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Little research has examined the employment of Black women as teachers, nurses, and librarians in the urban Black communities of the early twentieth century. The present study fills this void, analyzing Census data on the largest urban Black communities at the start of the Great Migration to cities. The results show that, in spite of the supposed advantages of the northern "Black Metropolis," Black communities in the urban North were relatively limited in their potential to offer opportunities for Black women to enter pursuits that were, at the time, mainstays of a nascent class of Black professional women.

Key words: *Black women, professional occupations, urban communities, early twentieth century United States*

The Black communities that were created in northern cities by the first wave of the Great Migration (circa 1915-1930) were widely viewed as places in which Blacks might find relief from the oppression and hardships of the Jim Crow South. Situated in the nation's urban-industrial mainstream, these communities were believed by many to hold unprecedented opportunities for Blacks to become employed in the skilled occupations that provided a route into the middle class of American life. Perhaps the strongest and most hopeful expression of this "Promised Land" story of the urban North was an idea called the "Dream of Black Metropolis" (Meier & Rudwick, 1976, p. 252).

The Dream of Black Metropolis was the belief that, in the large Black communities of major northern cities, Blacks could individually and collectively leverage the advantages of large and spatially concentrated Black populations to produce economic, social, and political benefits. Such supposed advantages included: an exploitable market of Black consumers for Black-owned businesses; a vital base of Black supporters for institutions that produced and disseminated unique forms of Black cultural expression; and a potentially formidable bloc of Black voters and social activists that could pressure the White-dominated power structure to deliver necessary public services to Black neighborhoods. In prosperous decade of the 1920s, the most ardent proponents of the Dream of Black Metropolis—namely, members of the Black professional and entrepreneurial elite—claimed that in the largest Black communities of the urban North, Blacks could achieve economic self-sufficiency, social autonomy, and political sovereignty (e.g., see Massey & Denton, 1993, pp. 115-116; Meier & Rudwick, 1976, p. 252).

The Perspective of the Black Metropolis

The idea that the socioeconomic status of Black Americans was enhanced in the sizable Black communities of northern cities during this time has inspired the scholarly perspective of the Black Metropolis (Gregory, 2005). While not endorsing the aforementioned separatist vision, this perspective holds that the concept of the Black Metropolis—defined as a Black "city in a city" positioned within a nationally prominent urban center—can inform historical and sociological understanding of the Black experience in cities in the early twentieth century.

The perspective refutes the notion that the large Black communities that arose in the urban North were dysfunctional ghettoes, emphasizing the specific advantages to Blacks of locations outside the South during this time. Such advantages included not only access to material resources, but also "political and cultural freedom of expression" and the possibility of "useful interactions with whites" (Gregory, 2005, p. 129). Owing to these advantages, the perspective asserts, the large Black communities of urban centers in the North and West generated and supported institutions—such as professional

practices, businesses, churches, newspapers, nightclubs, and theaters—that functioned independently of the larger society and uplifted these communities economically and socially.

However, this assertion appears to be based on a narrative that, while rich and compelling, is disproportionately influenced by contemporary anecdotal reports of the exceptional Black communities of New York and Chicago. Thus, it is unclear if the perspective of the Black Metropolis is applicable to a wide range of urban Black communities. One study, examining Blacks' employment in occupations that were commonly associated with the Dream of Black Metropolis in the early twentieth century, suggests that the perspective has an uncertain empirical foundation (Boyd, 2012). In particular, the study showed that, contrary to popular belief, opportunities for Blacks to enter many professional and entrepreneurial occupations after the first wave of the Great Migration were not significantly better in the urban communities of the North than in those of the South.

Black Women in the Black Metropolis

The results of this line of investigation are incomplete, however, for the findings are based mainly on analyses of occupations that were, in the early twentieth century, dominated by men. Most notable among these occupations were professional and entrepreneurial pursuits in which there were few women, in general, and very few Black women, in particular —for example, the professional occupations of doctor, dentist, and lawyer, and the entrepreneurial occupations of banker, insurance agent, and retail merchant. The number of Black women in these occupations was so small in many cities, in fact, that the relevant data were often incomplete (that is, available for only a handful of cities) or did not exist at all. Hence, analyses of these women for a wide range of occupations and urban centers were precluded. It follows that we know relatively little about the employment of Black women in occupations that were linked to the idea of the Black Metropolis in large Black communities of the early twentieth century.

