

“KNOCKING ON THE BIG CITY’S DOOR”:  
SOCIOLOGY AND SOUTHERN MIGRANTS TO CHICAGO  
IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the sociological response to Southern migrants in Chicago during the period of explosive outmigration from the 1920s through the 1950s. Sociologists navigated a complex framework of race, class, and region to study and aid these migrants. The University of Chicago's influence as a hub for sociological research made the Second City a highly visible and important migrant destination which raised intriguing questions about the crossing of invisible borders within America during this time of rapid social and political change.

The thesis provides an overview of the Southern migrant/ immigrant comparison, analysis of the relevant sociological studies, and a particular focus on Lewis M. Killian, a unique Chicago sociologist who challenged the prevailing migrant discourse. Using sources such as sociological publications, academic organizations, government-funded studies, migrant memoirs and popular culture, and papers from "migrant centers," this work presents a comprehensive analysis of the intersections of sociology and Southerners living under the national microscope.

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## INTRODUCTION

“Knocking on the Big City’s Door: Sociology and Southern Migrants to Chicago in the Early Twentieth Century” examines the sociological response to Southern migrants, both black and white, in Chicago during the period of explosive northbound migration from the 1920s through the 1960s. Sociologists and social workers throughout the city navigated a complex framework of race, class, and region to study and aid these migrants. These authorities both aligned with and distanced the experiences of Southern migrants from those of previous immigrants from overseas, raising intriguing questions about the crossing of invisible borders within America during this time of rapid social and political change.<sup>1</sup> While Chicago’s industrial opportunities and fairly close distance to the Upper South made it an important migrant destination, its distinctive history of labor and racial unrest, as well as the University of Chicago’s influence as a hub for sociological research, made the Second City a highly visible and fruitful ground for sociologists. “Knocking on the Big City’s Door” examines the origins and goals of sociological work with and about Southern migrants in light of the city’s history and the political and social concerns of the early twentieth century.

A number of research questions guided my investigations, predominately dealing with the importance of place and the layers of meaning embedded in the process of engaging in the sociological study of Southern migrants. Broadly, how did sociologists look at Southern migrants in the first half of the twentieth century, and how were their views affected by time and place? What were the impacts of their findings and methods

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<sup>1</sup> The title of this thesis is taken from a poem by Chicago migrant Robert Thoreson, quoted in “Messages from Migrant Centers,” *Appalachian Heritage* 3:4 (Fall 1975): 50.

of dissemination? How did Chicago's history with race relations, unions, immigration, and crime affect its acceptance of Southerners who moved there to work, either permanently or temporarily? How did national events such as the Civil Rights Movement and public concerns over issues like juvenile delinquency and morality affect Southerners' reception in the Midwest? Did widespread stereotypes of Southerners and Appalachians particularly leave their mark on migrant sociology? Did the work being done in Chicago merely echo larger national trends, or was Chicago a bellwether in twentieth-century sociology?

My argument is that Chicago's unique history, the status of the University of Chicago as a major center for sociology, and the importance of the city as a destination for both African-American and Appalachian migrants all combined to produce the dominant narrative of Southern migration in the twentieth century. The way Chicago sociologists did or did not investigate the phenomenon of migration guided the rest of the nation. Powerful images of Southern migrants, reinforced in Chicago, reflected Midwestern fears of sociopolitical upheaval tied to notions of the South as "other." These views of migrants affected the ways in which they were studied and the methods of aiding them, economically and socially, in the city.

Historians and others studying Southern migration as a historical event have looked at migrants to Chicago in a number of different ways. Works on this topic range from micro-histories to sweeping epics and utilize lenses such as politics, race, popular culture, and labor to examine how migrants changed and were changed by the city. While the historiography of this topic is certainly diverse, historians tend either to discuss

Chicago in the broad landscape of migrant destination cities or focus on a specific element of the Chicago experience. Racial divisions also predominate in the literature: authors generally discuss black migrants or white migrants, but rarely consider the impact of Southerners as a regional group. This thesis draws on these works but provides a unique contribution: in focusing on sociology in Chicago, this work serves to bridge the gap between these overly broad and or extremely localized historiographical trends. It also puts the history of academic sociology in conversation with the broader social and historical narratives, in a way that is otherwise lacking in the field of migrant and Southern studies.

Historians and writers have long considered the story of Chicago's migrants through the lens of urban studies, and particularly the making of Chicago's black ghettos. These authors focus on a particular and racially-specific facet of Southern migration to examine how coming to Chicago impacted black migrants economically and socially and created black communities in the city. Allan H. Spear's *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto 1890-1920* from 1967 is one of the earliest examples of this approach, focusing on the experiences of the first wave of migrants to leave the South. James R. Grossman's 1989 work *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* takes the traditional perspective of WWI as the beginning of significant black out-migration while Arnold R. Hirsch's *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940-1960* (first published in 1983 and reissued by the University of Chicago Press in 1991) examines this process in the context of the later Second Great Migration. These authors foreground the Chicago experience as an essential component of the



urbanization of black America throughout the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> A number of works that do not focus specifically on migrants nevertheless use their experiences and neighborhoods in Chicago to help illustrate larger truths about race, housing, and the growth of the modern city: Margaret Garb's *City of American Dreams: A History of Home Ownership and Housing Reform in Chicago, 1871-1919* and Robin F. Bachin's *Building the South Side: Urban Space and Civic Culture in Chicago 1890-1919* both explore Chicago's meteoric turn-of-the-century rise to prominence and its effects on city planning, fair housing, and access to resources for its rapidly-expanding population.<sup>3</sup>

These and other works focus on migrants' efforts to build a "Black Metropolis" and the *de facto* Northern oppression and social problems that contributed to urban ghettos. Several authors approach this theme on a personal level, using oral histories, interviews, and other ground-level means of investigating history. Nicholas Lemann extends his study a decade further than Hirsch in 1991's *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* by discussing the processes and consequences of ghetto formation through 1970. Lisa Boehm's *Making a Way Out of No Way: African-American Women and the Second Great Migration* (2009) traces the lives and migration experiences of forty black migrants to study the motivations and ultimate destinies of female migrants. Housing issues and the process of ghetto creation is also

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<sup>2</sup> Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940-1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Margaret Garb, *City of American Dreams: A History of Home Ownership and Housing Reform in Chicago, 1871-1919* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Robin F. Bachin, *Building the South Side: Urban Space and Civic Culture in Chicago 1890-1919* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

central to Isabel Wilkerson's *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migrations* (2010). The two works by Lemann and Wilkerson, both journalists, are not specific to Chicago, but do include the city as a major and influential migrant destination. Both works discuss individuals who left the Deep South for Chicago, only to wind up in South Side ghettos. Although taking a similar approach, these authors reach opposing conclusions regarding the success of black migrants in northern cities. For Lemann, the migration was a disappointment that further entrenched Northern racism and black poverty in a new location. Wilkerson, on the other hand, sees the migration as a successful escape from the pervasive and institutionalized racism in the South to a land that offered at least the possibility of social and economic mobility. James N. Gregory's *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (2005) takes a similar tack as Wilkerson in arguing that Southern migrants of both races were by and large successful in their new homes, and exerted a considerable amount of cultural and political influence as their presence helped to "southernize" the American working-class.<sup>4</sup>

Another way in which historians have viewed Chicago's southern migrants is through labor. Examining migrants at work provides a valuable opportunity to consider the interactions of black and white migrants outside the Jim Crow South, as well as their encounters with immigrants and Chicago "locals." Race and unionism are the key

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<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991); Lisa Boehm, *Making a Way Out of No Way: African American Women and the Second Great Migration* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009); Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migrations* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010); James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

considerations in this area, as historians discuss the centrality of color and regional origin to workplace relations and the struggle to gain rights for workers. William M. Tuttle, Jr.'s *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* gives a compelling look into racial and workplace relations immediately following WWI, when fears of blacks as Communist sympathizers and industrial strikebreakers led to suspicion, hostility, and eventually open violence. Lizabeth Cohen's *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (first edition 1990) and Rick Halpern's *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago's Packinghouses, 1904-54* (1997) discuss how race and ethnicity divided industrial workers and their interests in Chicago and what this meant for unionization. Both authors conclude that the development of a biracial, multiethnic working-class consciousness was central for uniting workers to stand up to their employers.<sup>5</sup>

Studies of white Chicago migrants are usually found in works that consider white migration more broadly in several cities, but works discussing the formation of white ghettos exist in Todd Gitlin and Nancy Hollander's *Uptown: Poor Whites in Chicago* (1970) and Roger Guy's *From Diversity to Unity: Southern and Appalachian Migrants in Uptown Chicago, 1950-1970* (2007). Works discussing white migrants generally focus more on cultural and social changes that were linked to this movement in a nationwide context, from cities across the North and west to California. Chad Berry's *Southern Migrants, Northern Exiles* (2000) examines how migration affected the culture and social

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<sup>5</sup> William M. Tuttle, Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1970); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago's Packinghouses, 1904-54* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

dynamics of white migrants from the South to Northern cities, as well as the culture of the places they settled. White and black Southerners brought their cultural preferences, social mores, and religious beliefs to their new homes, but white migrants were able to penetrate mainstream markets and different neighborhoods in a way that black migrants could not.<sup>6</sup>

Many works in popular culture and music studies focus on the cultural impact of Southern migrants in the North, especially those that focus on country music's rise and influence. Bill Malone particularly has explored this subject from many angles in several works, from *Country Music, U.S.A.* (third edition published in 2002) to *Southern Music, American Music* (second edition 2003) to *Don't Get Above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class* (2002). The Chicago-specific essays collected in *The Hayloft Gang: the Story of the National Barn Dance* (2008, edited by Chad Berry), as well as Kristine M. McCusker's *Lonesome Cowgirls and Honky Tonk Angels: the Women of Barn Dance Radio* more generally (2008) examine the rise of commercial country music and the spread of this traditionally Southern genre across the nation, concluding that Southerners' cultural power was a force to be reckoned with even in areas where they themselves were stereotyped or marginalized.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Todd Gitlin and Nancy Hollander, *Uptown: Poor Whites in Chicago* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); Roger Guy, *From Diversity to Unity: Southern and Appalachian Migrants in Uptown Chicago, 1950-1970* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007); Chad Berry, *Southern Migrants, Northern Exiles* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Bill Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A., 3<sup>rd</sup> edition* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2002); Bill Malone, *Southern Music, American Music* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2003); Bill Malone, *Don't Get Above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Chad Berry, ed., *The Hayloft Gang: The Story of the National Barn Dance* (Chicago: University

These and other works that focus either on migrants generally or their experiences in Chicago lend important insight into the dramatic social and economic changes that went along with the mass out-migration of Southern people. But none have yet examined the role that Chicago played in shaping migrant stereotypes and receptions nationwide through those engaged in professional and academic sociology. Although several historians such as James N. Gregory and Roger Guy admit that sociologists played a large role in shaping the view of Southern migrants as foreign outsiders, they have not discussed why this was and why Chicago's sociology was so pervasive and powerful. The University of Chicago's sociology department and social programs like the Urban League of Chicago were deeply involved with studying and aiding migrants of both races, and their hypotheses and findings were greatly influential in the academic community and beyond. Their studies often found their way into popular discourse through the press and were later reinforced by cultural media such as radio, film, books, and television.

The power of sociology, and that of Chicago's sociology in particular, is what this work focuses on to explore how this city characterized its migrants and influenced the evaluation of migrants across the nation. Like the previously discussed works that focused on labor, this will be an opportunity to consider both black and white migrants, along with their interactions. To consider this in light of sociology is to gain deeper insight into the meaning and making of Southern identity outside the South, as well as the making of Southern migrants into Southern immigrants.

Using sources such as scholarly sociological publications, proceedings of academic and professional organizations, government-funded studies, dissertations and theses, migrant memoirs, newspapers, and information from “migrant centers” and neighborhood aid agencies, this thesis presents a holistic look into the interactions of sociologists and transplanted Southerners living under the national microscope during this tumultuous period in American history. Through these sources, I analyze the importance of Chicago to the experiences of Southern migrants across the Midwest, and discuss how the city’s history with immigrants, race relations, and the labor movement influenced how city residents and university sociologists received and evaluated their Southern neighbors. This work draws upon sources that span the decades from the 1920s through the late 1960s to coincide with the peak of migration years and proliferation of sociological studies, as well as the coinciding of important events in Chicago labor and race history that set the stage for trouble with Southern migrants.

Sociological journals such as the *American Journal of Sociology* (1895 - ), *Journal of Social Forces/Social Forces* (1922 - ), the *American Sociological Review* (1936 - ), and others began to discuss the Southern migration phenomenon as early as the first decade of the 20th century. Journals contained academic (and quasi-academic) articles alongside government-funded studies regarding the status and problems of migrants. Similarly, published proceedings of organizations and thematic collections of their papers, such as those from the American Sociological Society/American Sociological Association shed light on the major topics of concern for sociologists of the

time, as well as the problems they perceived and solutions they proposed for dealing with Southern migrants.

Dissertations are also an important source for this work, as many sociology students studied and wrote about migrant conditions in their area before embarking on professional careers. Chicago neighborhoods were examined in Lewis M. Killian's "Southern White Laborers in Chicago's West Side" (University of Chicago, 1949) and Edwin S. Harwood's "Work and Community Among Urban Newcomers: a Study of the Social and Economic Adaptation of Southern Migrants in Chicago" (University of Chicago, 1966), among others. Comparable studies in other cities include Eldon D. Smith's "Migration and Adjustment Experiences of Rural Migrant Workers in Indianapolis" (University of Wisconsin, 1953), Harry P. Sharp's "Migration and Social Participation in the Detroit Area" (University of Michigan, 1954), and others well into the 1980s.

Along with his dissertation, I utilize the published works of Lewis M. Killian to discuss his role as an essential chronicler of the migrant experience and a dissenting voice among sociologists who only associated migrants with maladjustment and urban blight. His early articles, pioneering work *White Southerners* (1970), and autobiography *Black and White: Reflections of a White Southern Sociologist* (1994) document a lifetime of investigation and Killian's unique role as a Southern migrant himself studying migrants. This sociologist used his ideas about race relations and actions versus attitudes (or behaviors versus internal opinions) to inform migrant study and understanding, and consciously embraced an insider viewpoint to get beyond Southern stereotypes and

assumptions made by Midwesterners. There is currently no comprehensive secondary work on Killian's career and his contributions are frequently neglected by both historical and sociological sources. Killian and his body of work are thus the subjects of chapter three, "Southern in the City."<sup>8</sup>

Confusion and hostility towards Southern migrants were not confined to the academic realm, however. Newspaper articles from the *Chicago Defender* (1905 - ) and the *Tribune* (1847 - ) discussed sociological topics (housing, health, crime, etc.) as they related to the concerns of their reading public, and are here utilized where appropriate to examine how the press saw and publicized migrants. Additionally, interviews with migrants and news from migrant centers and aid agencies add another layer of analysis into how migrants themselves understood their complicated position within the city. Information from neighborhood aid agencies in Uptown, the Wabash Avenue YMCA, and the Jobs or Income Now (JOIN) community (started by the Students for a Democratic Society and documented in Gitlin and Hollander's *Uptown*) provides insight into how sociological theorizing was put into action on the ground by those who sought to aid and organize migrants at the local level.

Chapter one, "Our Kind of People," introduces the topic of Southern migration and its place in the early twentieth-century press and national imagination. Although it has been the topic of several important works in recent years, this dramatic population shift is often misunderstood and overly simplified in both scholarly and popular works. This chapter explores the hidden diversity of Southern migrants and its impact on

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<sup>8</sup> Lewis M. Killian, *White Southerners* (New York: Random House, 1970); *Black and White: Reflections of a White Southern Sociologist* (Lanham, MD: General Hall, 1994).



perceptions of Southerners by those who subscribed to a monolithic and stereotypical understanding. Through articles from newspapers and academic journals, as well as monographs, this chapter emphasizes how sociologists placed themselves to view migrants and the impact on their conclusions. Examples from other important destination cities lend background for a nationwide scope as well as useful points for comparison. Chapter one thus establishes a framework for comparing how the unique history of Chicago and the presence of a major sociological research center influenced both academic and non-academic reception of migrants. How did Chicago discuss its migrants? Did this change over time? What problems and/or benefits were associated with migrants? How did this compare to what was happening in other cities that experienced heavy Southern migration? I conclude that Chicago's preoccupation with race relations and unionization, precipitated by several notorious riots and strikes in the early twentieth century, led these issues to factor highly in migrant evaluations and rhetoric. Similarly, concerns about housing and slum creation found voice in public criticism and structured investigation of migrant housing and neighborhoods.

Chapter two describes the birth of sociology in America in the 1890s and the development of the University of Chicago as the national center for this burgeoning discipline. To fully understand how people studied migrants and to what ends, we have to understand the goals, tenets, and trends of the discipline at that time that led them to undertake such investigations in the first place and the methods they used to conduct their research. As sociologist Alice Goffman noted: "To evaluate any work of social science, it

helps to learn how the researcher found out what he or she claims to know.”<sup>9</sup> Chicago’s influential professors and dominant department created an extremely imposing subculture within sociology, one in which they controlled or heavily contributed to every aspect of the field, from journals to organizations and beyond. Although this empire eventually crumbled or was systematically overthrown, the power of Chicago’s sociological dynasty is an extremely important key to understanding studies conducted with the city’s migrant populations.

