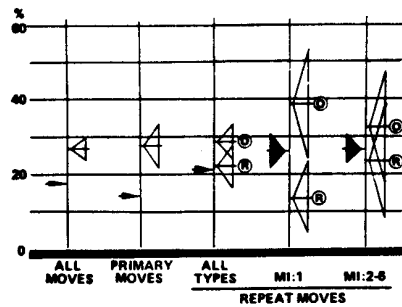
Socioeconomic Selectivity: Stayers, Returnees, and Other Repeat Migrants

(a) Educational Attainment

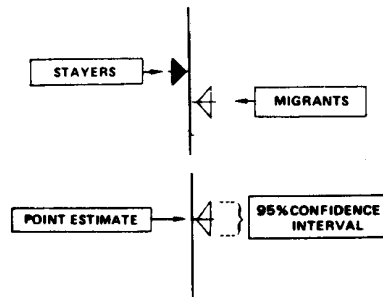
(b) Percent White Collar



(c) Percentage in Salaried Professional or Managerial Occupations



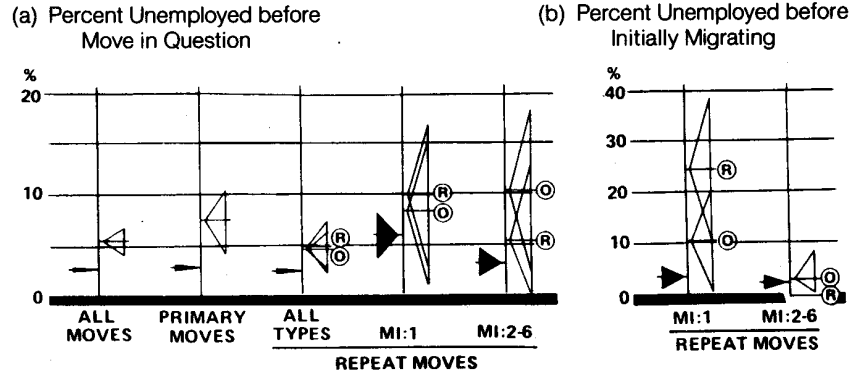
Legend



NOTE: Data shown in this and subsequent figures are means, with 95 percent confidence intervals, for stayers and various types of migrants.

FIGURE 2

Unemployment Experience: Stayers, Returnees, and Other Repeat Migrants



selectivity of repeat migration. Employment status before initially migrating (panel (b)) reveals something about respondents' circumstances before either move in a sequence. Among those whose sequence was to end in an MI:1 return, unemployment was commonplace from the outset. Approximately one-fourth of such migrants were initially unemployed, significantly more than among MI:1 stayers (4 percent). The MI:1 onward migrants appear to be intermediate between returnees and stayers, although the confidence intervals are too broad to establish that with much certainty. A further revealing difference here (data not shown) is that before the initial move in the sequence, 16 percent of the MI:1 returnees reported having lost a job involuntarily (fired, laid off, or company folded), compared with only 5 percent of the MI:1 onward migrants and 6 percent of stayers; the corresponding data for MI:2-6 exhibited no such pattern. Moreover, whereas 24 percent of MI:1 return migrants were initially unemployed, *none* of the MI:2-6 ones were.

These data underscore, then, that unemployment is one precursor of a distinct sequence in which a move made is quickly "undone" by another (possibly corrective) return move. We can only speculate on why such a sequence transpires. Perhaps the immediate pressure of unemployment before the initial move precludes a careful search among alternative destinations, thereby predisposing moves that are ill-directed and thereafter require a return to a familiar setting.

We also can compare unemployment status before the *repeat* move (i.e., following the initial move) to discern the circumstances preceding the repeat move within the sequence (panel (a)). Unfortunately, the patterns here are indistinct due to the widths of the confidence intervals. Nonetheless, migrants in all cases were more likely than nonmigrants to be unemployed.

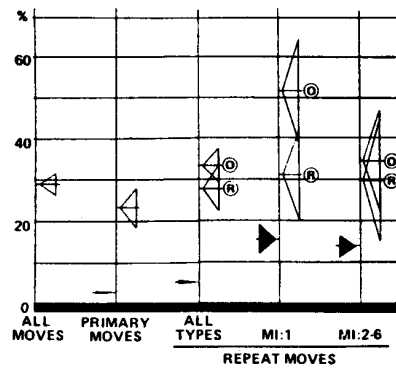
Attitudinal and Personality Indicators. Finally, the PSD contains several attitude and personality indicators (described more fully in Institute for Social Research [1972]). Certain pre-move differences shown in Figure 3 point to possible variations in the way that decisions about migrating evolve.