Of course, this is not to say that we have no knowledge of Black women's employment in these communities. Several

studies, focusing on the northern cities that had the largest Black communities after the first wave of the Great Migration, have analyzed the concentration of these women in the lowly pursuit of domestic service. These studies have described the low pay, long hours, and degrading working conditions of the Black women who labored as cooks, maids, child-care providers, and laundresses in the homes of upper-status Whites (Drake & Cayton, 1962, p. 242; Marks, 1989, pp. 45-48; Trotter, 1993, p. 60). Thus, research on Black women in the large Black communities of northern cities that arose during the first wave of the Great Migration has mainly examined the employment of these women in pursuits that were at or near the bottom of the occupational structure.

To be sure, this orientation reflects the fact that, at this time, most employed Black women toiled in the lower echelon of the labor force. But even in the early twentieth century, Black women worked in a wide range of occupations, including professional occupations (discussed below) that have yet to be analyzed in studies of the Black Metropolis. Black women in these occupations—teachers, nurses, and librarians, for example—contributed to the socioeconomic progress of Black communities (e.g., see Shaw, 1996) and, therefore, such occupations, while overlooked in past research, should be considered central to the Dream of Black Metropolis. Arguably, then, there is a need to expand the scope of research on the employment of Black women in the cities that were major destinations of first wave of the Great Migration. Specifically, there is a need to enlarge this scope to include those occupations that provided Black women with their greatest opportunities to be employed as professional workers.

The Present Study

This investigation will advance our knowledge of how Black women fared in the large urban Black communities of the early twentieth century by examining the proportion of the employment of these women in occupations that the U.S. Census Bureau defined as "professional services." Table 1 shows the professional services occupations in which the largest numbers of women were employed in 1930, the year generally used to denote the end of the first wave of the Great

Migration (Marks, 1989; Tolnay, 2003). Not surprisingly, most of the women who were employed in the professional services category were "teachers (school)": 56.0 percent of all women in this category (853,967 of 1,526,234) and 72.4 percent of Black women in this category (45,672 of 63,027). On the basis of these statistics, a contemporary study observed, "School teaching ... is the principal Negro profession" (Myrdal, 1944, p. 318). It is likely, furthermore, that many of the women who were employed as "musicians and teachers of music" or as "artists, sculptors, and teachers of art" were also teachers of some kind, but it is impossible to know the exact numbers with these data. The vast majority of Black women who worked as teachers during this time taught in schools or other settings that were racially segregated, especially in the South (e.g., see Myrdal, 1944, pp. 318-320).

Table 1. The Professional Services Occupations in which the Largest Numbers of Women were Employed: United States, 1930.

U.S. Census occupational categories	Total women	Black women
Teachers (school)	853,967	45,672
Trained nurses	288,737	5,581
Musicians and teachers of music	79,611	2,836
Librarians	27,056	180
Social and welfare workers	24,592	827
Artists, sculptors, and teachers of art	21,644	200
Professional services (total)	1,526,234	63,027
Total employed women (U.S.)	10,752,116	1,840,642

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census (1933a, Table 3).

In analyzing the employment of Black women in these occupations, the study will test two competing hypotheses. The first hypothesis is based on the perspective of the Black Metropolis. This perspective suggests that the opportunity structure of the urban North was much more favorable to Black women than was that of the urban South. In the urban North, the perspective asserts, Black women could access the resources of larger and more spatially concentrated Black communities (Gregory, 2005, p. 124) and could also, as noted

above, find relief from the *de jure* racial restrictions that characterized the urban South and, perhaps, develop useful relationships with Whites (Gregory, 2005, p. 129). Hypothesis 1, then, is that the proportion of Black women employed in the above professional occupations was greater in northern cities than in southern cities.

The second hypothesis is derived from research that advocates a "revisionist view" of the urban Black communities of the early twentieth century. This research shows that the advantages of the urban North for Blacks after the Great Migration were far more limited than the famous "Promised Land" story has suggested. While not denying the possible benefits of northern cities (e.g., greater political and civil rights; greater freedom of cultural expression), this research maintains that overpowering obstacles may have prevented Blacks from fully realizing the potential economic rewards of such locations (Eichenlaub, Tolnay, & Alexander, 2010; Marks, 1989, pp. 174-176). These obstacles included: the exclusion of Blacks from workplaces, public accommodations, and neighborhoods by intense racial prejudice and discrimination (Lieberson, 1980; Massey & Denton, 1993; Wilson, 1978); the disintegration of the social organization of Black communities by the cultural and psychological upheavals of an urban milieu that was alien to many of the southern migrants (Frazier, 1966); and the saturation of the labor market opportunities and occupational niches of Blacks by the heavy influx of migrants from the South (Lieberson, 1980, pp. 379-381). Thus, Hypothesis 2 is that the proportion of Black women employed in the aforementioned professional occupations was not significantly different in northern and southern cities.