Chapter three, “Southern in the City,” focuses on the work and life of sociologist Lewis M. Killian, the only Southern sociologist to study Southern migrants and a major contributor to Chicago sociology and the study of urban race relations in the latter part of the 20th century. Despite his importance, Killian’s name is often neglected in the historiography (along with consideration of sociology as a whole). Killian’s perspective as a Southern migrant studying other Southern migrants provides a foil to other sociologists of the time who necessarily had outsider perspectives that often ran to the stereotypical and superficial. How did Killian understand Southern migrants, and his own status as one (which was often unrecognized because of his education)? How did he differ from others in what he focused on with regards to migrant problems and issues? How did his position allow him to develop a more incisive view of migrants, and how does this compare with recent work by historians such as James Gregory and J. Trent Alexander? My argument demonstrates that Killian’s self-aware insider perspective combined with the participant observer fieldwork style pioneered by the University of

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<sup>9</sup> Alice Goffman, *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 211.

Chicago produced an opposing narrative for the Southern migrant experience, one that he used to advocate for greater acceptance and understanding of Chicago's newcomers.

From its founding, Chicago was a complex and volatile place with a nationwide reputation for conflict and vice. The opening of the University of Chicago in 1892 and the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition heralded a new era of education and sophistication for this wild industrial town, whose explosive population growth and rise to prominence both worried and excited the nation. Southern migrants are just a part of the multifaceted story of the building of Chicago, but a part that has been hidden and disregarded. Viewing them through the eyes of sociologists, particularly those at the university who became the most prominent intellectuals in their field, is one way of reintroducing this thread to the narrative of one of the most important and far-reaching population shifts in American history.

## CHAPTER I

### “OUR KIND OF PEOPLE”

“It’s a dangerous situation, one that we have to wake up to and face. [These people] have turned the streets of Chicago into a lawless free-for-all with their primitive jungle tactics” [said Walter Devereux, chief investigator for the Chicago Crime commission].

Authorities are reluctant to point a finger at any one segment of the population or nationality group, but they agree that [these people], who have descended on Chicago like a plague of locusts in the last few years, have the lowest standard of living and moral code (if any) of all, the biggest capacity for liquor, and the most savage and vicious tactics when drunk, which is most of the time.”<sup>1</sup>

The *Chicago Tribune*’s Norma Lee Browning, writing this and similar articles in the 1950s, offered an alarming portrait of the city’s latest arrivals and their sinister foreign ways. In some aspects, these descriptions echoed the xenophobic rhetoric of a half century earlier, in which nativists criticized and discriminated against the “new immigrants” from southern and eastern Europe and declared them incompatible with modern American (read: white middle-class Protestant) life. But who were these newcomers that Browning described, who were so out of step with society? Surprisingly enough, they were white Americans from the South.

During the twentieth century, millions of Southerners of all races left their homes to seek employment and opportunity in the industrial cities and towns of the Midwest and the agricultural fields and cities of the West Coast. Exact totals depend on how one defines “the South” or the time period of interest, but this migration inarguably relocated a significant portion of Americans to outside regions and spread Southerners across the nation on an unprecedented

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<sup>1</sup> Norma Lee Browning, “Girl Reporter Visits Jungles of Hillbillies,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 3, 1957.

scale.<sup>2</sup> Leading migration scholar James N. Gregory estimates the number of Southern migrants during the twentieth century at eight million African Americans, twenty million whites, and roughly one million Hispanic Americans.<sup>3</sup>

These migrants had diverse reasons for leaving the South. Some were fleeing collapsing agricultural and mining systems that could no longer support them; others were pursuing higher education that was unavailable to them at home for reasons of race or economics. Many were taking advantage of the Midwest's call for unskilled laborers for industrial expansion during both World Wars, as well as in the burgeoning centralized auto manufacturing industry. Millions were seeking to escape the rigid institutionalized racism that defined their lives in the Jim Crow South, and/or a class system that denied social and economic opportunities to millions. The diversity of race, class, and purpose among migrants, as well as the dates of their departure, has fragmented the story of Southern migration along these lines and hidden the experiences of many groups and the regionalism that ties them together. The Great Migration of rural African Americans in the years following World War I has emerged as the dominant historiographical narrative, but it is by no means the only one that could be told.<sup>4</sup> The later migration of African Americans from Southern cities, the concurrent migrations of both educated white Southerners and unskilled

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<sup>2</sup> Defining the South is a notoriously impossible task, so most scholars default to the U.S. Census definition while acknowledging that this imposes rigid political boundaries on a region that is largely cultural. This definition includes the eleven former states of the Confederacy, plus Oklahoma, Kentucky, West Virginia, Delaware, and Maryland. Defining the North can also be difficult. This paper uses the standard terminology of Southern migration studies, which generally treats "North" and "Midwest" as interchangeable. Scholars use either term to designate the five states of the Old Northwest that experienced the heaviest Southern influx: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin. See Chad Berry, *Southern Migrants, Northern Exiles* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 10.

<sup>3</sup> James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 14.

<sup>4</sup> James N. Gregory, "Southernizing the American Working Class: Post-War Episodes of Regional and Class Transformation," *Labor History* 39 (1998), 135.

white laborers, the exodus of Southerners of all races to the West, and the diverse receptions encountered by these groups are also stories that deserve to be included in a more comprehensive consideration of Southern migration.

### Southerners as Immigrants

Despite differences in race, socioeconomic status, and motivation, many migrants to the North and Midwest experienced a similar and unanticipated reaction in their destination cities. Rather than being seen as regional neighbors or even a welcome alternative to the wave of eastern, central, and southern European immigrants that had lately dominated the urban industrial working class, southern migrants were overwhelmingly perceived as foreign, problematic, and distinct from modern mainstream Americans by virtue of their culture or experiences. To the “locals” and later many migrants themselves, Southerners became the latest immigrant group on the scene, and a troubled one at that.<sup>5</sup> The fears and prejudices levied at white Southern migrants paralleled long-held anxieties about black Americans and young men in ways that exaggerated the numbers and influence of all of these groups. Sociologists and those engaged in social work were enormously influential in shaping this view, and for codifying the behaviors and opinions that represented modern American (non-Southern) culture, as well as those that opposed it.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the Southern migrant as immigrant trope and a review of the relevant sociological studies and attitudes with a particular focus on Chicago’s position and influence as a hub for both sociologists and migrants. The sociological literature discussing Chicago and other migrant destination cities in Michigan and Ohio raises interesting

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<sup>5</sup> The status of Southerners as *de facto* immigrants is well-documented in migration historiography, and some scholars have even taken this idea a step further to produce comparative histories. See Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*; Roger Guy, *From Diversity to Unity: Southern and Appalachian Migrants in Uptown Chicago, 1950 – 1970* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007); and *The American South and the Italian Mezzogiorno: Essays in Comparative History*, ed. by Enrico dal Lago and Rick Halpern (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

questions about the realities of social studies as products of their time and place, and their responsiveness to events of the larger sociopolitical milieu. The North's reaction to migrants was both a function of encountering an alien "otherized" South in the tumultuous twentieth century and of being confronted with its own conservatism, and this tension is clearly illustrated in the work of those who sought to study, explain, understand, and aid Southern migrants.

The tension between race and region is an important one for migrant studies, both now and then. The general lack of recognition of black migrants' Southern identity in sociological literature and the media demonstrates how race was privileged over regional origins in this case. The weight given to race in America overruled all other socioeconomic or regional factors, and the case of Southern migrants was no exception. No matter where they came from, race was assumed to be the primary identification and frame of reference for African Americans, while whiteness (ever the default in American consciousness) could accommodate regionalism. Gregory also makes this point with regards to Native American and Tejano migrants, who remained invisible within the Southern migration stream because they were not recognized as Southerners.<sup>6</sup> This tendency was reflected across the country by the immigration reforms of the 1920s, which instituted a national quota system to limit the numbers of undesirable immigrants. Under this system, only white Americans and Europeans were identified by national origin. Other groups, such as black Africans, Chinese, and Indians, were identified only by race.<sup>7</sup> The problematic whiteness of poor white Southerners is also well-documented in studies that

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<sup>6</sup> Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*, 45.

<sup>7</sup> Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 27.

examine turn-of-the-century and Progressive Era views of working-class, uneducated whites as racial degenerates, failing to uphold the responsibilities and attitudes that whiteness required.<sup>8</sup>

White migrants passed largely unnoticed until the 1930s, in contrast to the considerable attention that newspapers and city officials had been paying to black migration trends since before World War I. As historian Jack Temple Kirby wrote in 1983:

The [contemporary] published literature on [white migrant] odysseys is very limited. This may be because white migrants are less visible, often disappearing into white host societies in less than a generation. (By contrast, southern black migrants, segregated and most noticeable, provoked alarm, curiosity, and research in northern universities.)<sup>9</sup>

Even by 1923, residents of Chicago may have been somewhat surprised to hear that “hillbillies still exist,” even if this term was focused not on migrants, but on prejudiced whites in the South who were contributing to the black exodus.<sup>10</sup> By the 1930s, however, transnational immigration had greatly decreased as a result of the Immigration Act of 1924, the Great Depression focused fears on transients, and the hillbilly trope was firmly entrenched in popular media.<sup>11</sup> These factors contributed to the sudden and heightened visibility of white southern migrants, and the ease of their fit into the feared immigrant role. As the twentieth century wore on and the War on Poverty put the South, particularly Appalachia, under the microscope yet again, fears resurfaced about these people’s problems and distinctiveness.

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<sup>8</sup> See Shelley Sallee, *The Whiteness of Child Labor Reform in the New South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999); and Larry J. Griffin, “Whiteness and Southern Identity in the Mountain and Lowland South,” *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 10:1 (2004): 7-37.

<sup>9</sup> Jack Temple Kirby, “The Southern Exodus, 1910-1960: A Primer for Historians,” *Journal of Southern History* 49:4 (November 1983): 585-600.

<sup>10</sup> “Exodus Continues from South by the Thousand,” *The Chicago Defender*, June 2, 1923: 13.

<sup>11</sup> Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*, 61.



The nation had long regarded the South as a place apart, a particular stronghold of conservative values and peculiar customs that both horrified and fascinated outsiders. A 1933 *Chicago Defender* article describes the region as a place of “inhuman and cruel conduct” where violence and backwardness will reign “until real civilization hits the crossroads of the South.”<sup>12</sup> In 1938, President Franklin D. Roosevelt famously characterized the entire region as “the Nation’s No. 1 economic problem— the Nation’s problem, not merely the South’s.”<sup>13</sup> The reaction to this region’s dispersal of its white sons and daughters (and therefore presumably, their problems) underscored its position as a quasi-foreign country that was thought to operate on undemocratic and un-American principles. Characterizations of white Southern migrants drew on a narrow definition of Southern people and a long tradition of stereotypes that focused on poverty, social backwardness, violence, conservatism, and racism, and these assumptions were applied indiscriminately to the group as a whole and fed fears of their numbers and influence. Southerners themselves had helped to spread these ideas, as expatriate intellectuals criticized the South from a distance and the Southern Gothic genre, made famous by William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Flannery O’Connor, and others, gained popularity. These groups’ negative portrayals of working-class white Southerners in the South, while undeniably based in reality, dominated an intellectual landscape that was almost completely bereft of narratives by the people themselves.<sup>14</sup>

These stereotypes and the historical milieu in which they were applied served to tie white migrants to the tradition of American immigration, and to the tradition of discrimination that this

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<sup>12</sup> “Strange Black Man Turns Out to be Well Known White Man,” *The Chicago Defender*, May 20, 1933: 11.

<sup>13</sup> National Emergency Council, *Report on Economic Conditions of the South* (Washington, D.C., 1938), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*, 195. Harriette Arnow’s 1954 novel *The Dollmaker* (New York: Macmillan, 1954) is the only work about Southern migrants written by a Southerner, migrant or otherwise.

entailed. That these people were, in fact, American did not deter authoritative cultural entities such as sociologists and the print media from declaring and analyzing the foreignness of the recent arrivals, and predicting the problems that would arise from their incompatible habits and beliefs. White migrants were often subject to the same kinds of prejudices traditionally levied upon foreign immigrants, including discrimination in housing and employment, accusations of welfare exploitation and lawlessness, and even deportation back to the South (as transients under Great Depression settlement laws).<sup>15</sup> To be sure, these types of issues had long been faced by black Americans throughout history: vagrancy statutes that deterred or prevented migration succeeded fugitive slave laws that had curbed movement and any hope of independence before Emancipation.<sup>16</sup> But the application of these measures by white authorities to other white Americans underscores the perceived foreignness of white migrants in the North and Midwest and the significance of the South as a troubling and widely-understood symbol in America.

### Sociologists and Migrants

Sociologists played a vital role in shaping both the theory and practice of perceiving migrants as immigrants. Through influential articles, dissertations, and studies, as well as social programs directed specifically at migrants, academic and governmental voices greatly contributed to a national discourse that already saw the South as an alien other and now cast its migrant people as foreigners in a new land. Sociological discussions focused on theories of social pathology and maladjustment that had previously been applied to immigrant and ethnic studies, and these guided their research and characterizations of migrants. Such discussions were ubiquitous, influential, and quickly disseminated to the public, heightening migrant visibility and

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<sup>15</sup> Berry, *Southern Migrants*, 61-63.

<sup>16</sup> Alice Goffman, *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 202.

exaggerating Southern difference. As Gregory notes, “The noticing and the talking [about migrants] as much as the act of relocation created the Southern Diaspora.”<sup>17</sup>

Sociological studies and discourse also further divided the characterizations of black and white Southern migrants by treating these groups entirely separately, and by emphasizing the race of African Americans and the regional origins and beliefs of white migrants. No study combined the experiences of black and white migrants to get a larger view of Southern migrants as a whole, and studies that claimed to focus on “Southern migrants” usually discussed only whites, again reflecting the assumed correlation of Southern identity and the white race. While many surveys documented the experiences of specific groups of white migrants (increasingly Appalachians) in migrating to specific cities in the North and Midwest, studies of black migrants generally glossed this group as a single entity regardless of origin, again reflecting the primacy of race as a reference point over region. There were no studies that differentiated the Northern experiences of black migrants from Atlanta from those leaving the Mississippi Delta, for example. At least one made a broad differentiation of black migration streams, noting that migrants from specific sub-regions tended to end up in the same cities.<sup>18</sup> Most discussed the “Negro migration” generally or African Americans in a particular destination city (a fact that denies both the diversity within this movement and the vast time span covered by the Great Migration). Guy B. Johnson’s 1924 article “The Negro Migration and Its Consequences” succinctly describes what was the salient feature of this movement to white America: “The northward movement of the negro attracts attention, not because it is a migration, but because it is a *negro* migration.” Johnson goes on to compare the feelings of anxiety caused by black

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<sup>17</sup> Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*, 41.

<sup>18</sup> Lyonel C. Florant, “Negro Internal Migration,” *American Sociological Review* 7:6 (December 1942): 782-791.

migration to those caused by previous large-scale immigration.<sup>19</sup> Even a later and more incisive study that sought to define the parameters of migrant adjustment distinguished black migrants only by their destination of Beloit, Wisconsin.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the concern and attention given to studying migrants' actual or potential maladjustment and its consequences, the definition and standards that constituted adjustment were often vague and arbitrary. The earliest studies focused on aspects of social and economic differences between North and South and judged migrant adjustment as essentially migrant invisibility, dependent on adoption of the norms that sociologists deemed most indicative of a modern urban Northern lifestyle (or the norms they deemed most un-Southern). Things like purchasing insurance, joining a union, and owning and maintaining homes were common gauges of white migrant adjustment, as were mingling with locals in housing and marriage. Southerners' potential resistance to unionization was a particularly emphasized topic in the Chicago literature, reflecting that city's troubled history with unions and interracial organization in the workplace.<sup>21</sup> Many studies cited local prejudice as contributing somewhat to migrant maladjustment, but continued to emphasize the cultural incompatibility and ill-preparedness of white migrants for city life as the primary causes of the social problems they faced there.

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<sup>19</sup> Guy B. Johnson, "The Negro Migration and Its Consequences," *Journal of Social Forces* 2:3 (Mar. 1924): 404. Johnson's emphasis.

<sup>20</sup> Thompson Peter Omari, "Factors Associated with Urban Adjustment of Rural Southern Migrants," *Social Forces* 35:1 (Oct. 1956): 47-53. Despite the title, this article focuses on black migrants to Beloit without establishing that they came from rural areas. Perhaps by 1956, any Southern migrant was assumed to come from a rural area, or that their origins were rural in comparison to their new homes. This article is also unique in that it does describe black migrants as Southern. It is worth noting that the full dissertation from which this article originated is titled "Urban Adjustment of Rural Southern Negro Migrants in Beloit, Wisconsin" (University of Wisconsin – Madison, 1955), and that the author was Ghanaian.

