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**OCCUPATIONAL DISPARITY IN A MIGRANT METROPOLIS:
A CASE STUDY OF ATLANTA***

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Migrants, internal and international alike, have found their way to the Atlanta metropolitan area in great numbers over the last few decades. We use the 2000 Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) for the Atlanta metropolitan area to study the occupational distribution of immigrants, return migrants, primary migrants, and non-migrants. We exploit a number of aspects of Atlanta's changing population. First, between 1990 and 2000, the overall population increased by 39%. Internal migrants and immigrants are driving these changes: Return migrants, primary (or northern-born) migrants, and immigrants comprised almost 40% of the region's working-age population in 2000. Second, Atlanta has a large black population; estimates suggest that the black population increased by 62% between 1990 and 2000 to 1,202,260 persons. Finally, the area's growing immigrant population reflects growth specifically among foreign-born Asians and Hispanics. In the 2000 PUMS, foreign-born non-Hispanic Asians were 2.35% of the population, and foreign-born Hispanics were 4.5% of the population. Of course Atlanta has been dominated traditionally by a black-white dichotomy, but it has become an important regional destination for migrants of all sorts over the last twenty years, and this dynamic is changing the nature of race and ethnic relations in the community.

The promise of jobs is the main "pull" factor to Atlanta for native- and foreign-born persons. An immigrant from Columbia who lived in New York City at one time noted that in the Atlanta area, "There are more opportunities for work" (*Atlanta Journal and Constitution* 2000). But, what are the jobs like? Are immigrants over- or under-represented in certain occupations relative to native-born black and white migrants (and non-migrants)? Are black return migrants

working in more prestigious and better paying occupations, for instance, than northern-born black migrants? Are there differences among the immigrant groups; that is, are Hispanic immigrants working in different occupations compared to Asian immigrants? Does the evidence suggest the development of occupational niches in Atlanta?

We address these questions in order (1) to generally study immigrant economic adaptation vis-à-vis native-born persons (migrants and non-migrants alike) in Atlanta, (2) to analyze the ability of members of different racial and ethnic groups to obtain occupations in the primary sector of the labor market versus the secondary sector, and (3) to further develop the literature about labor market queues and the ways in which such queues function to stratify persons with different migratory experiences, and racial and ethnic backgrounds, into the occupations in which they work. Consequently, we extend dual economy theory and occupational queuing theory to immigrant and migrant economic adaptation.

We employ the 5% PUMS from the 2000 census to examine the occupational distribution of native- and foreign-born groups in the Atlanta metropolitan area. We limit our analyses to Atlanta metropolitan residents twenty-five years of age and older, and to those who last worked between 1995 and 2000. Census 2000 allowed individuals to choose multiple races, but, according to our analysis, over 98% of the population over the age of 25 in Atlanta selected only one race. Despite the small proportion of the population who chose more than one race, our study includes those individuals who identified with multiple racial categories. In the end, we include four racial/ethnic groups: non-Hispanic whites are those non-Hispanic individuals who answered “White only” as their race; non-Hispanic blacks are non-Hispanics who indicated they are Black/African American regardless of any other race/ethnicity they selected; non-Hispanic Asians are any remaining non-Hispanics who indicated that they are Asian (or Pacific Islander)

regardless of any other race/ethnicity; and Hispanics are defined as any person who listed Spanish/Hispanic/Latino regardless of any other race/ethnicity.

We use a number of other variables to further stratify our sample into different migrant groups. First, our sample is divided into those who were born in the United States (native born) and those who were born outside the country (foreign born). Second, for native-born persons we use migration status variables to indicate whether someone is a return migrant, northern-born (or primary) migrant, or non-migrant. Return migrants are those individuals who were born in the South, lived in the North in 1995, but lived in the South (specifically, Atlanta) in 2000. Northern-born migrants were born in the North, lived in the North in 1995, but resided in the South (Atlanta) in 2000. Non-migrants are those persons who were born in the South and lived there in 1995 and in 2000 (Atlanta).¹ In sum, then, we compare eight groups on occupational outcomes: non-Hispanic (NH) white return migrants, NH black return migrants, NH white non-migrants, NH black non-migrants, NH white northern-born migrants, NH black northern-born migrants, foreign-born (NH) Asian immigrants, and foreign-born Hispanic immigrants.

We calculate odds ratios for primary (professional and management occupations) versus secondary occupations, as well as other comparisons. The results indicate that white return and northern-born migrants are over-represented in the primary jobs and that black non-migrants and foreign-born Hispanics are under-represented. Also, black return and northern-born migrants are slightly over-represented in the office and administrative category. Foreign-born Hispanics are under-represented in professional jobs but very over-represented in service and construction jobs

¹ We could further delineate this group into intra-southern migrants. That is, many “non-migrants” may, in fact, have migrated to Atlanta from outside of Atlanta but within the South. We choose to remain focused on broadly-defined regional distinctions for our migrant definitions. Similarly, there is variation within the immigrant groups (e.g., Mexican immigrants, Chinese immigrants), but we prefer our more parsimonious grouping.

(odds ratio = 7.98), while foreign-born Asians are under-represented in construction jobs and more likely than foreign-born Hispanics to work in a professional or primary occupation. It appears, then, that the foreign-born groups in Atlanta are working in different jobs. In short, all individuals from the white groups are more likely to be in a professional job than the members of other groups.

We also estimate logistic regression equations predicting whether or not an individual works in a primary or secondary occupation. Based on these equations – which include a full set of control variables – we calculate predicted values. These findings suggest that about 40% of the individuals in the three white groups are predicted to hold a primary occupation, that about 30% of those individuals in the three black groups are predicted to work in such occupations, that about 30% of foreign-born Asians are predicted to hold a primary occupation, and that 19% of foreign-born Hispanics are predicted to work in primary occupations. Thus, there remains a racial and ethnic hierarchy that is related to occupational queues and migratory experiences. Interestingly, though, in a place like Atlanta, where there is a large black middle class, foreign-born Hispanics appear to be doing the worst based on occupational criteria.

The infusion of migration status complicates the story about race and ethnicity in the South. It appears, for instance, that at least in the case of occupational status in Atlanta, black northern-born migrants do slightly better than black non- and return-migrants. But, native-born whites - regardless of migration status - remain at the top of the occupational queue. Racial privilege, then, continues to dominate the South even with large-scale migration into the area, and significant political and demographic change, over the last 50 years.