Units of Analysis

Consistent with the focus of the perspective of the Black Metropolis on cities with the most substantial Black populations, the units of analysis will be the urban centers that held the nation's 25 largest Black communities in 1930 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1933b, Table 23). Fourteen of these cities are outside of the South. Called "northern" for sake of simplicity, they are Baltimore, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Indianapolis, Kansas City (Missouri), Los Angeles, New York,

Newark (New Jersey), Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Saint Louis, and Washington, DC. Baltimore and Washington, DC, are classified as northern cities on the basis of a widely accepted sociological definition of the South (Reed, 1972, pp. 13-15). According to the perspective of the Black Metropolis, the Black communities of these 14 northern cities—the principal destinations of the first wave of the Great Migration—were the places that, at the time, offered the best opportunities for pursuit of the Dream of Black Metropolis (Gregory, 2005, p. 113). The 11 southern cities are Atlanta, Birmingham, Dallas, Houston, Jacksonville (Florida), Louisville, Memphis, Nashville, New Orleans, Norfolk, and Richmond.

Data and Variables

The main dependent variables, calculated at the city level with Census data for 1930 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1933c, Table 12), measure the proportion of the employment of Black women in the six professional services occupations discussed above. These variables are computed as, $OR_X = (B_X / O_X) / (B_O / O_O)$, where: OR_X is the relative probability (that is, the odds ratio) of Black women's employment in occupation *X*; B_X is the number of Black women employed in occupation *X*; O_X is the number of non-Black women employed in occupation *X*; B_O is the number of Black women employed in all other occupations in the workforce; and O_O is the number of non-Black women employed in all other occupations in the workforce. OR_X is preferable to other measures of employment (e.g., a measure of occupational representation) because it is unaffected by the relative size of the workforce of the group examined (Logan, Alba, & McNulty, 1994; Wilson, 2003).

The analysis will also include two supplemental dependent variables, both of which are based on the Census-defined occupation, "nurses (not trained)." This pursuit, classified by the Census Bureau as a "domestic and personal services" occupation, provides a potentially interesting contrast with the professional services occupation, "trained nurses." The proportion of the employment of Black women as "nurses (not trained)" (calculated in the manner described above for OR_X) will be examined, along with another dependent variable, the *nursing ratio*. This ratio (NR) will be operationally defined as

the likelihood of the employment of Black women as trained nurses (OR_{TN}) divided by the likelihood of the employment of these women as untrained nurses (OR_{UN}), that is, $NR = OR_{TN} / OR_{UN}$. The values of the nursing ratio reflect the probability that Black women were employed as trained nurses relative to the probability that they were employed as untrained nurses. The perspective of the Black Metropolis holds that the opportunity structure of the urban North was superior to that of the urban South and, therefore, predicts that the values of the nursing ratio were, on the average, higher in northern cities than in southern cities.

The main independent variable is a dummy variable for region (1 = North, 0 = South). Hypothesis 1 predicts that the slope coefficient of this variable will be positive and significant. Hypothesis 2 predicts that the coefficient will be non-significant.

The other independent variables are suggested by studies reviewed earlier. The absolute size of a city's Black population in 1930 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1933b, Table 23), logged to amend its skew, is included to take account of the potential of a Black community to generate and sustain a variety of ethnicity-based institutions and subcultures (Fischer, 1975, p. 1325). A large Black population was supposedly a valuable "internal resource" for pursuit of the Dream of Black Metropolis in the early twentieth century (Gregory, 2005, p. 124). A large Black population could potentially give rise to an exploitable market of Black consumers for Black entrepreneurs, a formidable bloc of Black voters for Black politicians, and an enthusiastic audience of Black patrons for Black entertainers and artists.

The residential segregation of Blacks from Whites in 1930, measured by the index of dissimilarity, is also included as an independent variable to take account of the extent to which Blacks lived in neighborhoods with other Blacks. The studies cited earlier indicate that residential segregation by race became one of the most prominent features of urban centers in the early twentieth century (e.g., Massey & Denton, 1993). Ranging from zero to one, the index values reflect the proportion of Blacks (or Whites) that would have to move to create an "even" residential distribution of Blacks and Whites in the city —that is, a distribution in which the racial composition of each neighborhood is the same as the racial composition of the

entire city (Massey & Denton, 1993, p. 20). The values of the index of dissimilarity, computed by Cutler, Glaeser, and Vigdor (1999) with Census data, were accessed from the website, <trinity.aas.duke.edu/~vigdor/segregation>, which is maintained by the last author. Although these values are based on wards, they "provide a reasonably accurate view of segregation levels" for cities during the study period (Cutler, Glaeser, & Vigdor, 1999, p. 499).