<sup>21</sup> For more on the history of unions in Chicago, see William M. Tuttle, *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1970); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago's Packinghouses, 1904-1954* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

Although some migrants experienced difficulties and perhaps a degree of culture shock after leaving the South, there is much evidence to suggest that migrants were not that different from their new neighbors and fit into Northern society just fine. In areas like Harlem and Chicago's Black Belt, black migrants contributed to the development of districts where black-owned businesses and culture could flourish. Migrants were also largely employed: during World War I, African Americans (many of them Southern migrants) made up a quarter of the labor force in Chicago's stockyards.<sup>22</sup> A higher percentage of migrants of all races were employed compared to non-migrants.<sup>23</sup> Many even found the political voice that had denied them for so long in the South: by 1924, Chicago had more black voting power than anywhere else in the nation. Oscar De Priest was elected in 1929 as the first African American in Congress in the North and served until 1935, a milestone no doubt influenced by Chicago's black migrant voters.<sup>24</sup>

According to Gregory and others, migrants were not inherently poor or problematic, and statistically their rates of poverty, unionization, and support of equal rights was comparable to locals. If indeed ill-prepared for city life, they adapted quickly and well enough to become a large and permanent component of the workforce, and failed to disrupt society with their allegedly un-American beliefs. As Gregory boldly states, "a priori assumptions about southern whites and their political and racial views are manifestly wrong."<sup>25</sup> Yet even in the face of statistics and the absence of the predicted cultural crisis, white migrants retained their

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<sup>22</sup> Halpern, *Killing Floor*, 47.

<sup>23</sup> Albert J. Reiss, Jr. and Evelyn Kitagawa, "Demographic Characteristics and Job Mobility of Migrants in Six Cities," *Social Forces* 32:1 (Oct. 1953): 70-75.

<sup>24</sup> Cohen, *New Deal*, 260. While only one-third of Chicago's "ethnics" (first and second generation immigrants from abroad) voted, one-half of the black population exercised this power, many probably for the first time.

<sup>25</sup> Gregory, "Southernizing," 145.

characterization as dangerous foreigners and sociological studies continued to analyze migrants as products of a strange land.

### Contemporary Migrant Studies

Many studies of migrants conducted at peak migration times (or at times of peak xenophobia by host communities) were official government studies that analyzed migrants with the goals of mitigating the social disturbance and ills they were assumed to bring. Grace G. Leybourne's WPA-funded study, published in 1937, draws heavily on a body of Southern stereotypes in documenting the real and potential obstacles that white Southern Appalachian migrants faced in Cincinnati.<sup>26</sup> This study uses statistical information on criteria such as union membership, family size and composition, and dependence on public relief as gauges of migrant adjustment and assimilation. Leybourne engages with the widely-understood language of white stereotypes and slurs, referring to migrants as "hill-billies," "Highlanders," and "Briers" in her analysis of the many ways this group was unsuited for city life. She also describes the Appalachian/local incongruence in explicitly nationalistic terms, contrasting the migrants' descent from "original British stock" to the predominately German-Catholic heritage of Cincinnati.<sup>27</sup> Warning of the cultural and mental adjustments that await those who migrate from areas where education is rare and social contact is limited, Leybourne evidences both a common oversimplification of migrant experiences and a blatant characterization of migrants as immigrants: "The Hill-Billy is looked upon as a "foreigner" with his distinguishable accent, [...]

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<sup>26</sup> Grace G. Leybourne, "Urban Adjustments of Migrants from the Southern Appalachian Plateaus," *Social Forces* 16:2 (Dec. 1937): 238-246.

<sup>27</sup> Leybourne, "Urban Adjustment," 239. The author's focus on the city's own "foreign" elements is interesting and unusual in the sociological literature – in light of this emphasis, we might expect her portrayal of the migrants (with their historical Anglo heritage that was supposedly the bedrock of American identity) and their effects on the city to be more favorable.

as part of a different culture, as an illiterate; and it has to be acknowledged that there is only too much foundation for these attitudes.”<sup>28</sup> She also utilizes methods and measures drawn from ethnic studies such as intelligence tests and rates of “mixing” and eventually begins using the words “migrant,” “emigrant,” and “immigrant” interchangeably.

Erdmann Doane Beynon’s 1938 work (also funded by the WPA), “The Southern White Laborer Migrates to Michigan,” provides a similar analysis of migrants moving north to obtain unskilled positions in the centralized auto industry.<sup>29</sup> This study emphasizes the importance of cultural differences in influencing adjustment, and parallels the Southern migrant experience to that of second wave “central European peasants” in this regard.<sup>30</sup> Beynon also describes the adoption of white Southern labor by Northern industry as a direct substitution for the previous immigrant workforce. His focus on the cultural distinctiveness of Southern white migrants covers familiar stereotypical ground, citing the racism, clannishness, and allegiance to their old home that allegedly impeded their adjustment to Northern urban life. Obviously, concerns about racism or loyalty to the South did not enter into considerations of black migrant adjustment. Beliefs about Southern whites were so ingrained and standardized in Michigan that Beynon was able to cite studies made by the Detroit Department of Public Health in the early 1930s that identified people as poor white migrants based on not only their socioeconomic status, but also by their “dialect” and attitudes towards vaccination.<sup>31</sup> Southern white distinctiveness was also apparently recognized by all parties, as Beynon noted “[Migrants] and their northern neighbors

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>29</sup> Erdmann Doane Beynon, “The Southern White Laborer Migrates to Michigan,” *American Sociological Review* 3:3 (June 1938): 333-343.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 333.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 335-336.

are both conscious of a difference between them and other native born white Americans,” and he credited this with contributing to the development of a vigorous migrant group consciousness.<sup>32</sup>

Both of these authors use statistical information to challenge some aspects of the migrant stereotype while confirming others. Beynon notes that in Flint, common assumptions about migrants keeping “roomers” or self-segregating in “colonies” do not hold, but that the low rates of social mobility and poor housing are what one might expect. His measures of adjustment include housing integration with Flint locals and rates of intermarriage with Northerners.<sup>33</sup> Leybourne seeks to dispel the myth that migrants arrive to pursue welfare, not work. This suspicion that migrants were exploiting public assistance not available to them at home fuels hostility against them by locals, she argues. Despite this plea for understanding, the author continues to subscribe to the body of negative cultural stereotypes surrounding this group. She measures adjustment by factors such as union and club membership.<sup>34</sup> Migrant adjustment was conceived of as a process of assimilation, just as immigrant adjustment had been, and could only be judged complete when “the social problems of the southern white migrant laborers... [are] indistinguishable from those of the northern white laboring class in general.”<sup>35</sup>

Although sociologists often claimed to be challenging migrant stereotypes in their studies, they were also unknowingly contributing to these perceptions through their choice of subjects and methods of analysis. By focusing on localized communities or particularly visible groups that did not reflect the experiences of the majority of migrants, sociologists found

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 335.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 339-343.

<sup>34</sup> Leybourne, “Urban Adjustment,” 246-248.

<sup>35</sup> Beynon, “Southern White,” 343.



evidence that generally supported the prevailing discourse of Southern difference and maladjustment. In other words, they found what they and most others were expecting to find, and thus reinforced these assumptions.

When studying migrants, sociologists overwhelmingly focused on urban migrants in cities such as Chicago, Detroit, Flint, and Cincinnati. This bias was partially the result of location and convenience: the University of Chicago particularly was a pioneer and major research institution in the fields of sociology and social work. These cities of interest had large and visible migrant communities, and in some cases contained white Southern-dominated neighborhoods often referred to as “hillbilly ghettos” or “Little Dixies.” Black Southerners as well were easy to locate, since housing discrimination largely circumscribed the neighborhood choices of all black urbanites and concentrated them in areas like the South Side and the Black Belt. Areas of concentrated Southern white migrant population were often treated as discrete ethnic communities after their “discovery” in the ‘30s, and provided material for dozens of articles and scholarly works over several decades. In addition to the articles already discussed in this paper, there were also Ph.D. dissertations like Lewis M. Killian’s “Southern White Laborers in Chicago’s West Side” (University of Chicago, 1949), Eldon D. Smith’s “Migration and Adjustment Experiences of Rural Migrant Workers in Indianapolis” (University of Wisconsin, 1953), Harry P. Sharp’s “Migration and Social Participation in the Detroit Area” (University of Michigan, 1954), Edwin S. Harwood’s “Work and Community Among Urban Newcomers: a Study of the Social and Economic Adaptation of Southern Migrants in Chicago” (University of Chicago, 1966), and others well into the ‘70s and ‘80s.

Sociologists thus focused on large concentrated groups of migrants in the cities that contained or surrounded their universities. But this strategy rested on many hidden assumptions:

that all migrants went to cities, that these places were permanent and reliable indicators of migrant adjustment, and that the inhabitants were representative of all migrants. This was not the case, as historians today increasingly realize, and sociologists' choices on these matters deeply influenced their findings. Gregory particularly has noted that urban residency was a temporary situation or last resort out of economic necessity for most migrants, who escaped to the suburbs as soon as they could and thus fell off the sociologists' radar. The Southern "colonies" like Uptown Chicago and other Little Dixies were "way stations, not permanent communities," and accordingly research done only there cannot be said to speak for the larger migrant experience.<sup>36</sup>

Another factor generally ignored by sociologists was the process of return migration, in which migrants alternated between the North and South or returned to the South permanently after years away. Many migrants returned home seasonally to work on farms or periodically to visit family and friends, and, indeed, their desire for time away was often cited by Northern employers as a strike against them and evidence of their general shiftlessness. The return migration phenomenon was symbolized by the Dixie Highway, a network of roads that connected the South with the Midwest and loomed large in migrant lore. Returning to the South, or at least wanting to, always made its way as a pop culture theme into the national consciousness, most famously through country singer Bobby Bare's 1963 interpretation of "Detroit City":

'Cause you know I rode the freight train north to Detroit City  
 And after all these years I find I've just been wastin' my time  
 So I just think I'll take my foolish pride  
 And put it on a Southbound freight and ride  
 And go on back to the loved ones, the ones that I left waitin' so far  
 behind

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<sup>36</sup> Gregory, "Southernizing," 137.

I wanna go home, I wanna go home,  
Oh, how I wanna go home.<sup>37</sup>

Return migrants were overwhelmingly white: black migrants who had escaped the Jim Crow South were understandably reluctant to return (a rule that only weakened with the rise of the Sunbelt South in the 1970s).<sup>38</sup> The reality of return migration influenced the available population that sociologists found and studied, as well as the conclusions they drew. Their conception of migrants did not provide for those who never intended to make a home outside the South, or those who did not succeed in the North and were forced to return. Although sociologists of the time did not realize it, failing to account for return migration meant that often they were not sampling a representative population, and that the attitudes and actions of those they did survey might have been influenced by the permanence or impermanence of their new home.

J. Trent Alexander examines the topic of migrant transience, its causes, and its meaning for the formation of group identity in two Midwestern cities.<sup>39</sup> Through this study, Alexander concludes that migrants from the most economically-depressed areas, including areas in Appalachia and the Upper South, were less likely to return home after moving north. There was little economic incentive for returning, since a primary motivation for migration was the lack of opportunity at home and the decline of agricultural and mining operations. Moving back and forth between regions, even just for visits, also required financial resources many of these migrants did not possess. The migrants to Cincinnati were overwhelmingly Appalachian by way

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<sup>37</sup> Bobby Bare (performer), Danny Dill and Mel Tillis (songwriters), "Detroit City," RCA Records, 1963.

<sup>38</sup> For more on black Southerners and migrant descendants returning to the South, see Carol Stack, *Call to Home: African Americans Reclaim the Rural South* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

<sup>39</sup> J. Trent Alexander, "'They're Never Here More Than a Year': Return Migration in the Southern Exodus, 1940-1970," *Journal of Social History* 38:3 (Spring 2005): 653-671.

of the eastern Kentucky coal country, while those to Indianapolis tended to originate in more prosperous western Kentucky and Tennessee. Indianapolis migrants were much more mobile, contributing to a lack of migrant identity, while Southern Cincinnatians who could not go home again developed a vigorous migrant identity that persists to this day. By documenting these specific migrant streams, Alexander posits that permanence (heavily influenced by migrant poverty and the inability to return south) was central to both the development of migrant group identity and Northern acculturation.

This argument is important for the consideration of migrant sociology because it points to the availability bias in much of that work. Permanence was tied to poverty, as argued by Alexander, and migrants who did stay fled to the suburbs as soon as possible, according to Gregory. By focusing on discrete and seemingly long-term migrant communities, be it Uptown Chicago or Cincinnati's Lower Price Hill, sociologists were therefore studying and publicizing only the poorest migrants that could not afford to move up or move on. The "hillbilly ghettos," where they existed and attracted much sociological interest, were not representative of most migrants and inordinately concentrated poor Appalachians in impoverished and highly visible conditions. Millions of migrants never lived in urban areas at all, and the majority became indistinguishable from the Midwest suburban middle-class within a generation.

### Chicago Studies

While few sociologists engaged with migrant studies in Chicago (discussed in chapter two and three), studies completed there are valuable for the information they convey about both migrant groups and those who investigated them. Thomas W. Allison's "Population Movements in Chicago" from 1924 takes a fairly grim view of African-American migrants, although this is

mostly to do with their ability to increase overpopulation and crowding in the city. “The negro problem here is essentially housing,” he writes in his study of neighborhood transformation and decline in three areas: the Lower North Side, the Near West Side, and the Near South Side. Predictably, his critique often takes a racist tinge, as when he describes the “invasion” of black households into better neighborhoods as the Black Belt expanded (as much as it was able to do so) to accommodate new arrivals, or that the poor condition of some black neighborhoods were a “reflection on the intelligence and moral sense of the community.”<sup>40</sup>

But unlike many critics of the time, Allison does not say that the influx of black migrants was to blame for the existence of slum neighborhoods, only that their arrival and increase is perpetuating and spreading these undesirable zones. It seems a small point to make, but puts this author in disagreement with much of the migrant discourse of the time that blamed newcomers for ruining neighborhoods. This accusation was levied at white migrants as well, and as historian Roger Guy notes:

This type of criticism ignores the larger structural forces that were affecting property values in Uptown [a popular area for white migrants], and did not acknowledge that the seeds of neighborhood decline had preceded the arrival of southern whites. Uptown had been known for its night life, taverns, and liquor consumption as early as the 1920s. The deteriorated housing and low rents that attracted southerners to Uptown had existed before their arrival.<sup>41</sup>

Other contemporary studies of African-American migrants often presented a similarly bleak portrait of the lives and status of Southern newcomers, and one that also neglected the historically extenuating circumstances that affected this status. From E. Franklin Frazier’s 1932 work *The Negro Family in Chicago* to Drake and Cayton’s seminal 1945 work *Black Metropolis*:

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<sup>40</sup> Thomas W. Allison, “Population Movements in Chicago,” *Journal of Social Forces* 2:4 (May 1924): 529-533.

<sup>41</sup> Roger Guy, *From Diversity to Unity: Southern and Appalachian Migrants in Uptown Chicago, 1950-1970* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 71.

*A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, studies of the time characterized black migrants as uneducated country bumpkins struggling to adapt in the big city.<sup>42</sup> As with white migrants, it would be decades before revisionist historians would take a closer and more nuanced look into their experiences. Karl E. and Alma F. Taueber utilize 1960 Census data to challenge the assumption that black migrants settled in the worst neighborhoods and were intensely residentially segregated, and twenty years later, Carole Marks finds evidence to directly negate the claim of black migrants as an unskilled rural group.<sup>43</sup>

In a paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Society in 1947 and later published in the *American Sociological Review*, Ronald Freedman of the University of Michigan (later University of Chicago) discusses the results of a study similar to Allison's that he conducted in the city's eastern districts. Using data from the 1940 Census, Freedman analyzes the presence of "Migrant Zones" within these districts and compares the characteristics of migrants and non-migrants who lived within their borders. Freedman takes on the critics of neighborhoods where migrants clustered who insisted that these areas were Southern-dominated slums of particular decrepitude. He writes that these notorious neighborhoods were, in reality, filled with typical urban housing and a variety of people and social classes. Census findings indicated that migrant zones were not concentrated clannish areas that hearkened back to the ethnic neighborhoods of previous years; instead, they were merely convenient and affordable areas of which diverse groups took advantage. According to Freedman, "the selective factor

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<sup>42</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932); St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1945).

<sup>43</sup> Karl E. and Alma F. Taeuber, *Negroes in Cities: Residential Segregation and Neighborhood Change* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1965); Carole Marks, *Farewell – We're Good and Gone: The Great Black Migration* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). See also Stewart E. Tolnay, Kyle D. Crowder, and Robert M. Adelman, "'Narrow and Filthy Alleys of the City'?: The Residential Settlement Patterns of Black Southern Migrants to the North," *Social Forces* 78:3 (March 2000): 989-1015.

involved in this concentration is mobility,” not migrant status.<sup>44</sup> Migrants flocked to these areas without necessarily dominating them because they offered cheap rents and proximity to transportation lines; the same factors that appealed to the many non-migrants who lived there.