One such difference concerns the respondent's anticipation of a forthcoming move, indexed by response to the question "Do you think you might move in the next couple of years?" In panel (a) of Figure 3, we see that nearly one-fourth of the primary migrants-to-be anticipated their initial job-related move. Among the short-interval repeat migrants-to-be, those who subsequently returned and those who migrated onward differ at each point in their

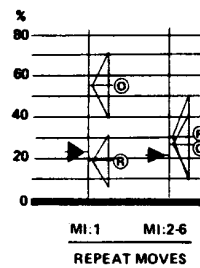
FIGURE 3

Attitude and Personality Indicators

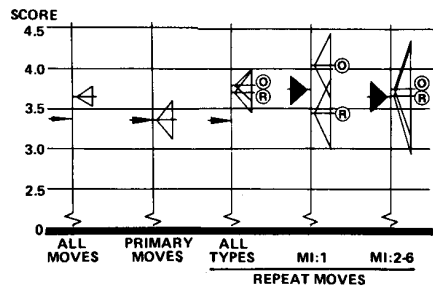
(a) Percent Anticipating Job-Related Move before Move in Question



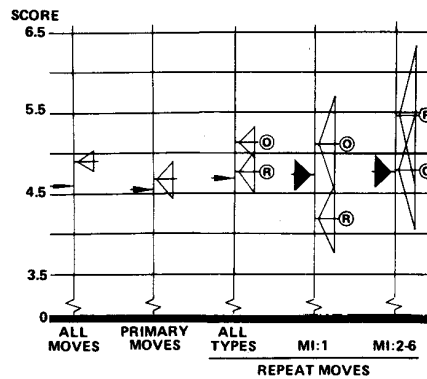
(b) Percent Anticipating Job-Related Move before Initially Migrating



(c) Efficacy-Planning Index^a
(7 = most effective planner)



(d) Risk Avoidance Index^a
(9 = most cautious)



^a Measured before move in question.

respective sequences. As seen in panel (b), the MI:1 returnees are far less likely to have anticipated the initial move (19 percent versus 55 percent), and in panel (a) they less often anticipate the repeat move (31 percent versus 52 percent). Both differences are statistically significant for the MI:1 sequence but virtually nonexistent for the MI:2-6 sequence. The most distinctive feature of the MI:1 onward sequence is how often the moves comprising it were anticipated in advance. The MI:1 return sequence, by contrast, consists of moves that were predominantly unanticipated, particularly the initial one.

Another noteworthy difference is documented on the PSID efficacy-planning index, a composite variable designed to measure the extent to which the respondent plans ahead and believes that plans work out. Although primary migrants and stayers are indistinguishable, MI:1 returnees score significantly lower than their onward-migrating counterparts (panel (c)). Finally, MI:1 returnees are less cautious (i.e., score lower on the PSID risk avoidance index), whereas onward migrants are significantly more cautious (panel (d)).

All in all, we see consistent differences on these dimensions between migrants and stayers and, for MI:1 repeat migrants, between returnees and onward movers. The MI:1 returnee emerges as an individual who is less inclined to anticipate forthcoming moves or more generally to plan ahead, and is less cautious. These differences surely merit further investigation, and with more robust measures than ours. The intriguing question these results pose is why migrants who venture out and promptly return fail to anticipate either move, whereas their counterparts who then move onward do so well at anticipating both moves.

Conclusions

Migrants who rapidly return (within a year after they leave) differ noticeably from those who rapidly move onward or who return after longer absences. Indeed, the act of returning after a short absence comprises one part of a distinctive migration sequence that tends to coincide with unemployment and seems less carefully conceived than the moves that form other sequences.

We find that rapid return migration is weighted with distinctive types of persons: the comparatively less educated and less skilled, the recently unemployed, and persons who are less inclined to plan ahead or to avoid taking risks. As such, rapid return migration is distinctly unlike other types of migration (which generally are positively selective of those at risk). It partially conforms with the "failure" stereotype of a person whose initial move proved disappointing and required a "corrective" return.

Migrants who rapidly move onward, by contrast, appear to compound the initial selectivity of primary migration, yielding a population that has been "doubly selected." For example, such migrants are the most highly educated of all.

From a practical standpoint, the implications of our findings center on two matters: (1) the effects of repeat (and especially return) migration on the local economy and labor force in areas to which migrants move (back) and (2) strategies for strengthening migration's personal economic effectiveness. In regard to the first matter, the differences we have documented may reflect the sifting and sorting of people with particular socioeconomic characteristics and varying degrees of adeptness at personal planning and self-investment. Whether an influx of rapid return migration enhances or detracts from a given region's fortunes hinges, of course, on the region's stock of human capital. (In a severely distressed region like the Mississippi Delta, for example, short-interval returnees, although negatively selected out of the population of previous residents, may be superior nonetheless to the unskilled, aged, and dependent population they rejoin.) Our data indicate that longer-interval returnees probably add more to that stock than do short-interval returnees.

In regard to migration's personal effectiveness, the data carry a clear message. The short-interval returnee is a person whose initial move, perhaps pressured by unemployment, was less carefully thought out than the initial moves of other migrants. These findings mark off a specific target population—unemployed persons—and a potential role for policy vis-à-vis a specific migration sequence: the self-canceling pair of moves made in quick succession. Assuming such persons must eventually seek employment elsewhere, that role could be to strengthen the economic effectiveness of the initial move, thereby reducing the need for quick return—for example, by helping migrants with their personal planning and by supplying information to broaden their choice of alternative destinations. Such measures might result in more informed choices and fewer disappointments, improving the unemployed migrants' chances of attaining the objectives that prompt them to move in the first place. SSQ

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