Values of the index were missing for Birmingham, Dallas, Houston, and Norfolk and were estimated with linear interpolation using the index values of other time-points in the data set cited above. The ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression results obtained in the analyses that included the estimated values (Table 2) were virtually identical ($r = 0.991$) to OLS regression results obtained in analyses that excluded the missing values (available on request). The substantive interpretations of the two sets of estimates, moreover, were exactly the same.

Results and Discussion

The estimates of the regression analyses in Table 2 show that, for three of the six professional occupations examined, the employment of Black women was significantly more likely in the large Black communities of the urban North than in those of the urban South. Hence, there is mixed support for Hypothesis 1, which predicted, based on the perspective of the Black Metropolis, that in the wake of the first wave of the Great Migration, opportunities for Black women to enter these occupations were greater in northern cities than in southern cities.

The employment of these women as musicians and teachers of music and as artists, sculptors, and teachers of art was, in accord with this perspective, significantly more likely in the urban North than in the urban South (b's = 0.31 and 0.08). Perhaps this was because, in the large Black communities of northern cities, Black women had unique opportunities to become affiliated with the entertainment and artistic subcultures that arose in such places after the first wave of the Great Migration. The perspective of the Black Metropolis holds that these subcultures were particularly vibrant in the large Black communities of the urban North and had no counterparts in the urban South (Gregory, 2005, pp. 124-142). In the northern

communities, there were greater opportunities for Black musicians to entertain White and racially mixed audiences and for Black artists to exhibit their work in White-owned art galleries and to secure the support of White patrons. There were also greater opportunities for Black musicians and artists to have useful interactions with Whites in these and other creative fields. Such opportunities, the perspective of the Black Metropolis argues, were virtually nonexistent—and almost unimaginable—in the South in the early twentieth century (Gregory, 2005, p. 124).

Table 2. Regression Analyses of the Employment of Black Women in the 25 Largest Urban Black Communities, 1930 (continued next page)

	Region (1 = North)		Black population (logged)		Residential segregation	
Occupations	*Slope*	*p-value*	*Slope*	*p-value*	*Slope*	*p-value*
Musicians and teachers of music	0.31**	< 0.01	-0.01	0.40	0.18	0.19
Social and welfare workers	0.20**	0.01	-0.10**	0.01	0.52**	0.01
Artists, sculptors, and teachers of art[a]	0.08*	0.03	< 0.01	0.47	-0.01	0.46
Trained nurses	0.01	0.45	0.01	0.36	0.19	0.12
Teachers (school)	-0.03	0.37	< 0.01	0.47	-0.34	0.12
Librarians[b]	-0.06	0.13	-0.01	0.40	0.14	0.19
Nurses (not trained)	-0.93**	< 0.01	0.15	0.14	0.62	0.19
Nursing ratio	0.20	0.06	-0.01	0.43	0.25	0.25

Notes: Occupations are ranked by the value of the partial slope coefficient of the region dummy variable. All p-values are one-tailed.
** $p \leq 0.01$, $p \leq 0.05$ (one-tailed tests)
a Missing Birmingham, Jacksonville, Nashville, and Pittsburgh.
b Missing Birmingham and Jacksonville.

Also consistent with the Black Metropolis perspective, the employment of Black women as social and welfare workers was significantly more likely in the urban North than in the urban South (b = 0.20), indicating that in the former region, Black women had greater opportunities to perform social

work in Black communities. Perhaps in the less traditional and less restrictive cultural and political milieus of northern cities, Black women encountered fewer obstacles to entering the field of social work. Perhaps, too, there were, in these cities, special needs for social welfare services in Black communities—for example, the need to help the southern migrants adjust to their new surroundings (Grossman, 1989)—that created opportunities for Black women to become social workers.

Table 2. Regression Analyses of the Employment of Black Women in the 25 Largest Urban Black Communities, 1930 (continued from previous page)

Occupations	*Intercept*	*Adj. R2*	*p-value*
Musicians and teachers of music	0.22	0.67	< 0.01
Social and welfare workers	1.05	0.61	< 0.01
Artists, sculptors, and teachers of art[a]	0.01	0.21	0.07
Trained nurses	-0.09	0.03	0.32
Teachers (school)	0.57	0.04	0.29
Librarians[b]	0.13	-0.07	0.68
Nurses (not trained)	-0.72	0.43	< 0.01
Nursing ratio	0.15	0.18	0.07

Notes: Occupations are ranked by the value of the partial slope coefficient of the region dummy variable. All p-values are one-tailed.
** $p \leq 0.01$, $p \leq 0.05$ (one-tailed tests)
a Missing Birmingham, Jacksonville, Nashville, and Pittsburgh.
b Missing Birmingham and Jacksonville.