Two years later, Freedman expanded his research into the book *Recent Migration to Chicago*. This work also emphasizes the similarity of migrants to the working-class Chicagoans they settled alongside in migrant zones. He also notes that students of migration, including sociologists, tended to focus only on problem migrants: “unskilled, poorly-educated persons of low economic and social status who came to the city as part of the urban labor reserve.”<sup>45</sup> More or less, this was a description that fit many rural Southern men of either race who arrived as part of the Depression and WWII defense migration streams. Freedman also makes an incisive observation that was often lacking in migrant studies: differences existed among migrants themselves. Rather than glossing the entire group as a single entity with one background and set of traits, Freedman notes that migrants’ “characteristics tended to vary in relation to the cultural level of their place of origin.”<sup>46</sup> By “cultural level,” the author refers to one of three categories of origins he identifies among migrants: rural-farm, rural nonfarm, and urban. For Freedman, migrant identity in Chicago is not a monolithic construction based on the illusion of a uniformly rural and impoverished South. The hidden diversity of Southern places and people is a pertinent factor in their new locations, perhaps even more so than their regional label.

A paper from the 1952 meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society, later published in *Social Forces*, further complicated the simplistic understanding of migration that existed in the

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<sup>44</sup> Ronald Freedman, “Distribution of Migrant Population in Chicago,” *American Sociological Review* 13:3 (June 1948): 304-309.

<sup>45</sup> Ronald Freedman, *Recent Migration to Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), 11.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

public consciousness at the time. “Demographic Characteristics and Job Mobility of Migrants in Six Cities,” a combined effort between Albert J. Reiss, Jr., of Vanderbilt University and Evelyn M. Kitagawa of the University of Chicago, uses occupational mobility survey data to compare migrants with natives in Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco, St. Paul, and New Haven. Race is never mentioned in this article, but this conspicuous omission and the publication date of 1953 point to a discussion of white migrants alone. While acknowledging differences between these six cities with regards to economic base and types of industry, the authors nonetheless are able to make several statements that call into question the prevailing migrant discourse.

First, they counter the notion that migrants are predominately young men living outside of family groups. Visions of uneducated youths running wild in the city, unencumbered by family responsibilities or supervision, were powerful images to a nation in the grips of the post-war juvenile delinquency panic. Reiss and Kitagawa maintain that while migrant men were generally younger than the native male population, they were employed at comparable if not higher rates: 83.7% of migrants to 79.3% of “natives” in Chicago. The authors also support the assumption that migrants were generally less skilled as workers than native men, and came to cities to obtain employment rather than go into business for themselves. Another intriguing finding is that men generally did not arrive alone. This study was one of a small number to consider women alongside men.<sup>47</sup> Male migrants were accompanied (or perhaps even led) by wives, sisters, daughters, and mothers to their new homes, and migrant women were employed at higher rates than native ones (42.3% to 34.6% in Chicago).<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> The experiences of migrant women and acknowledgements of their influence have only recently surfaced in works such as Lisa Boehm, *Making a Way Out of No Way: African American Women and the Second Great Migration* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009) and Roger Guy, “Of Voices Few and Far Between: White Appalachian Women Migrants in Postwar Chicago, 1950-1970,” *Oral History Review* 37:1 (2010): 54-70.

<sup>48</sup> Reiss and Kitagawa, “Demographic,” 72.



The study's second focus was mobility. A commonly-cited complaint about migrants from both employers and citizens was that they were unreliable workers who changed jobs frequently. By calculating a "crude mobility rate" based on the number of different jobs held by both migrants and natives during the period 1940-1949, Reiss and Kitagawa test this theory. Predictably, they find that mobility was higher among migrants than natives, as well as being higher for young people as compared with old. But contrary to popular belief, they do not allege that Southerners' inherent shiftlessness and irresponsibility was the cause. Rather, they seek a more sophisticated understanding of the migrant situation through examining the economic and political forces that influenced job mobility. Simply by migrating, a person had already completed one job change, nearly half the crude mobility rate in a city rated with low mobility. Chicago had the second lowest rate besides Philadelphia during the 1940s, with an average of 2.5 jobs in nine years for men. The time period was also a factor: if migrants arrived in a city to work in wartime industries, they necessarily had to change jobs as these industries disappeared or re-tooled after 1945. This article concludes that migrants are not nearly as mobile as they are perceived to be, and their mobility is often the result of forces beyond their control.

### Southerners as Silent Subjects

The studies discussed in this chapter were conducted and analyzed by Northern university and government affiliated sociologists who strove to maintain a detached and academic point of view. Southern sociologists did not study Southern migrants of either race as a general rule.<sup>49</sup> They mostly focused on race relations at home or other topics, despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that some were technically migrants themselves. Southern elites, including writers,

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<sup>49</sup> Sociologist Albert J. Reiss, Jr., discussed previously as affiliated with Vanderbilt University in Nashville, was a native of the Pacific Northwest. Ronald Freedman was Canadian.

tended to ignore the Southern exodus in favor of analyzing Southern life within the confines of the region, even if they themselves were expatriates. The most famous migration novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*, was written by Californian John Steinbeck, and while Oklahoman Woody Guthrie sang about the plight of migrants as one of them beginning in the 1930s, it would be decades before his words reached the ears of most mainstream Americans. Southern entertainers may have reached the masses through radio (Chicago's WLS National Barn Dance began broadcasts in 1924) and eventually television, but even they were often portraying a narrow and stereotypical version of Southern or rural identity that did not invite reflection or serious consideration. Ultimately, the majority of Americans did not learn about Southern migrants or their experiences from the migrants themselves.

The sociological literature documenting the height of Southern migration is telling for what it reveals about larger social questions and the milieu in which they were considered. Although united by their region of origin, migrants were divided by race, and their receptions in Northern and Midwestern cities were affected by preconceived and culturally-loaded notions about them. Sociologists were both participants in and crafters of a discourse that emphasized migrant foreignness, but in a way that made some groups more foreign than others. Their findings had important ramifications for the local reception of migrants and the development of migrant identities.

Chicago, as an important migrant destination and powerhouse of social science research, became an especially influential location for studying migrants and disseminating information and opinions about them. The next chapter discusses the history of sociology in America and its manifestations in Chicago, as well as the University of Chicago's rise to prominence as the premier social science center in the nation. By studying the work of sociologists in this period of

enormous change in both American and Southern history, we can gain insight into the nature of regionalism and cultural discrimination as it played out in the Northern urban landscape and well as an understanding of what it meant for citizens from both sides of the Mason-Dixon line to encounter the “other” Americans.

## CHAPTER II

### EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY SOCIOLOGY IN AMERICA AND ITS EFFECTS IN CHICAGO

In the previous chapter, I explored how migrant studies in the early twentieth century were often as telling about the authors as they were about the people being examined. Further perspective is necessary for a deeper understanding of this research and its impact on sociological discourse, but traditional secondary literature lacks this kind of interdisciplinary contextualization. As one sociologist noted: “If sociology’s concern with its own history is inadequate from the social historian’s view, so, too, is the historian’s treatment of sociology.”<sup>1</sup>

There are a number of questions we must consider: what exactly did it mean to be a sociologist in the early and mid twentieth century? What traditions and discourse shaped the way they pursued the study of society, and how their voices were heard? How did the national sociological perspective (if there was one) compare to the views taught and preached in Chicago? This chapter discusses the development of sociology as a discipline in turn of the century America, as well as the rise to prominence of the Chicago School and its teachings. Through articles from *American Journal of Sociology* and others, the papers and proceedings of the American Sociological Society, and accounts from University of Chicago founders and “descendents,” this chapter demonstrates the nature and influence of sociology at the time when migrants were either made painfully conspicuous or virtually ignored by its practitioners. Only by understanding what sociologists were trained to do and see in this period can we fully

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<sup>1</sup> James T. Caryl, *Sociology and Public Affairs: The Chicago School* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1975), 7.

appreciate how they viewed the migrant experience and repercussions, as well as how they interacted, if at all, with migrant study subjects.

### The Birth of American Sociology

Sociology first emerged as a discipline in America in the late nineteenth century, combining elements of psychology, philosophy, anthropology, economics, and statistics to study human society and environment. The Industrial Revolution, the Civil War, and other dramatic upheavals of the century had irrevocably changed the social and environmental landscape of America, and society “became acutely aware that life in the United States was not altogether a success.”<sup>2</sup> With concerns about public health and social ills at high tide during the Progressive Era, the development of a specialized field dedicated to uncovering the inner workings of society and the root causes of modern problems was somewhat inevitable. As one early sociologist remarked, “In short, like every other distinct thought-phenomenon, the American sociological movement was a child of its time. It was not an isolated, alien, detached curiosity. It was a part of the orderly unfolding of native conditions.”<sup>3</sup>

The spirit of reform and charitable organizations had a long (and predominately female) tradition across the nation. Religious institutions of many denominations had offered aid to orphans, the poor, and elderly people in both official and unofficial capacities since the early 1800s, and cities with sizable migrant and immigrant populations were home to dozens of ethnic and religious organizations that assisted members of their own community with financial, employment, and housing issues. By the turn of the century, American reform blossomed into a

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<sup>2</sup> Albion W. Small, “Fifty Years of Sociology in the United States,” *American Journal of Sociology* 21:6 (May 1916): 725.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 724.

national force that demanded legislative action. Female reformers and “club women” were at the head of this movement, transforming Victorian ideals of womanhood into directives for social change. By broadening the prescriptive female sphere that focused on safe, healthy, moral homemaking to apply these instincts to society as a whole, reformers crafted a powerful new identity for American women as civic housekeepers who made significant inroads into the male world of policymaking, particular with regards to child welfare policy.<sup>4</sup> Although this movement was largely composed of white Protestant women from the middle and upper classes, a black Progressive movement also took shape to advocate for racial justice and uplift with female figures like Ida B. Wells and the National Association of Colored Women (founded in 1896 with the motto “Lifting as We Climb”) at the forefront. By the late nineteenth century, the growing professionalization of such reform and social concerns swept sociology into the university realm. Although women’s colleges and some coeducational institutions did exist by this time, higher education and the scientific training it offered was by and large still a man’s world. The distinctions between those theorizing about society and those actively working with vulnerable populations, as well as between men and woman working in this field, are discussed later in this chapter.

As the study of human relations and interactions, nascent sociology sought to discover the laws that governed society through methodological and scientific investigation. The early sociologist, then, was “a man who is studying the facts of society *in a certain way*. [...] in the spirit of a philosopher.”<sup>5</sup> Again and again, early sociological literature emphasized the scientific

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<sup>4</sup> See Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); and Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, eds., *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Albion W. Small, “What is a Sociologist?” *American Journal of Sociology* 8:4 (January 1903): 468-469. Small’s emphasis.

and objective nature of the field: the author of the first comprehensive textbook declared he had “never thought of sociology as the abstract or hypothetical science of social forces. Sociology is a concrete science, primarily descriptive and historical, secondarily explanatory.”<sup>6</sup> Émile Durkheim, French philosopher and an influential founder of sociology, published *Les Règles de la Méthode Sociologique (The Rules of Sociological Method)*, his manifesto on the ideals and goals of the discipline, in 1895 which also emphasized the centrality of objectivity and the scientific method. Durkheim also discussed the importance of studying social facts as real phenomena, further aligning the field with empiricism and positivist sciences.<sup>7</sup> The turn-of-the-century public, however, seemed skeptical of the field’s utility and legitimacy: a 1903 article in the *American Journal of Sociology* found it necessary to rebuke those who thought that sociology was “merely a pretentious name for slumming.”<sup>8</sup> As a field, it was not wholly (or sometimes, at all) concerned with improving life in the lowest strata of society, or in studying only deviance and poverty. Although they undoubtedly appreciated the application of biological concepts to the study of humanity that Social Darwinism engendered, sociologists at this time did not widely engage with the ideas that often led scholars and reformers alike to declare certain groups or social constructs better or fitter for survival than others. Early sociologists emphasized that theirs was a high-minded, academic, and purely scientific cause, an inquiry into the very foundations of humanity: “We agree that the primary task of sociology is to discover and to formulate the laws of those processes in human association which differ, either in degree or in kind, from processes

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<sup>6</sup> Franklin H. Giddings, “Sociology and the Abstract Sciences. The Origin of the Social Feelings,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 5 (March 1895): 95. Giddings’s *The Principles of Sociology* was published the next year.

<sup>7</sup> Émile Durkheim (translation by W.D. Halls), *The Rules of Sociological Method* (New York: The Free Press, 1982).

<sup>8</sup> Small, “What is a Sociologist?,” 471.

that occur in antecedent orders in the scale of evolution.”<sup>9</sup> This refrain was taken up by academic sociologists in departments around the nation and in the earliest leadership of the American Sociological Society.<sup>10</sup>

Even at that early date, the tensions between sociology and social work were evident, with academic sociologists emphasizing the scientific and objective nature of their work. The division (according to sociologists) is made clear in 1903’s “What is a Sociologist?,” in which social work is characterized as a “practical employment” and a “phase of the science to which it is most closely related,” but clearly subordinate to sociology as a field. The author also cautions against the “loose application of terms” that confuses “ordinary social workers” with true sociologists.<sup>11</sup> Religious and philanthropic motives often drew the two together, as when academic sociologists felt called to study and then ameliorate the societal ills of their day with a specifically Protestant Christian perspective. In 1912, the National Institute of Social Sciences awarded their gold medal to Lillian Wald, pioneer of public health nursing and leader of a settlement house in New York City, illustrating the close ties between social theory and practice at that time.<sup>12</sup> However, the pairing did not last, and soon sociologists and social workers had “almost universally withdrawn into separate departments and schools, leaving behind the chill

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<sup>9</sup> Albion W. Small, “Points of Agreement Among Sociologists,” *American Journal of Sociology* 12:5 (March 1907): 637.

<sup>10</sup> See Lester F. Ward, “The Place of Sociology Among the Sciences,” *American Journal of Sociology* 1:1 (July 1895): 16-27; and “Contributions to Social Philosophy V: Sociology and Psychology,” *American Journal of Sociology* 1:5 (March 1896): 618-632.

<sup>11</sup> Small, “What is a Sociologist?” 469.

<sup>12</sup> John Louis Recchiuti, *Civic Engagement: Social Science and Progressive-Era Reform in New York City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 83.



that is characteristic of the feelings behind divorced couples.”<sup>13</sup> Academic sociologists saw their field as objective and scientific, trying to understand humanity as a whole, rather than seeking to improve the lot of specific groups through targeted assistance and charitable works. “We do not desire to turn out “social reformers” so much, as men familiar with the broader principles of social development,” declared Professor J.Q. Dealey of Brown University in 1906. “Fix the principle in the mind, and the application of it will follow.”<sup>14</sup>

Religion also played into the division between sociology and social work. While many *fin de siècle* religious movements and ideals articulated similar aims with sociology, eventually they too were separated from the discipline. The Social Gospel and Applied Christianity movements sought to bring Protestant believers out into their communities to ameliorate and Christianize the urban landscape. The idea of religious solutions to the country’s perceived social crisis gained traction with the public and the academy alike as strong relationships developed between reformers and the “New Social Science.” Many of the early sociologists were clergymen or came from religious families, and it was not unusual to have clergy in sociology departments or courses being taught in “Christian Sociology.”<sup>15</sup> However, prominent figures at the University of Chicago sociology department took a stand early on to downplay the influence of religion and Christian morality in their theories and aims. The questions posed by sociologists “implicitly rejected the answers that religion provided. [...] The task of the sociologist was to suggest paths

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<sup>13</sup> Robert E.L. Faris, *Chicago Sociology, 1920-1932* (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1967), 13.

<sup>14</sup> Discussion on Albion W. Small’s “Points of Agreement Among Sociologists.” Paper presented at the first annual meeting of the American Sociological Society, Providence, RI, December 1906.

<sup>15</sup> Luigi Tomasi, “The Influence of Religion on the Chicago School of Sociology,” *Clinical Sociology Review* 11:1 (January 1993): 17-34.

forward based on actual behavior rather than religious ideals.”<sup>16</sup> As a result, religion, along with social work, was eventually segregated from the wider academic discipline.

Chicago itself had a particularly innovative history when it came to social work, one that helped shape the development of American sociology despite the dismissal of academic sociologists. Jane Addams’s Hull House opened on the Near West Side in 1889 and united female social activists in researching and ameliorating urban poverty and problems. Through residence, community interaction, and outreach, these “New Women” provided social and educational opportunities for working-class people (particularly women and immigrants) and helped pioneer the urban settlement house movement, a world where “even aggressive and successful men deferred to women.”<sup>17</sup> Addams and co-founder Ellen Gates Starr also advocated for legislative reforms in labor laws, healthcare, suffrage, and other issues that directly affected their constituency. Similar to sociologists of the time, Hull House reformers strove to move beyond merely treating the symptoms of poverty to identify the root causes in order to eradicate it. The first volume of the first sociological journal in America contained one piece written by a woman among its more than fifty articles and reviews, an article on domestic labor by Jane Addams.<sup>18</sup> Hull House residents went on to publish original articles and receive book reviews in the journal. Addams, along with a handful of women, later became a member of the American Sociological Society. Despite the general scorn of social workers by the male-dominated academy, Hull House introduced and maintained a practical and female perspective in Chicago’s sociology scene, no matter how marginalized and separate it became.

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<sup>16</sup> David Sehat, *The Myth of American Religious Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 196.

