Internal Migration in the United States Rates, Selection, and Destination Choice, 1850-1940

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I study the internal migration of native-born white men in the United States using linked census data covering all possible 10- and 20-year periods 1850--1940. Inter-county migration rates were stable over time. Selection into migration on the basis of occupational status was also largely stable and was neutral or slightly negative. But the orientation of internal migration changed, declining in distance, becoming more directed towards the west, and increasingly driving urbanization. These patterns changed in the 1930s as migration became less common and less urban oriented. These results provide a clearer understanding of historic US internal migration than previously possible.