If White social workers, wishing to avoid contact with Blacks, were unwilling to provide such services, then the resulting dearth of social workers would have enhanced opportunities for Black women to provide social welfare services in Black communities. This racial avoidance explanation, while speculative, is bolstered by the significant, positive association of the likelihood of Black women's employment as social and welfare workers with residential segregation by race ($b = 0.52$).

The association implies that the opportunities for Black women to become social and welfare workers were most auspicious in those cities in which Whites made their greatest efforts to spatially distance themselves from Black communities.

However, contrary to the perspective of the Black Metropolis, the employment of Black women as school teachers, trained nurses, or librarians was no more likely in the urban North than in the urban South. Thus, in support of Hypothesis 2, the opportunities for Black women to enter the occupations that were mainstays of a class of Black professional women (Shaw, 1996) were no better in northern cities than in southern cities. True, the nursing ratio for Black women was, in agreement with the Black Metropolis perspective, greater in the urban North ($b = 0.20$). Yet, this regional difference was only marginally significant ($p = 0.06$), and it was due mainly to the significantly lower likelihood of Black women's employment as untrained nurses in northern cities compared to southern cities ($b = -0.93$). Perhaps the opportunities for Black women to avoid the lowly pursuit of untrained nursing, a domestic and personal services occupation, were greater in the urban North because of the more diversified industrial economies of the region.

Conclusions

The regional equality of the employment of Black women as school teachers and trained nurses undermines a key assertion of the perspective of the Black Metropolis. These occupations were the professional services in which the largest numbers of Black women were employed in the early twentieth century (Table 1). Thus, the findings suggest that the overall chances of Black women becoming professional services workers in municipally-supported institutions, such as schools and hospitals (as well as libraries), were not substantively different in northern cities than in southern cities after the first wave of the Great Migration. It follows that, during this time, the large Black communities of the urban North, despite their numerous advantages, were far more limited in their potential to offer opportunities for Black women to become professional services workers than the perspective of the Black Metropolis has

implied. This conclusion accords with the "revisionist view" that challenges the conventional wisdom that, in the aftermath of the Great Migration, urban centers outside the South were springboards for Blacks' socioeconomic advancement (Eichenlaub et al., 2010).

Why were the opportunities for Black women in northern cities relatively limited? Perhaps it was because of greater barriers to enter professional occupations in these cities. Consider the case of teaching. The formal educational requirements for school teachers were often much higher in the North than in the South. In point of fact, it was common in the early twentieth century for southern schools to hire uncertified Black teachers, who could then be paid substandard salaries (Myrdal, 1944, p. 320). In addition, because of the *de jure* racial segregation of schools in the South, Black teachers in the region had "a complete monopoly on the jobs in Negro schools." Conversely, in the North, where schools were less likely to be racially segregated, it was more difficult for Black teachers to secure employment because of racial discrimination (Myrdal, 1944, p. 319).

It follows, too, that during the early twentieth century, the best prospects for Black women to become professional workers were found in a narrow range of occupations that were anchored in the large Black communities of northern cities. These were occupations that were affiliated with the entertainment and artistic subcultures of these communities—namely, musicians and teachers of music, and artists, sculptors, and teachers of art—and occupations that delivered much-needed public services to their residents—namely, social and welfare workers. To some extent, then, the Black Metropolis of the urban North did offer superior opportunities for Black women to enter professional services occupations in the early twentieth century. But these opportunities were limited to occupations in which relatively few Black women were employed (Table 1), that is, occupations that had little potential to substantially expand the class of Black professional women during this time.

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Appendix

Table A. Occupations in the 25 Largest Black Communities, 1930.

Occupations	Mean	SD
Nurses (unskilled)	0.81	0.56
Musicians and teachers of music	0.37	0.21
Teachers (school)	0.34	0.18
Social and welfare workers	0.29	0.21
Trained nurses	0.13	0.10
Librarians[a]	0.07	0.09
Artists, sculptors, and teachers of art[b]	0.07	0.07
Nursing ratio	0.24	0.24
Black population (logged)	11.24	0.63
Residential segregation	0.50	0.17
Region (1 = North)	0.56	0.51

[a] Missing Birmingham and Jacksonville.
[b] Missing Birmingham, Jacksonville, Nashville, and Pittsburgh.