<sup>17</sup> Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion*, 10.

<sup>18</sup> Jane Addams, “A Belated Industry,” *American Journal of Sociology* 1:5 (March 1896): 536-550.

## The University of Chicago

The University of Chicago opened its doors in 1892, inaugurating the nation's first department of sociology. While other universities, such as Cornell, had offered courses in sociology since the 1880s, Chicago's decision to recognize it as its own department was prescient. The University as a whole was quite forward-thinking, and considered somewhat of an upstart by the older established schools. "But only once was a major university established full-blown and ready to take its place at once in the first rank of institutions of higher education," wrote one chronicler.<sup>19</sup> Built with funds from John D. Rockefeller and other *nouveau riche* industrialists, Chicago dared to compete with the Ivy League by offering generous salaries and even equal pay for female professors, all to attract the very best scholars and establish the University as the bellwether of a new century in American education.

Albion W. Small (1854-1926), considered the father of Chicago's sociology department and a founder of American sociology as a whole, was enormously influential in legitimizing the field and shaping its practice in Chicago. Originally from Maine, Small studied in Germany and graduated in 1889 with a Ph.D. in history from Johns Hopkins University. Small chaired the department for over thirty years and served as President of the American Sociological Society (discussed later in this chapter) from 1912 to 1913. Perhaps most importantly, he founded the *American Journal of Sociology* in 1895, creating the first academic journal of sociology in the States and cementing Chicago's place as the leader in American sociological research.<sup>20</sup> He also served as editor for thirty years until his retirement in 1925. Since Chicago's was the first

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<sup>19</sup> Faris, *Chicago Sociology*, 22.

<sup>20</sup> Harry Elmer Barnes, "The Place of Albion Woodbury Small in Modern Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology* 32:1 (July 1926): 15-44.

department in the nation, the first generation of professors came from a variety of disciplines and exercised their powers to help define the field as it grew. As a later sociologist noted, “In Chicago, sociology was implanted in American academic life and after that nothing was quite the same again.”<sup>21</sup>

The doctoral dissertations defended at the university in its first years paralleled the attempts of the burgeoning field to define itself and its boundaries. Unsurprisingly, among the first dissertations were topics influenced heavily by economics, political science, biology, anthropology, and psychology, the “mother” sciences noted by Lester Ward and Albion Small. 1895 saw the completion of “American Municipal Government” (Jerome Hall Raymond) and “An Exposition in Outline of the Relation of Certain Economic Principles to Social Adjustment” (Frederick William Sanders). In 1897, it was still possible to graduate as a sociologist with a dissertation on “The Ethnobotany of Coahuila Indians of Southern California” (David Prescott Barrows), which today would be classified as anthropology.<sup>22</sup> The following years saw a clarification of the borders of the field, and by 1899 topics that modern scholars would recognize as sociological became the norm. George Edgar Vincent’s “Sociology and the Integration of Studies” (1896) and Hanna Belle Clark Powell’s “The Public Schools of Chicago: a Sociological Study” (1897) were the first truly sociological dissertations completed in the program.<sup>23</sup>

A comprehensive listing of all the founders and early professors of sociology at Chicago and their contributions is beyond the scope of this work (key figures of the “Chicago School” proper are discussed later in this chapter), but a few salient points about the initial group bear

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<sup>21</sup> Leonard Broom, “Editor’s Foreword,” in Faris, *Chicago Sociology*, xi.

<sup>22</sup> Later becoming the president of the University of California, Berkeley, Barrows indeed eventually identified as an anthropologist.

<sup>23</sup> A list of dissertations from 1893 to 1935 are found in Faris, *Chicago Sociology*, 135-150.

mentioning here.<sup>24</sup> First, they were all white and middle or upper class. Neither is perhaps surprising, although the university was integrated and coeducational from the beginning, but these cultural privileges profoundly shaped the views of those studying (and often judging) society, just as they do today.<sup>25</sup> But whereas today's sociologists are obligated to discuss and examine their own "positionality," such an accounting of privilege was not mandated nor even recognized in the past. American sociology was largely formed by those viewing society from a comfortable vantage point. Secondly, they came from across the country and Canada. Although Small was from Maine, there was little East Coast or New England bias evident in either their origins or their alma maters. There were even a few Southerners on the faculty (a fact which becomes more intriguing in the next chapter): William Isaac Thomas from Virginia, Ellsworth Faris from Tennessee, and William Ogburn from Georgia. Lastly, all of these professors were men. Although the University did employ female faculty, they were confined to departments seen as appropriate for their gender (such as the Department of Household Administration, where lawyer and political science Ph.D. Sophonisba Breckenridge was relegated). The closest approximation to a female sociology professor was Edith Abbot, who in 1924 became dean of the School of Social Service Administration, which was the nation's first graduate school of

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<sup>24</sup> For a full history of the Chicago School, see Martin Bulmer, *The Chicago School of Sociology: Institutionalization, Diversity, and the Rise of Sociological Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); and Lester R. Kurtz, *Evaluating Chicago Sociology: A Guide to the Literature, with an Annotated Bibliography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

<sup>25</sup> The University of Chicago was a center of black education, granting more Ph.D.s to African Americans between 1870 and 1940 than any other school in the nation. The most notable black sociology student was E. Franklin Frazier (Ph.D. 1931), whose dissertation and book *The Negro Family in Chicago* is cited in this work. Despite Frazier's influence and the prevalence of racial topics, the sociology department was almost entirely white through both the first and second Chicago Schools.

social work and considered a “woman’s department” as late as the 1960s.<sup>26</sup> Women were accepted as sociology students and many even received the Ph.D., but they were obligated to pursue their work and build their legacies outside the university classroom.<sup>27</sup>

The troubled relationship between academia and women has a long history and bibliography, and the history of sociology is no exception. Sociologist and Chicago alumna Mary Jo Deegan has written extensively on this topic as it pertains to the University of Chicago. Deegan documents the largely unacknowledged collaborations and shared influences between female social workers like Addams and male professors of sociology, as well as incidents of both clear discrimination and inarguable collegial respect within this realm. Jane Addams was twice denied an honorary doctorate before receiving it in 1931, the same year she won the Nobel Peace Prize. In at least one instance, her nomination was proposed by the male sociology faculty at Chicago but denied by university trustees.<sup>28</sup> A more damning instance of discrimination was the formation of a special section on sociology and social work within the American Sociological Society in 1921. Despite the articulated focus of this group, it contained no social workers and thus no women.<sup>29</sup> Deegan chalks these incidents up to unabashed sexism, but does not engage with the larger debates of sociology vs. social work and science vs. humanism. I would suggest a slightly different evaluation of a vicious cycle of elitism and sexism at play in Chicago sociology

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<sup>26</sup> Jo Freeman, “Women on the Social Science Faculties Since 1892,” paper delivered at the Political Science Association Conference, Winter 1969. Available: <http://www.uic.edu/orgs/cwluherstory/jofreeman/academicwomen/uc1892.htm> (accessed 11 October 2015).

<sup>27</sup> For more on Breckenridge, Abbot, and other remarkable women sociologists, see Ellen Fitzpatrick, *Endless Crusade: Women Social Scientists and Progressive Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>28</sup> Mary Jo Deegan, *Jane Addams and the Men of the Chicago School, 1892-1918* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1988), 175; and Mary Jo Deegan, ed., *Women in Sociology: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991).

<sup>29</sup> Mary Jo Deegan, “Early Women Sociologists and the American Sociological Society: The Patterns of Exclusion and Participation,” *The American Sociologist* 16 (Feb. 1981): 14-24.

and the field as a whole, one in which only university-trained “scientists” could be sociologists in a world where only men could be university-trained scientists.

### The American Journal of Sociology

Established a mere three years after Chicago founded the first sociology department, the *American Journal of Sociology* gave students and practitioners of the fledging science guidance and a forum. *AJS* was founded to “be a medium for exchange of thought between scholars upon the work of developing an orderly view of associated human activities as a whole.”<sup>30</sup> The first article of the first issue was written by Albion W. Small, who would become the journal’s driving force for the next thirty years. In it he discusses the aims and reasoning behind the development of a true discipline of social philosophy. As he would continue to do throughout his life, Small emphasizes the inevitability of sociology’s rise to prominence and the necessity of the field: “Sociology has a foremost place in the thought of modern men. Approve or deplore the fact at pleasure, we cannot escape it.”<sup>31</sup> This statement also offers a matter-of-fact rebuke to the field’s critics, who dismissed sociology as little more than conceited voyeurism.

A review of the articles in the first volume of the journal, published bimonthly from July 1895 to May 1896, offer a glimpse into the discourse and concerns of Victorian sociology. Several articles discuss Christian sociology or political topics like trade and anti-monopoly legislation. While no overwhelming topical trends emerge, it is clear that even though the Chicago group strove to broaden the horizons of the discipline both thematically and geographically, they were working within a fairly small world. Chicago professors authored the majority of the articles and reviews, and most made multiple appearances in each issue. Albion

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<sup>30</sup> Albion W. Small, “The Era of Sociology,” *American Journal of Sociology* 1:1 (July 1895): 13.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

W. Small tied with Lester Ward (an enormously influential figure in his own right from Brown University) with six featured articles, and also contributed nine book reviews. The journal's six associate editors were all Chicago professors and most contributed articles. The group's only woman was Marion Talbot, the current Dean of Women and later head of the Department of Household Administration. She had no articles in 1895, but then neither did male associate editors Frederick Starr or Charles Zeublin.<sup>32</sup>

The founding of the *American Journal of Sociology* marked the beginning of truly national discourse in the field, despite initially functioning as something of a house organ for the Chicago department. The articles and reviews in the journal also show substantial international engagement as authors discussed the work of European sociologists, particularly those in France and Germany. Although Émile Durkheim had only one piece appear in the *AJS*, his work and publications were extensively commented upon, and the nature of the piece he authored (a brief letter in the original French) suggests the audience was well familiar with the work of the “father of sociology.”<sup>33</sup> Karl Marx, having died in 1883, did not appear directly in the journal, but authors discussed his work and significance as a sociological figure from the 1910s onward. The journal, while widely discussing international sociological thought and developments, focused on the creation of a truly American sociology and thus highly favored American academics as both authors and reviewers.

The *American Journal of Sociology* was a pioneering forum for American sociology and remarkably successful as a journal, but its focus on the University of Chicago drew the ire of other sociologists and departments who felt themselves slighted or cast as outsiders. Chicago's

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<sup>32</sup> *American Journal of Sociology* Vol.1 (July 1895-May 1896).

<sup>33</sup> Émile Durkheim, “Minor Editorials,” *American Journal of Sociology* 3:6 (May 1898): 848-849.



dominance of the field became a truly national force as the journal's editorial team, headquartered at the university, decided whose work would reach their growing professional audience. Chicago's total dominance of the sociological journal medium lasted over forty years, from 1895 to 1936. Following the Great Depression and growing dissension in the ranks over Chicago's influence and "extraordinary centrality in professional communication," the American Sociological Society (not founded in or by Chicago, but necessarily heavily influenced by the department) voted to establish its own independent journal that was free of entanglements with Chicago or any other university.<sup>34</sup>

The expansion of graduate sociology programs in the 1920s had created a generation of scholars with fresh ideas and views of sociology, but who struggled for jobs, publications, and professional recognition because they were not in the Chicago inner circle. The academic and government-funded studies discussed in chapter one were conducted during this turbulent period. Spurred by the additional stress placed on academia by the Depression, an ever-narrowing employment field, and growing dissatisfaction with the Society, dissidents within the organization formed the *American Sociological Review*. Seen by contemporaries as a clear rebellion against Chicago sociologists, the *ASR* consciously strove to create a more egalitarian forum where new voices and perspectives, particularly from East Coast schools, could be heard. Representatives from up-and-coming sociological centers like Columbia University, as well as members of smaller regional professional organizations, drove this unprecedented national challenge that "is treated both as symbol and cause of Chicago's loss of professional centrality,

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<sup>34</sup> Patricia Madoo Lengermann, "The Founding of the *American Sociological Review: The Anatomy of a Rebellion*," *American Sociological Review* 44 (Apr 1979): 185.

which dates from about this time.”<sup>35</sup> Other sociological journals were founded in the early twentieth century, such as *Social Forces* (University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, 1922-present) and *The American Sociologist* (Washington University in St. Louis, 1938-1947), but none had the same national impact or shook up the academic pecking order quite like the *American Sociological Review* (1936-present). Chicago’s *American Journal of Sociology* is still published and incredibly influential today, but it no longer has a monopoly on national sociological discourse.

### The American Sociological Society

The American Sociological Society (now American Sociological Association) was founded in December 1905 in Baltimore after Professor C.W.A. Veditz of George Washington University identified a need and desire of prominent sociologists to gather with others of their profession. The founding of the *AJS* in 1895 was an important step towards unification and professionalization of the field, but it was not sufficient for the goals of this burgeoning discipline. An initial gathering of fifty people, along with letters from interested parties who were unable to attend, sought to define the goals and scope of the proposed organization, the first of its kind in America. Hitherto sociologists had been working more or less in isolation, or had been confined to the fringes of groups like the American Economic Association. A group of their own on a national scale would allow for freer exchange of ideas, research, and a more intentional shaping of the field of American sociology. “Sociology has grown up through one-idea thinkers,” wrote E.A. Ross, but the time had come to coalesce in a way that would have profound implications for the growth and application of sociology in twentieth-century America.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>36</sup> “Organization of the American Sociological Society,” *American Journal of Sociology* 11:4 (Jan 1906): 556.

The society's constitution declared its goals to be "the encouragement of sociological research and discussion, and the promotion of intercourse between persons engaged in the scientific study of society."<sup>37</sup> Again there is the emphasis on sociology as a methodological science instead of a charitable or philanthropic pursuit. From the beginning, the society made a distinction between theoretical and practical sociology, though "it was not proposed to exclude practical workers in the sociological field, so long as such workers are also interested in the essentially scientific phases of the subject."<sup>38</sup> The first membership list contained over a hundred people across the county who practiced or were interested in sociology. Many represented universities, but some were affiliated with groups like the School for Social Workers in Boston, the Massachusetts Agricultural College, and the Boston Trade School for Girls. Prominent social workers such as Jane Addams and Charlotte Perkins Gilman were founding members, as were several other women.

Predictably, the University of Chicago was heavily involved from the beginning. Most of the department's founders and many prominent students, including Albion Small, G.E. Vincent, Edward Hayes, William Ogburn, Ernest Burgess, and Robert Park, served as presidents. Despite Chicago's influential representation, society leadership came from a variety of up-and-coming departments, including those from Johns Hopkins, Yale, and the University of Michigan. The initial invitation and survey sent to prospective members went out with only one Chicago name signed to it (Small's), and this unofficial membership committee made up of professors from as far away as Nebraska serves to highlight the geographic diversity of sociologists at this point in

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<sup>37</sup> *Papers and Proceedings of the American Sociological Society, Vol. 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1907), 139-142.

<sup>38</sup> C.W.A. Veditz, "The American Sociological Society," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 20:2 (February 1906): 302.

time.<sup>39</sup> These leaders also had a variety of life experiences beyond sociology and university teaching: founder and first president Lester Ward was a trained geologist and lawyer who published four sociology texts before becoming chair of the sociology department of Brown University in 1906. Altogether, the American Sociological Society appeared to offer a slightly wider definition of sociology and sociologists than was espoused by the Chicago department since its founding more than ten years prior.

The society's first annual meeting was accordingly held in Providence, Rhode Island, on December 27-29, 1906. Topics ranged widely, from "Western Civilization and the Birth Rate" presented by E.A. Ross to "The Fine Arts as a Dynamic Factor in Society" by Mrs. J. Odenwald-Unger. The latter may have been a conventionally female topic, but the author uses it to directly challenge President Lester Ward and his published texts. Mrs. Odenwald-Unger may have indeed been a forward-thinking female sociologist, but regrettably, she never appears again in the literature or academic proceedings.<sup>40</sup> Future meetings would host presentations around a central theme, such as 1908's "The Family in Modern Society" and 1917's "Social Control." Through these early decades, the Society evidenced an increasingly wide scope of the field and its practitioners. Panelists from universities presented alongside those from settlement houses and government agencies, with topics ranging from education to politics to race. This openness would eventually be subsumed by Chicago's quest for dominance and in-fighting amongst university and methodological factions, as was previously discussed with regards to the rise of the *American Sociological Review* as the official journal of the Society.

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<sup>39</sup> "Organization of the American Sociological Society," 557.

<sup>40</sup> *Papers and Proceedings Vol. 1*, 78.

## The Chicago School

The famed “Chicago School” of sociology that developed in the 1920s and ‘30s owed much to Small and the early pioneers of the department, as well as the journal and society that helped fuel their rise to prominence. Although the school is widely referenced and understood in sociological and anthropological literature today, there is much debate about what exactly defined or comprised the group. References to the school usually describe a department devoted to qualitative research and utilizing the city as a laboratory, led by a few prominent thinkers during the years between World War I and the Depression.<sup>41</sup>

A number of scholars and Chicago-educated sociologists have criticized or problematized this monolithic definition by pointing out the diversity of topics and research methods employed at the university during this time, as well as the lack of a conscious unified and coherent “hallmark” that identified the school’s work or students. Chicago sociologist and criminologist James T. Carey remarked in 1975 that there was no particular group consciousness on the part of the Chicagoans, although they certainly considered their work and university important.<sup>42</sup> As such, the Chicago School cannot be a traditional one in the sense of a group centered around a particular theory or style of research. Despite the status of the School as an “origin myth for sociology,” Chicago sociologist Howard S. Becker stated that it is better understood as a “school of activity” where many prolific students contributed work to further the legacy and visibility of a prominent university. “The object was not to present a united theoretical front, but to get

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<sup>41</sup> Wayne G. Lutters and Mark S. Ackerman, “Social Relations in Complex Environments: An Introduction to the Chicago School of Sociology,” *UCI-ICS Social Worlds Lab* #96-1, 1996. Available: [http://userpages.umbc.edu/~lutters/pubs/1996\\_SWLNote96-1\\_Lutters,Ackerman.pdf](http://userpages.umbc.edu/~lutters/pubs/1996_SWLNote96-1_Lutters,Ackerman.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> Cary, *Sociology and Public Affairs*, 1.

students taught and degrees given, to raise money for research projects, and so to develop and maintain a reputation for the department as a good all-around place.”<sup>43</sup>

School or not, Chicago’s department and professors were extremely influential in the sociological world in the first decades of the century. By the end of World War I, the department was widely regarded as the center of sociological research and pedagogy in the nation. Not only the first but now the best, Chicago was propelled to greater heights by the work of W.I. Thomas, Ernest Burgess, and Robert E. Park. Thomas, a Southerner and founding student in the department, became a professor himself in 1895 and introduced the strong emphasis on ethnographic research and a focus on the margins of society that became a hallmark of Chicago sociology. His work with Polish sociologist Florian Znaniecki manifested itself in a five-volume monograph that is considered foundational in the field of immigrant studies, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America: Monograph of an Immigrant Group* (1918-1920). He also extensively studied controversial subjects such as criminality and sexuality, while serving as associate editor for the *AJS* from 1895-1917. Along with *The Polish Peasant*, he is also remembered for the “Thomas theorem,” expressed in his work *The Child in America: Behavior Problems and Programs*: “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.”<sup>44</sup>

Unfortunately, Thomas’s contributions to Chicago were cut short when he was arrested for alleged sexual misconduct under the Mann Act in 1918. Though later acquitted, Thomas was fired from the department and had several publication deals revoked. He went on to publish other works and lecture at the New School for Social Research and Harvard, and was even elected

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<sup>43</sup> Howard S. Becker, “The Chicago School, So-Called,” *Qualitative Sociology* 22:1 (1999): 3-12. See also Luigi Tomasi, ed., *The Tradition of the Chicago School of Sociology* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1998).

<sup>44</sup> William I. Thomas and Dorothy Swaine Thomas, *The Child in America: Behavior Problems and Programs* (New York: Knopf, 1928), 572.

president of the American Sociological Society in 1927 by a new generation who rejected the conservatism that had prompted Thomas's expulsion from Chicago and tenured academia. Although Thomas went on to a productive and influential career, one can't help but wonder what his legacy at Chicago might have been if he had been allowed to stay. Robert Park himself declared in 1939 "it is in the work of W.I. Thomas, I believe, that the present tradition of research at Chicago was established."<sup>45</sup>

Burgess and Park authored the foundational text *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* in 1921 and introduced the emphases on urban studies and social pathology that would become integral to Chicago sociology. Burgess, a Canadian, had received his doctorate from Chicago in 1913, and went on to teach in the sociology department for nearly forty years. Robert E. Park traveled extensively as a journalist and worked as Booker T. Washington's "white ghostwriter" in the South in the early 1900s before coming to the University in 1914.<sup>46</sup> Both Burgess and Park served as presidents for the American Sociological Society in the '30s, and both were instrumental in introducing urban studies and the idea of urban ecology to the department.<sup>47</sup> Park became chair of the department and oversaw the development of monographs that focused on the "dark side of urban life," such as homelessness, criminal and gang activity, and juvenile delinquency. Park's 1915 article "The City: Suggestions for the Study of Human Nature in the Urban Environment," later developed with Burgess into a book of the same name in 1925, is arranged as a guide for empirical research in the complex urban world that encouraged students

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<sup>45</sup> Lester R. Kurtz, *Evaluating Chicago Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 3.

<sup>46</sup> Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915 (vol. 2)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 175.

<sup>47</sup> Jan Lin and Christopher Mele (eds.), *The Urban Sociology Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 91-92.

to “get the seats of [their] pants dirty in real research.”<sup>48</sup> By encouraging students to mix and mingle with the down and out, to study the lives of those on the fringes by being directly involved in their environments (if not their illicit activities) rather than from a lofty academic viewpoint or merely from records and documents, Burgess and Park laid the groundwork of Chicago’s tradition of participant observation as the defining research style of the department. Studies of this era allowed these forgotten city dwellers to tell their own stories in their own words (through sociologists), further emphasizing that everyone had a story worth telling.

This type of research earned the department a reputation for seeking out the seedier elements of the city for study, a reputation that played right into the era’s thirst for scandal and hard-boiled crime fiction. For interwar Americans, Chicago already had quite the reputation as a hotbed of organized crime and urban evils. Newspapers, popular films, and pulp fiction writers like Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler created vivid portraits of the city that fed the public’s appetite for exposés and glimpses into dangerous underworlds. Even non-fiction work (albeit literary) had plenty to say in this regard: Nelson Algren’s 1951 essay *Chicago: City on the Make* waxes poetic on the city’s downtrodden hustlers and slums as the true heart of the city while lamenting the legacy of corruption and duplicity that has driven its residents to this state.<sup>49</sup> Sociologists in Chicago often drew on these same sources (although based in reality) to research and write dissertations and monographs. Sociologist Roger Salerno has termed this facet of the

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<sup>48</sup> Robert E. Park, “The City: Suggestions for the Study of Human Nature in the Urban Environment,” *American Journal of Sociology* 20 (1915): 557-612; and Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, *The City: Suggestions for the Study of Human Nature in the Urban Environment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925). Although Park’s legendary quotation summed up the spirit and goal of *The City*, it does not appear in this work. Rather, it was recorded by student Howard Becker in the 1920s and first reproduced in John C. McKinney, *Constructive Typology and Social Theory* (New York: Meredith Publishing Company, 1966), 71.

<sup>49</sup> Nelson Algren, *Chicago: City on the Make*, Fiftieth Anniversary Edition, annotated by David Schmittgens and Bill Savage (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).



field “sociology noir,” and argues that Chicago was the main contributor in studies of “loneliness, marginality, and deviance” in the years 1915-1935.<sup>50</sup> Previous sociological work had examined crime and deviance, of course, but Chicago was unique in both its proliferation and ethnographic approach to the studies of those on the fringes of urban society. When it came to vice, Chicago students had a plethora of options to investigate, and many developed their skills and built their careers on examining society through the perspectives of outsiders. Seeking cultural immersion while maintaining a morally relative viewpoint, these emerging sociologists combined the discipline’s foundation of scientific neutrality with modern ideas about human observation, fieldwork, and the democratizing nature of social science.

### Migrant Sociology in Chicago

All of these people, organizations, and ideas helped set the stage for the sociological study of Southern migrants to Chicago in the early twentieth century. The emphasis on objectivity and the troubled relationship with the field of social work, and, in Chicago, the departmental attention to urban vice, helped guide those investigating migrants in their research methods, subject choice, and conclusions. It also helps explain the comparative lack of material specific to Chicago. Despite the large numbers of potential study subjects in the neighborhoods surrounding the university and the opportunity to investigate their growing reputation of vice, few contemporary sociologists ventured into the world of migrant sociology. The journals, classrooms, and discourse were strangely silent about this mass population shift and its repercussions in the North. Certainly Southern migrants have been studied more in the past thirty

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<sup>50</sup> Roger Salerno, *Sociology Noir: Studies at the University of Chicago in Loneliness, Marginality, and Deviance, 1915-1935* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., Inc., Publishers, 2007).

years than they ever were in their own time, and migrants to Chicago have never received the attention warranted by their numbers.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the African-American Great Migration was (and is still) extensively studied in a broad way (and remains the most prolific historiographical thread today) and several government-funded studies investigated white Southern migrants' impact on a regional level and in cities other than Chicago. But contemporary sociological articles or dissertations that specifically focus on Chicago migrants are difficult to come by. I argue that this lack is directly related to the very tenets of sociology established in the 1890s and codified by departments nationwide in the early twentieth century. The importance of scientific objectivity may have played a role: perhaps the cohort of white, overwhelmingly American academic sociologists of the time did not believe it was possible to objectively study other white Americans, even those they did not overtly identify with. Many seminal Chicago studies concerned immigrants, after all. Studies of black American life were more common, but even studies of black Southerners were categorized as primarily racial rather than migrant studies. Browsing the list of dissertations and Master's projects compiled by Faris, location-specific studies (of a particular town or settlement as a discrete unit, or of a particular group that inhabits the area, e.g. Mennonites) or those concerning social movements and institutions (such as the play movement for children, Boy Scouts, the church) are heavily represented.

Academic sociology's long held aversion to social work and its boundaries may also have been a factor. Black Chicago created an extensive network of social and religious aid organizations to promote racial uplift and prosperity in the city. The Chicago Urban League, the Wabash Avenue YMCA, black newspapers like the *Chicago Defender*, and countless other groups worked to assess the needs of the growing and diversifying community and to respond

with appropriate support. Although the larger organizations sometimes commissioned specific studies of their own to assess problems like employment and housing conditions, this work did not make it into academic circles or wider national distribution.<sup>51</sup> By the 1960s, groups like JOIN (Jobs or Income Now) and the Southern Center provided similar services for a largely white constituency. Perhaps sociologists faced a reluctance to enter the territory of social workers by studying those that such agencies aided (and studied with the goal of providing aid) on a daily basis. This theory loses some strength when we consider Chicago sociologists had no qualms about studying foreign immigrants served by both American social workers and native aid agencies, but perhaps the problematic duality of Southern migrants as familiar outsiders disrupted this system.

Lastly, we should consider Chicago's research interests in "sociology noir." Southern white enclaves and "Little Dixies," along with those who inhabited them, were often criticized in the press as dens of poverty and vice. With knife fights, drunkenness, and unwed underage mothers as common as the press claimed, surely this should have been the site of Chicago's next big exposé. And yet it wasn't. Perhaps, as suggested above, students and sociologists avoided these districts because of concerns over objectivity and involvement with social work. Or maybe by the time white migrants caught the attention of Chicago in the 1930s, the taste for noir was waning. But another theory is that once they ventured into migrant districts in Uptown or the Near West Side, they realized that life there simply wasn't salacious enough to compete with well-known monographs like *The Unadjusted Girl* (1923), *The Hobo* (1923), or *The Jack-Roller* (1930). Professors like Park encouraged their students to explore Chicago's hidden worlds of

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<sup>51</sup> See Arvarh E. Strickland, *History of the Chicago Urban League* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1966); and Jeffrey Helgeson, "Striving in Black Chicago: Migration, Work, and the Politics of Neighborhood Change 1935-1965," Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Chicago, 2008).

unorthodox sexuality and illegal behavior to seek larger truths about humanity and the urban space. Maybe there just wasn't anything to write about from such a perspective. As Gregory and others would note fifty years later, maybe these Southerners were just like everyone else around them: everyday people working, raising families, and trying to survive in the Windy City.

### CHAPTER III

#### SOUTHERN IN THE CITY

The previous chapter examined the development of sociology in Victorian America and its repercussions in Chicago and the famed Chicago School, while also discussing the factors that made Chicago sociology unique among its peers. The national and Chicago-specific discourses in this burgeoning discipline profoundly shaped the sociological studies conducted in and about the city, helping to determine the topics chosen and methods employed, and to some extent, even the conclusions drawn.

While the Chicago department heavily emphasized the importance of the city as a laboratory and the necessity of sociology students as participant observers at all levels of modern society (including the criminal and socially-taboo), this approach was overwhelmingly absent when it came to studying Southern migrants. Those who did study Southern migrants (whether from the University of Chicago or not, and whether studying Chicago or other migrant destinations) primarily did so through documents and records, maintaining a distance from their subjects. They also usually cast the migrants themselves as “exploitative or subversive,” even if they claimed to be trying to clear up misconceptions.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, those who embodied the Chicago tenets of cultural immersion, participant observation, and moral relativism chose to focus on topics such as homelessness and transience, gangs and delinquency, and urban nightlife.

Almost any sociologist focusing on Chicago would have come across Southern migrants in the course of their studies or daily lives, if nothing else, because of their sheer numbers and

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis M. Killian, *White Southerners* (rev. ed., Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), 92.

the wide time span of their arrivals in the city. Studies of poor neighborhoods, transience, and nightlife would seem destined to involve Southerners in some way, even if migrants were not the slum-dwelling, carousing caricatures that appeared in newspapers and the popular imagination. Yet migrants were by and large ignored by Chicago sociologists, or discussed obliquely in works that examined larger topics such as E. Franklin Frazier's dissertation "The Negro Family in Chicago" (University of Chicago, 1931). And even though the department had its fair share of Southerners as both students and faculty, they were not interested enough in the migration issue (and perhaps wishing to dissociate themselves from migrants entirely) to write about others who undertook the same journey. Southern sociologists, whether they worked for Southern universities, Northern universities, or the government, did not study Southern migrants of either race as a general rule, and mostly focused on race relations at home or other topics. Southern elites in general, including writers, tended to ignore the Southern exodus in favor of analyzing Southern life within the confines of the region, even if they themselves were expatriates. Lewis M. Killian was thus a notable exception to the tradition of Northern sociologists and mute Southern intellectuals. As the only Southern sociologist to study Southern migrants (as well as being a migrant himself), Killian provided an insider's view of the realities of white migrant life in the North and a different perspective from other sociologists.

#### Lewis M. Killian, Cracker Sociologist

Born in Darien, Georgia, in 1919, Killian experienced firsthand the conditions of the South that led many, black and white, to seek opportunity and refuge elsewhere. His 1994 biography, *Black and White: Reflections of a White Southern Sociologist*, describes his early life witnessing both racial discrimination against African Americans and class discrimination against

poor white “mill people” in his hometown.<sup>2</sup> Killian obtained his B.A. and M.A. sociology degrees, focusing on race relations, from the University of Georgia in Athens and completed his thesis “The Training in Domestic Service of Negro Women in Athens, Georgia” in 1941, shortly before the entire state university system was suspended from accreditation for firing its more liberal professors on the orders of Governor Eugene Talmadge.<sup>3</sup> His research interests and personal philosophy thus marked him as something of an outsider at this conservative university and with many of his Southern peers, a status that would help drive his migration northward and influence his academic perspective for the rest of his life.

Killian’s master’s thesis, completed during what he describes as a period that developed and awakened his consciousness of race and privilege in America, is a truly remarkable work. Although Kathryn Stockett’s 2009 award-winning novel *The Help* and its much-lauded 2011 film adaptation brought the topic, if in a fictionalized form, to the public’s attention most recently (and particularly the idea of domestics’ stories being told through and by a privileged white person), the history of truly domestic (as in not foreign-born) service in the South and especially its racial basis has received sporadic examination from scholars.<sup>4</sup> Even when black domestic service was widespread in America from the years of immigration restriction (c. 1924) to well into the Civil Rights Movement, it was considered a private topic that did not receive

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<sup>2</sup> Lewis M. Killian, *Black and White: Reflections of a Southern Sociologist* (Dix Hills, NY: General Hall, Inc., 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Killian, *Reflections*, 32.

<sup>4</sup> Kathryn Stockett, *The Help* (New York: Penguin Group, 2009). See Katherine van Wormer, David W. Jackson III, and Charletta Sudduth, *The Maid Narratives: Black Domestic Workers and White Families in the Jim Crow South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012); Rebecca Sharpless, *Cooking in Other Women’s Kitchens: Domestic Workers in the South, 1865-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); and Susan Tucker, *Telling Memories Among Southern Women: Domestic Workers and Their Employers in the Segregated South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002); Tera Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007). For further bibliography, see Vanessa May, *Unprotected Labor: Household Workers, Politics, and Middle-Class Reform in New York, 1870-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

much scrutiny or serious examination from university sociologists.<sup>5</sup> The complex intersections of race, class, and gender that enabled the relationships between working-class black women and privileged white families also masked them in silence and denial. That Killian was able to gain access to both sides of this taboo world as a white Southern man and university student is almost unbelievable. The only comparable study is Agnes Elizabeth May's "Employment of Women in Domestic and Personal Service, with Special Reference to Negro Women in Atlanta, Georgia" (1939). This work, written for the sociology M.A. at the historically black Atlanta University, analyzes servitude from a global perspective and contextualizes black domestics in Atlanta, but without the kind of in-depth interviews and first-person presentation style that would characterize Killian's work two years later.<sup>6</sup>

Killian fully understood the implications of these tricky dynamics (both between the maids and their employers, and between either group and himself as a white male university student) as he planned and carried out his survey for the thesis:

I interviewed 110 black female domestic servants and their employers, under a wide variety of conditions. At times the servant and I were conspirators, for many housewives made it clear they did not want me talking to their [maids] unless they were present. One of their greatest fears was that I might tell a neighbor how much the servant was paid and set off a bidding war for her services. [...] The relationship between employer and servant was typically paternalistic, exploitative, and oppressive. It was expressed in the attitudes of "Miss Annie": "Mandy is *my* maid; I trained her and she does things my way; I look after her and she's

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<sup>5</sup> Social workers (usually female) took much more of an interest in the complex relationships and conditions engendered by domestic service. See Lucy Maynard Salmon, *Domestic Service, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901).

<sup>6</sup> Agnes Elizabeth May, "Employment of Women in Domestic and Personal Service, with Special Reference to Negro Women in Atlanta, Georgia" (Master's thesis, Atlanta University, 1939).



very happy; how much I pay her is nobody's business but hers and mine."<sup>7</sup>

In his memoir, Killian describes his Athens years and thesis as being transformative for his understanding of race in the South. His thesis work enabled a long-term and intimate relationship with the local black community, something entirely new to a young white Southerner in the 1940s. His experiences as a member and resident of the Kappa Alpha fraternity, which at that time employed exclusively African-American house butlers, also broadened his perspective on white interactions with blacks in domestic service. On a more public scale, the University of Georgia's tumultuous racial and political history during this time period greatly influenced Killian's understanding of how deeply ingrained white supremacy could be, even at a major university, as progressive professors struggled to make a difference before being silenced or removed by the old guard administrators or conservative politicians. One such professor, concerned about repercussions for himself and Killian as a result of the racially-charged thesis topic, even suggested the student send his draft to the governor's office for "clearance" before officially submitting it to the department. In the midst of this contested environment, Killian graduated in 1941 with his Master's in sociology and a racial perspective much different from the one he had grown up with and observed in rural Darien.

### Killian in Chicago

After leaving Georgia, Lewis Killian spent time at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of Iowa, and in the "Jim Crow" segregated Army, where he

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<sup>7</sup> Lewis M. Killian, "The Training in Domestic Service of Negro Women in Athens, Georgia" (Master's thesis, University of Georgia, 1941). Quoted in Killian, *Reflections*, 30.

eventually became adjutant and personnel officer for the Third Military Railway Service in Iran. Armed with the GI Bill and cognizant of Chicago's national reputation for cutting-edge sociological research and publishing, he enrolled at the University of Chicago in 1946 and obtained a Julius Rosenwald Fund Fellowship (founded in 1928, this fund initially awarded grants-in-aid to help black students pursue graduate and professional education, but by the mid '30s, it was being granted to black and white students with broader aims of fostering social progress).<sup>8</sup> His introductory sociology course with Ernest Burgess enlightened him to the research potential of Chicago's white Southern migrant population, and he quickly moved to connect with this group and Chicagoans such as ministers who were occupied in aiding migrants and easing their transitions into the North's urban environment.

Killian's identification with the largely working-class Southerners who made up the Chicago migrant population and its effect on his sociological work is made clear in his autobiography. The first chapter on his childhood is titled "A Cracker Boy," and he later states that he uses the term hillbilly "as a member of the in-group."<sup>9</sup> His 1949 dissertation, "Southern White Laborers in Chicago's West Side," and two articles published in the early '50s examine the experiences of poor Southern whites as they adjusted to conditions in the North and urban life in Chicago. His own life experiences and self-identification as a Southerner of the lower class (at least in origin) differentiated him from his fellow sociologists and others judging and analyzing migrants, and allowed him to make important distinctions that were missing from the discourse.

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<sup>8</sup> See Jayne Beilke, "The Changing Emphasis of the Rosenwald Fellowship Program, 1928-1948," *Journal of Negro Education* 66 (1997): 3-15.

<sup>9</sup> Killian, *Reflections*, 50.

Most importantly, Killian distinguishes between migrant beliefs and migrant behaviors in a way that others had failed to do. A key component of the white Southerner's immigrant identity was the alleged possession of backward and un-American beliefs that placed him or her at odds with modern urban society. Sociologists and others feared the influence and numbers of migrants and their potential to act on and spread such beliefs. Many believed that white migrants would import racist attitudes and cause trouble when Northern norms required them to live near or work with African-Americans. White migrants were allegedly used to a system where law and order did not apply to race relations, and where the color of their skin made them superior to all other groups. While Killian does acknowledge the reality of Southern racism and its manifestations in the migrant population, he makes two crucial points about white migrants that no one had noted previously: first, that migrants could hold these beliefs while still complying with urban social norms, and second, that migrants did not have to import racism to the North. It was already there, perhaps subtler in its application but no less pernicious and widespread than in the South.

### The Second Chicago School

As discussed in the previous chapter, by the 1930s the University of Chicago's sociology department was no longer the dominant force in publication and training that it once had been. Competing universities and professional organizations, seeking to break the elitism and nepotism that characterized the department's stranglehold on the field, had mounted a successful rebellion against the Chicago monopoly. Although Chicago would never again regain its seat as the only center of American sociology, following World War II and thousands of servicemen and women returning to school under the G.I. Bill, and consequently the department experienced a revival often called the Second Chicago School. Sociologist Gary Alan Fine (Ph.D., Harvard University

1976) describes the life of the Second School as lasting from 1946 to about 1960, a period of enormous social, economic, and racial changes across the country. These tumultuous issues would have a serious impact on the field of sociology and its manifestations in Chicago.<sup>10</sup>

Like the pre-war Chicago School, this mid-century iteration also lacked an overarching theoretical perspective or research focus; rather, this “school of activity” was comprised of dedicated and prolific students who consciously worked and published to advance and protect the Chicago name, while ascribing to the department’s tradition of participant observation and letting subjects speak for themselves. A review of the dissertations from the Second School period reveals a predominance of topics discussing minorities, deviance and delinquency, labor, and social aid institutions such as old age homes and orphanages. Echoing Killian’s position as a researcher, this period also witnessed an uptick in minority students studying their own communities or the expression of those communities in Chicago, such as A.J.A. Al-Tahir’s 1952 “The Arab Community in the Chicago Area: A Comparative Study of the Christian-Syrians and the Muslim Palestinians” and Eugene Shigemi Uyeki’s 1953 “Process and Patterns of Nisei Adjustment to Chicago.” There is also evidence of Southern students researching topics dealing with the South or Southerners (Bevode Chalmus McCall’s 1954 “Georgia Town and Cracker Culture: A Sociological Study” from a Florida native), although Killian remained the sole investigator of migrant life. Female sociologists were finally able to move beyond the traditional domestic and education topics, with hard-hitting and controversial research such as Shirley Ann Starr’s “Interracial Tension in Two Areas of Chicago: An Exploratory Approach to the

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<sup>10</sup> See Gary Alan Fine (ed.), *A Second Chicago School? The Development of a Postwar American Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Martyn Hammersley, *The Dilemma of Qualitative Method: Herbert Blumer and the Chicago Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1989); and Andrew Abbott, *Department and Discipline: Chicago Sociology at One Hundred* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

Measurement of Interracial Tension” (1950) and Rose Helper’s “The Racial Practices of Real Estate Institutions in Selected Areas of Chicago” (1958).<sup>11</sup>

It was in this transformative post-war phase of the Chicago department’s existence that Lewis M. Killian began his serious work on white migrants. His 1949 dissertation, at over four hundred pages long, remains today the most in-depth and comprehensive study of mid-century white migrants in the urban North and an important contribution to the historiography of white Southern identity. Beginning with a broad survey of white interregional migration since 1920, “Southern White Laborers in Chicago’s West Side” examines Southern white identity, settlement patterns, stereotypes, cultural institutions, and race relations in the North, and consciously differentiates itself from previous studies of Southerners that relied on statistics alone and a detached, academic viewpoint: “In none of the previous studies of southern white migrants in northern cities has the situation of the migrant been viewed primarily through the eyes of the “hillbillies” themselves.”<sup>12</sup>

Through interviews with 175 Southern white migrants and dozens of others who interacted with them (pastors, managers, bartenders, as well as black neighbors and co-workers), Killian discusses the motivations and implications of the Southern migrant boom and its potential for studying racial and regional differences across the nation. Like a few of the sociologists detailed in chapter one, Killian emphasizes the importance of investigating and dispelling migrant stereotypes to fully understanding their place in the new community. By assessing educational levels, state origin, urban vs. rural origin, occupation, employment, and

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<sup>11</sup> The list of Ph.D. dissertations from 1946-1965 appears in Fine, *Second School*, 387-403, “compiled from information made available by the Alumni Office of the University of Chicago.”

<sup>12</sup> Lewis M. Killian, “Southern White Laborers in Chicago’s West Side” (Ph.D. diss, University of Chicago, 1949), 12.

other social factors, this work strives to present a more accurate and workable conception of the migrant experience that both sociologists and social workers could utilize. He emphasizes that the educational levels of migrants are generally higher than those who remained in the South, and that, although Chicago made much of its Appalachian and “mountain” migrants, the majority of the population (over 33,000 at the time of the survey) were actually from Missouri (Kentucky, Tennessee, and Texas also contributed large numbers to the city).<sup>13</sup> And although white migrant centers as tools for social aid didn’t really take off until the 1960s, even in the late ‘40s Killian discusses the power of sociologists to become allies of social action groups that wanted to improve the lives of migrants and minorities.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike previous sociologists who studied migrants, Killian combines statistical research from the Census and government reports with the participant observation techniques and willingness to investigate the seedier side of life that had been the University of Chicago’s hallmark for decades. He describes visiting Southern-owned or dominated taverns and churches where he could informally interview fellow migrants and get their honest impressions of Northern life, as well as observe their interactions with each other as an increasingly self-aware group. By actually talking to migrants and others in their neighborhoods and positioning himself as a sympathetic insider (rather than simply as a Northern university man or government surveyor), Killian was able to gain unprecedented access and insight into the migrant experience and how it was shaped by Northern institutions and mores. A number of unique research questions, beyond the mere vital statistics of the population emphasized by others, guided his investigations into the growing white migrant community on the West Side: how did the

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

migrants conceive of themselves as a group and of their position in Chicago society? Was a group consciousness emerging as they continually found themselves being lumped together and stereotyped as a cohesive unit? Did they widely interact with Chicago institutions or prefer to maintain separate identities as outsiders? And (perhaps most interestingly for Killian) what were their reactions to the different racial norms and patterns of interracial interactions in the North? He notes that Chicago may serve as a kind of laboratory for observing and testing sociological theories about race and behavior that cast a wary eye on the South: "A prominent feature of the current political controversy over civil rights legislation is speculation as to the possible reactions of the white people of the South to the sudden removal of the legal basis for "Jim Crow." The southern white migrant to Chicago encounters such a change almost overnight."<sup>15</sup> Would Southern migrants balk at the North's lack of *de jure* discrimination? Would race riots erupt where urban life necessitated blacks and whites to live and work together? Would Southerners try to enforce and spread their own ideals of racial hierarchy? These concerns and fears were frequently voiced in newspapers and occasionally in sociological literature of the time, and drove Northern perceptions and behaviors towards the Southerners they deemed lawless and volatile.

Killian's dissertation findings comprise a sort of catalogue of Southern stereotypes along with sociological explanations and (mostly) refutations of their veracity. It also gives a compelling snapshot of the growing but still fairly young Southern community in Chicago, one that had not attained the sense of cohesiveness that he would explore in later work. White Southerners in Chicago have "shallow roots," he argues. The South is their home and most intend to return someday, which also contributes to their general lack of involvement in

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

community activities (often used as an indicator of social adjustment or assimilation) and an overwhelming apathy towards “enforcing” Southern ways in the North. Like J. Trent Alexander wrote nearly sixty years later in 2005, why would Southerners bother to try to change things in their new environment if they never intended to stay?<sup>16</sup> This perception of Northern life as just a temporary exile for much of the group also inhibited the development of group consciousness, at least for a while.

Even while defending white Southerners against the many stereotypes levied against them, Killian presents an honest examination of this group’s racism and its ramifications in their new home. Many interviewees claim they dislike Chicago because of its African-American population and this group’s position in the racial hierarchy. This comes out in their own interviews as well as those with employers and school officials:

The only objections to the Negroes that we get come from the parents. They will come in the office and say, “I don't want my children going to school with Negroes.” This is particularly true of the southern white parents. But when we tell them there is nothing they can do about it, that's all there is to it. They just accept it, even if they don't like it.<sup>17</sup>

And yet these areas of interaction and the neighborhoods comprising the “Southern White Area” (author’s designation based on Census research) are not the areas of high racial tension in the city as determined by the Mayor’s Commission on Human Relations.<sup>18</sup> Even on neighborhood borders where housing has become “mixed,” Killian’s African-American interviewees often reveal a surprising harmony:

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<sup>16</sup> J. Trent Alexander, “They’re Never Here More Than a Year”: Return Migration in the Southern Exodus, 1940-1970,” *Journal of Social History* 38:3 (Spring 2005): 653-671.

<sup>17</sup> Killian, “Laborers,” 358.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.



I've lived in this area for twenty-eight years, right on Monroe Street, and I haven't heard of any open difficulties between the southern whites and the Negroes. Once we had a siege of window-breaking on my block, but everyone's windows were broken, white or Negro, so I don't think it was racial vandalism.<sup>19</sup>

The only true hotspots for racial conflict in the area are the white Southern bars or “hillbilly taverns,” many of which found creative ways to discourage black patrons, where Killian observes that white men feel safest being openly racist. Killian also describes Southern racism in the North as coming primarily from a place of fear:

Seeing Negroes do all the things which, in the South, would be interpreted as a complete break-down of the structure of “White Supremacy,” the “hillbilly” exaggerates the power of the Negro and finds it difficult to see the realities of Negro-white relations. He perceives Negroes as an aggressive, powerful group to be feared and avoided rather than as an inferior, somewhat likeable group who should be feared only if allowed to “get out of place.”<sup>20</sup>

This fear-based perception also contributes to the lack of serious Southern racial conflict in the neighborhood. And, since the area is overwhelmingly working-class, there is a lack of the so-called “improvement associations” that operated in middle-class neighborhoods, which enforced restrictive housing covenants that illegally barred black renters and homeowners (forcing them into the increasingly crowded Black Belt neighborhoods) and which Killian credits as a major cause of racial tension and conflict in the city. Commenting on the wide opportunities for racism that occurred in the “better” parts of the city, the author noted: “Getting away from the disorganized, deteriorating Southern White Area did provide these people with some education

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 346.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 424.

in a nonsouthern [sic] pattern of race relations. But it amounted to education to northern, urban techniques of discrimination rather than an education for greater tolerance!”<sup>21</sup>

Killian’s dissertation presents a compelling and unprecedented examination of the white Southern experience in Chicago, as well as provocative points about how this migration will affect twentieth-century race relations, both North and South. The process of white Southerners being rejected by a group they so greatly resemble in almost every way should be of great interest to sociologists and students of race relations, he says: “This almost automatic association of "southern white" with “dominant status” and “prejudice,” in popular thought, in the press, and in much of the scientific literature on race relations, makes the southern white migrant doubly important.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the development of some degree of group consciousness and self-segregation by the outsider group can hold important lessons for those studying minority groups of any kind:

The similarities between the situation, the behavior, and the self-conceptions of the "hillbillies" and those of groups which are more sharply differentiated and the objects of more obvious antagonism, bring into sharper focus some of the less dramatic, less emotionally laden forces tending to preserve consciousness of intergroup differences in a heterogeneous population and, particularly, in an urban society. It shows, especially, the obstacles to the disappearance of even a weakly differentiated “newcomer” group as a distinct category which arises within the group itself.<sup>23</sup>

His final chapter expresses the predominant concerns of sociologists and racially-progressive students of Southern migration: how will migrants change and be changed by their experiences with Northern blacks and racial norms? How will this alter the Southern racial landscape if and

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 416.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 421-422.

when they return home? While emphasizing that more detailed and comprehensive research is needed, Killian concludes that:

It is questionable whether the displaced rural southern white who expresses a sincere desire to return to his old community actually finds life there as desirable as he pictured it when he finally returns. It is also questionable whether the southern white who has made some accommodation to northern, urban racial mores will readily lapse into “southern ways” when he returns from a prolonged stay in the North.<sup>24</sup>

“It’s the Custom Here”

In a 1952 article “The Effects of Southern White Workers on Race Relations in Northern Plants” and a 1953 piece “The Adjustment of Southern White Migrants to Urban Social Norms,” Killian describes the specific industrial aspects of the research about Chicago migrants that he completed for his dissertation.<sup>25</sup> Notably, neither of these articles were published in his alma mater’s journal, the *American Journal of Sociology*, even though he had graduated fewer than five years before. Perhaps the journal was trying to broaden its contributor base (and quell rumors of nepotism), or perhaps the Chicago arbiters still weren’t interested in migrants. In any case, Killian’s 1950s migrant work found an outlet in the competing *American Sociological Review* and *Social Forces*. In these studies, he examined the relationship of actions and attitudes, and he challenged the “cult of attitude measurement that so dominated both social psychology

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 427.

<sup>25</sup> Lewis M. Killian, “The Effects of Southern White Workers on Race Relations in Northern Plants,” *American Sociological Review* 17:3 (June 1952): 327-331; Lewis M. Killian, “The Adjustment of Southern White Migrants to Northern Urban Norms,” *Social Forces* 32:1 (Oct. 1953): 66-69.

and ethnic studies,” a distinction and critique as he had learned from his Chicago professor Herbert Blumer.<sup>26</sup>

Killian found that although Southern migrants could hold divergent, undemocratic beliefs with regards to African-Americans, they generally did not act on them. To do so would have been to violate the prevailing public social norms and endanger their socioeconomic position in the city, already precarious as unskilled workers. Instead, migrants adopted a “when in Rome” outlook and kept their attitudes private while working and interacting with blacks in society. One subject expressed it thus: “One thing I don’t like about Chicago is the colored. I don’t want to do anything mean to them, but I want to be able to let them alone [...] I’ve kind of got used to sitting next to ‘em and eating in restaurants with ‘em, but I don’t like it.”<sup>27</sup> Interviewing both plant managers and employees, Killian found that even in plants where managers expressed doubt that Southerners and black workers could get along, there were few conflicts even in the smaller plants that had integrated bath and dressing rooms.<sup>28</sup> Nearly sixty years later, sociologist Elijah Anderson named these areas of the urban environment where diverse populations interacted, gained understanding through mutual experience, and spread tolerance and civility “cosmopolitan canopies.”<sup>29</sup> Some migrants even bonded across the color line based on their Southern identities and experiences as strangers up North, according to Studs Terkel in his book *Chicago:*

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<sup>26</sup> Killian, *Reflections*, 43-44.

<sup>27</sup> Killian, “Adjustment,” 68.

<sup>28</sup> Killian, “Northern Plants,” 328.

<sup>29</sup> Elijah Anderson, *The Cosmopolitan Canopy: Race and Civility in Everyday Life* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 2011).

Did you know when a Southern white meets a Southern black, say in Uptown or in the vicinity of Mrs. Chapin's house, and they discover they're from the same county, all they talk about is "back home"? "Back home" is not where they are, somewhere on Leland or Wilson. "Back home" is where they came from. They're still strangers in a strange land, no matter how long they've been up here.<sup>30</sup>

Even if migrants had been pushing a racist agenda, Killian argues, it would hardly have had the cataclysmic effect that many predicted. According to Killian, this assumption denied the existence of racism in the North without the influence of Southerners, and cast white Southern migrants as the sole perpetrators of actions that Northerners also committed, albeit without the explicit support of the law. It also severely overestimated the power and influence of this working-class group. White migrant adjustment involved "substitution of the private, informal, and indirect techniques of discrimination, characteristic of race relations in the North, for the public, formal, and direct manifestations of prejudice found in the South."<sup>31</sup> Fears of Southerners inflicting their views on the North were largely unfounded, and were more reflective of Northerners exorcising their own demons than striving to protect an imaginary peace and harmony between the races in the North. This notion is widely represented in contemporary regional and Southern studies; as Southerner and Southern historian Dewey W. Grantham, Jr. wrote in 1967: "The sectional theme may owe some of its vitality to the fact that many Americans have been able to externalize inner conflicts by focusing on the South as a deviant section."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Studs Terkel, *Chicago* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 81.

<sup>31</sup> Killian, "Adjustment," 68.

<sup>32</sup> Dewey W. Grantham, Jr. (ed.), *The South and the Sectional Image* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 2.

### White Southerners as a Minority Group

Killian expands the idea of Southerners comprising a quasi-foreign and discrete group within modern America in his 1970 book *White Southerners*. The editor of Random House's minorities in American life series requested that Killian submit an examination of white Southerners as a title for the series, and the sociologist was more than prepared to respond.<sup>33</sup> This work synthesizes his graduate studies, personal experiences, and postgraduate focus on race relations into a consideration of white Southerners as a distinct "sociological minority" group that manifested varying degrees of group consciousness in diverse environments. Killian writes:

As internal migrants in a reunited nation, white southerners leave a homeland marked by a regional consciousness. Although they are Americans, they have another identity as southerners. It is hard for them to forget this identity and it is remarkably easy for Americans in other regions to recognize them as southerners.<sup>34</sup>

While acknowledging the logical challenges of discussing a white Anglo group as a minority within America, Killian's argument centers around the inherent dissonance of twentieth-century Southern life and identity. The precarious balance between conservatism and radicalism, foreignness and hyper-Americanism, and attitudes and actions both guided and complicated the experiences of Southern whites both in and outside the South. *White Southerners* is not only about migration, but also offers a broad historical synthesis of who is a white Southerner and what that means. Chapters include "The Southern Homeland," "Marginal White Southerners" (discussing Catholics, Jews, and transplanted Northerners), and "White Southerners in a

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<sup>33</sup> R. Fred Wacker, "The Sociology of Race and Ethnicity in the Second Chicago School," in *A Second Chicago School?* ed. Gary Alan Fine, 148.

<sup>34</sup> Killian, *White Southerners*, 96.

Pluralistic America.” However, Killian devotes significant analysis to migration issues and the idea of forming or reclaiming a Southern identity once outside the “homeland.”

Killian’s thesis hinges on the labeling and treatment of white Southerners as a distinct group at home and “abroad,” as well as the adoption of a persecution mentality by white Southerners who saw themselves as singled out and stereotyped outside the South. Since the book’s publication, this statement has been explored and embraced in various degrees by Southern scholars including John Shelton Reed and James N. Gregory.<sup>35</sup> In this book, Killian argues that white Southerners have become a minority group because they are treated as one in this new environment and because they themselves accept this designation. They are highly “visible” (or in this case, audible) in their host communities, are (or at least appear to be) somewhat geographically concentrated, and are perceived as distinct by their host communities in ways that drive and reinforce this designation among themselves. This unusual status has important implications for the ways migrants adjust and assimilate (or not) to life outside the South, as well as how they perceive their neighbors and their own position within Chicago’s racial and economic hierarchies.

Killian’s ultimate finding is that white Southerners share many important characteristics with actual foreign ethnic or religious minorities, and respond to cultural friction and assimilation in ways that align with classic disadvantaged minority behavior.<sup>36</sup> Although host communities often worry and complain about the effects of minority groups on their areas in

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<sup>35</sup> See John Shelton Reed, *The Enduring South: Subcultural Persistence in Mass Society* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972) and *One South: An Ethnic Approach to Regional Culture* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1982). Also James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

<sup>36</sup> In sociology, the classic minority profile is of a group moving into a new environment in which they are less socially and economically powerful than members of their host community. Although this is not always the case, it is the most common.

terms of culture, crime, property values, etc., historically disadvantaged groups lack the clout and independence to push their own agendas and effect widespread change (if indeed there is even a significant difference between the groups).

In the case of white Southerners, although communities lamented the deterioration they felt this group would bring to their cities and openly blamed them for racial tension and race riots (particularly Detroit's 1943 riot), Killian argues that this group overwhelmingly obeyed prevailing Northern racial norms (certainly discriminatory in their own way) and posed little threat to Chicago's racial or economic status quo. Southerners were largely employed in unskilled and semi-skilled positions, and would not risk their jobs by sparking racial conflict in the workplace. As noted in his 1950s articles, Chicago's industrial workplaces were often segregated to begin with and thus did not occasion much interracial interaction for Southerners, Northerners, or European immigrants (although tensions and conflicts between different European ethnic groups were common and well-documented). Similarly, working-class Southerners were economically confined to more dilapidated neighborhoods like Uptown and had little effect on property values in middle-class or affluent areas.

Finally and perhaps most significantly, the link between white Southerners and race riots was tenuous at best. In Detroit, public opinion variously condemned black "hoodlums" and white migrants as instigators, and at least two studies described white Southerners as the primary culprits. A 1990 article analyzed statistics of arrested rioters and found no correlation between Southern origin and participation in the riot.<sup>37</sup> Interestingly enough, Killian does not discuss the racial implications of or if Southerners had a perceived or actual role in Chicago's well-known

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<sup>37</sup> Dominic J. Capeci Jr. and Martha Wilkerson, "The Detroit Rioters of 1943: A Reinterpretation," *Michigan Historical Review*, 16:1 (Spring 1990): 49-72.



riot of 1919 in either *White Southerners* or his 1949 dissertation. Beginning with a black boy's murder on a Lake Michigan beach, violence spread through the city and the prolonged clash eventually claimed thirty-eight casualties and over five hundred injuries. The official report published by the Chicago Commission on Race Relations contextualizes the event in the wider picture of riots and racial clashes around the country, emphasizing the national scope of the problem and not highlighting the South or Southerners specifically. The white participants in the riot are referred to as "hoodlums" and "gangsters" and as belonging to nefarious "athletic clubs" of shady teenage boys such as Ragen's Colts (and eventually part of the city's Italian community is implicated in the violence), but there are no overt references to white Southerners.<sup>38</sup> Although this disastrous event occurred at a key peak for black Southern migration, it was fairly early in the process of white migration, so perhaps Southern whites were not seriously considered as instigators or perpetrators separate from the larger white community, a theory supported by William M. Tuttle in *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919*.<sup>39</sup> The Cicero race riot of 1951 occurred at a high point of white migration and visibility, but arose from a white landlord violating an illegal housing covenant and drawing the ire of white residents who opposed the presence of a black veteran and his family residing in the all-white neighborhood. In this case, perhaps the guilty parties were so immediately obvious or clearly crossed regional lines that blaming the scapegoat of the moment was hardly necessary. The 1953 Trumbull Park Homes riots (again, not mentioned by Killian) resulted from a similar covenant violation and an all-white neighborhood in South Deering reacting with fear and anger to the presence of an African-American family in their midst. Again, we must appreciate the role of illegal and discriminatory

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<sup>38</sup> Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922).

<sup>39</sup> William M. Tuttle, Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1970).

housing covenants in these riots, as identified multiple times by Killian as one of the largest instigators of racial conflict but one that was largely absent from working-class neighborhoods that tended to attract recent white Southern migrants.<sup>40</sup>

### Killian After Chicago

After receiving his Ph.D. in 1949, Killian left Chicago to teach in sociology departments around the country. Unlike many of his colleagues and contemporaries, he chose to return to the South. His first position out of school was at the University of Oklahoma, followed by the University of Florida where he spent sixteen years. With colleague Ralph H. Turner, he co-authored the textbook *Collective Behavior* in 1957, a work so influential and utilized that it warranted a fourth edition in 1993. He was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1975 to study race relations in England. Other positions and visiting professorships followed, and Killian ended his full-time teaching career at the University of Massachusetts in 1984 after nearly two decades in Amherst. His other essential works focused on race relations from both sides and the future of racism in America. Along with his work with groups like the National Research Council, the Southern Regional Council, and the Anti-defamation League of B'nai B'rith, Killian published *The Impossible Revolution? Black Power and the American Dream* in 1968.<sup>41</sup> He returned to the South again as a Faculty Associate at the University of West Florida until 2000, and passed away in Pensacola in 2010 at the age of 91.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940-1960*, 2nd. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 53-54; Hirsch, "Massive Resistance in the Urban North: Trumbull Park, Chicago, 1953-1966," *Journal of American History* 82:2 (Sept. 1995): 522-550.

<sup>41</sup> Lewis M. Killian, *The Impossible Revolution? Black Power and the American Dream* (New York: Random House, 1968).

<sup>42</sup> Margaret L. Anderson, "Lewis M. Killian 1919-2010," (obituary) *ASA Footnotes* 39:2 (Feb. 2011): 14-15.

Killian is recognized by many today in the sociological world as a pioneer in the fields of race relations and collective behavior, but his contributions to American migrant studies have gone largely underappreciated even in his own field. His position as a sociologist studying those with whom he so closely identified offered unique and provocative insights into a community that seemed closed and dangerous to many in mid-century America. By examining white Southerners through the lens of social science rather than fear or sensationalism, and by drawing on the participatory fieldwork techniques developed at the University of Chicago, Killian presented the most comprehensive picture of his time of the realities and aspirations of this hugely influential migrant group. As both sociologist and Southerner, Lewis M. Killian began his career in race and minority relations by advocating for the voice of his own group and their place in the evolving American landscape, but without denying the immense troubles of his region or acting as an apologist for his people. Without prejudice or favoritism, Killian sought to introduce and explain these American neighbors to each other in a way that would facilitate dialogue and understanding, with the ultimate goal of ameliorating regional stereotypes and racial tensions. For the greater part of his life, Killian remained skeptical of America's capacity for true racial equality, but he persisted in his mission to understand group behavior in terms of group consciousness and environment and to advocate for the cooperation of all Americans in building a nation that could appreciate and grow from interracial cooperation and diversity.

## CONCLUSION

You'll know it's the place built out of Man's ceaseless failure to overcome himself. Out of Man's endless war against himself we build our successes as well as our failures. Making it the city of all cities most like Man himself – loneliest creation of all this very old poor earth.<sup>1</sup>

Chicago, as a city and as an idea, looms large in the American imagination. Throughout the twentieth century, its status as a center of both industry and crime, opportunity and danger, has compelled massive population shifts and social movements. For Southern migrants both black and white, Chicago became a beacon of hope for a new and better life. In reality, this destination became a highly-visible scene of cultural clash, conflict, and stereotypes that did not always fulfill these newcomers' ambitions.

At the same time that Chicago was becoming an industrial and commercial force to be reckoned with on the turn-of-the-century American landscape, the boundaries of the new discipline of sociology were being tested and taught at the Midwest's response to the Ivy League. The University of Chicago quickly became the bellwether for American sociology and trained generations of its students to use the city as a laboratory and conduct groundbreaking and controversial research into the dark side of urban life. At the same time, political and economic events in the South were also causing Southerners to view this Northern city as a site of opportunity and potential work as their own region and prospects collapsed around them. For them, Chicago was a different kind of laboratory: one where they tried out new occupations, new neighbors, and new lifestyles in their experiment of making a life outside the South. But ultimately, it was also a laboratory in which they themselves were research subjects.

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<sup>1</sup> Nelson Algren, *Chicago: City on the Make*, Fiftieth Anniversary Edition, annotated by David Schmittgens and Bill Savage (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 73.

The peak years of the first major wave of Southern migration in the late 1910s and 1920s coincided with the dramatic curtailment of international immigration in America, a frenzy of World War I fears about “Americanization,” and the rise to prominence of the Chicago School of sociology. Suddenly Americans from a neighboring region were the most “foreign” arrivals appearing in this Midwestern city with a long history of immigrant trials and triumphs. Concerns about international immigrants were replaced (somewhat) in the public consciousness by mid-century topics of racial conflict, civil rights, and juvenile delinquency. News of violent segregation struggles in the South and youth culture gone wild permeated the press and popular media. Roger Guy credits the press and the police with “creating and sustaining a hostile reception for southern white migrants.”<sup>2</sup> The atmosphere was thus primed to foster suspicions of Southern migrants as troublemaking young men who were bringing their lawless notions of racial interaction to the North to wreak havoc on the peaceful and civilized “natives.”

As Northern cities began to complain about Southerners in their midst, university-trained sociologists stepped in to analyze the phenomenon and what could be done to ease transitions and ultimately assimilation. The findings, based largely on documentary and anecdotal evidence, often paralleled stereotypical attitudes of the time: Southerners were another uneducated, unskilled, impoverished group moving to the city in droves that had great potential to disrupt the city’s racial balance and social fabric. Some tried to dispel these assumptions, yet presented a rather grim view of Southerners and their potential as productive citizens of the modern North. In Chicago, white migrants were curiously neglected by sociologists. The only one that deemed them worthy of full investigation was one of their own. Using participatory fieldwork techniques that differed greatly from the methods of previous sociologists, Killian’s findings revealed the

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<sup>2</sup> Roger Guy, “The Media, the Police, and Southern White Migrant Identity in Chicago, 1955-1970,” *Journal of Urban History* 26 (2000): 329-330.

story of a group that was undeniably unique and yet similar to the population of their new environments.

Southern migration continued at a variable pace throughout the twentieth century, slowing only with the renaissance of the Sunbelt South in the 1960s and '70s. In some cities like Cincinnati, Southerners formed a powerful cohesive group consciousness that persists to this day, but more commonly, Southern heritage was forgotten in a generation or two as the families that stayed committed to permanent Northern residence and moved out to the suburbs. Regional identification was replaced with racial, religious, union, or other markers that had more meaning for citizens of a major American city. Chicago in the 1960s was a remarkably tumultuous place with countless groups and ethnicities vying for a place in the metropolis, and student and political activists taking to the streets. 1968 alone saw two major riots: one on the West Side following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the other the infamous Democratic National Convention protest.

The panic over Southern migrants and the civil upheaval that never materialized in their wake largely faded from memory in light of these more dramatic (and televised) events, and even today's urban and social scholarship has not yet fully examined this period from a regional perspective. The words and experiences of diverse Southerners themselves are still missing from this narrative, as well as recognition of the impact they had on shaping the events of the twentieth century. This thesis is intended to address this unfortunate gap by telling the story of migration in one important city and expressing the power and potential that the Southern migration boom holds to teach scholars about the essential intersections of race, class, and region in the heart of America during some of the most turbulent times in our nation's history.

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