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CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC
REFUGEES AND THE FUTURE OF
AMERICAN CITIES

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PREAMBLE

History informs us that some people, especially the wealthy, typically flee cities in response to pandemics and other major catastrophes.¹ Media accounts and preliminary empirical research suggest that the response to the COVID-19 pandemic is no exception. Nearly a half million people reportedly fled hard-hit New York City within two months of the World Health Organization declaring the coronavirus disease a global pandemic.²

Some coronavirus pandemic refugees headed to nearby suburbs, others headed to second homes and vacation spots in other states, and still others moved back home to live with parents.³ Many of those leaving the state were residents of some of New York City's most wealthy neighborhoods.⁴ Others were renters in the city who lost their jobs in the economic shutdown and either could no longer afford to pay their rent or tolerate the lockdown in what otherwise was a bustling city with almost limitless opportunities for social interaction.⁵

Is the pandemic-induced flight from New York City and other U.S urban centers temporary and destined to reverse itself once the pandemic is contained? Or, alternatively, will the pandemic accelerate an out-migration trend already underway—given mandates on social distancing in daily interactions, shifting preferences for less dense living, and the growing trend toward remote work in both the private and public sectors of the economy?⁶

¹Michael Edelstein, David Heymann, and Khalid Koser, 2014, "Health Crises and Migration," *Forced Migration Review*, FMR 45, available at <https://www.fmreview.org/crisis/edelstein-heyman-koser>. The note that "Large scale population movement as a direct result of a health crisis is rare. When it does occur, migration tends to be internal (to regions directly outside the immediate crisis zone), temporary, and early on in the health crisis when information is often scarce, contradictory or inaccurate."

²According to Sound Health, Manhattan's population fell by almost 20 percent between March 1 and May 1, 2020. SOHO, West Village, Morningside Heights, the Upper East Side, the Financial District, Midtown, Gramercy and Brooklyn Heights reportedly "emptied by at least 40 percent." See "Young People are Joining the Rich in Leaving NYC for Cheaper, Less Dense Cities After Coronavirus," *Sound Health and Lasting Wealth*, available at <https://www.soundhealthandlastingwealth.com/covid-19/young-people-are-joining-the-rich-in-leaving-nyc-for-cheaper-less-dense-cities-after-coronavirus/>.

³Miriam Hall, 2020, "Could the Coronavirus Be A 'Turning Point' for New Yorkers to Leave EnMasse?," *Bisnow New York*, April 6, available at <https://www.bisnow.com/new-york/news/economy/population-loss-coronavirus-migration-103754>; Bonnie Kristian, 2020, "The Great Coronavirus Migration," *The Week*, March 20, available at <https://theweek.com/articles/903397/great-coronavirus-migration>.

⁴As one writer put it,

"The neighborhoods driving the exodus do not resemble the city as a whole. The residents from these places are mostly white in a city that's mostly not. Residents from these places are more than twice as likely to have a college degree. These places have higher rents and lower poverty rates. People who live there are more likely to be able to walk or bike to work, or to work from home....More than half of these neighborhood residents have household incomes of more than \$100,000; nearly one in three earn more than \$200,000."

See Kevin Quealy, 2020, "The Richest Neighborhoods Emptied Out Most as Coronavirus Hit New York City," *The New York Times*, May 15, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/05/15/upshot/who-left-new-york-coronavirus.html?action=click&module=Editors%20Picks&pgtype=Homepage>. Also see Edward Helmore, 2020, "Coronavirus Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous: How the 1% Are Coping," *The Guardian*, March 13, available at <https://www.fmreview.org/crisis/edelstein-heyman-koser>; Hayley C. Cuccinello, 2020, "Billionaire Tracker: Actions the World's Wealthiest Are Taking in Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic," *Forbes*, June 25, available at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/hayleycuccinello/2020/03/17/billionaire-tracker-covid-19/#b1efc27e697b>

⁵In 2019, median rent in Manhattan reportedly was \$3500 a month. See Miriam Hall, 2020, "Could the Coronavirus Be A 'Turning Point' for New Yorkers to Leave EnMasse?," *Bisnow New York*, April 6, available at <https://www.bisnow.com/new-york/news/economy/population-loss-coronavirus-migration-103754>

⁶Mihir Zaveri, 2020, "The Uncertain future of Midtown," *The New York Times*, July 27, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/27/nyregion/nyc-midtown-manhattan-coronavirus.html?searchResultPosition=1>.

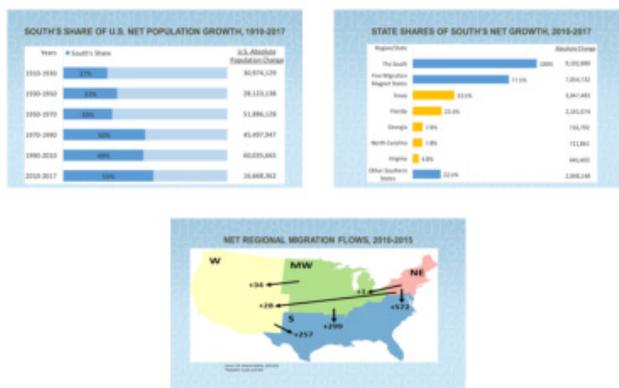
Only time will tell, especially since the coronavirus pandemic is far from over and other overlapping crises, including the Black Lives Matter protest movement, threats of adverse weather events during the current Atlantic Hurricane season, and potential for irregularities in November election activity across the country, could make matters worse. However, an overview of pre-pandemic migration trends and recent public and private sector efforts to adjust or respond to the coronavirus pandemic should provide insights into what potentially could happen moving forward. These issues have enormous implications for the future form and function of cities of all sizes as well as suburban, exurban, and rural communities.

PRE-PANDEMIC MIGRATION TRENDS

A major population redistribution trend was well underway in the U.S. prior to the coronavirus pandemic.⁷ In every decade since 1970, over half of net U.S. population growth has occurred in the South. Owing to a host of economic and race issues, the South gained no more than one third of net national population growth in the seven decades prior to 1970 (Figure 1A).

Emblematic of the post-1970 redistribution trend, the South captured 55% (9.1 million) of nation’s net population gain (16.7 million) between 2010 and 2017. The majority of the net growth was concentrated in five states: Texas, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia. The other 13 southern states combined captured only 22% of the region’s net growth during this period (Figure 1B). The South’s emergence as the nation’s primary growth node was driven in large measure by net migration from the other three U.S. regions—especially the Northeast but also the Midwest and the West (Figure 1C).

The Emergence of the South As A Migration Magnet



Ten states were the top net exporters of population in 2017. Four were in the Northeast (New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Connecticut), two were in the Midwest (Illinois and Kansas), and two were in the West (California and Hawaii). Only two were in the South (Maryland and Louisiana). New York was, by far, the number one exporter of population, losing an average of 458 people every day in 2017. New Jersey, California, and Illinois lost between 200 and 395 people daily. The six remaining top net exporters of population lost between 37 and 80 people each day in 2017.

⁷James H. Johnson, Jr. and Allan M. Parnell, 2019, "Seismic Shifts," Business Officer, July/August, available at <https://businessofficermagazine.org/features/seismic-shifts/>.

(Figure 2)

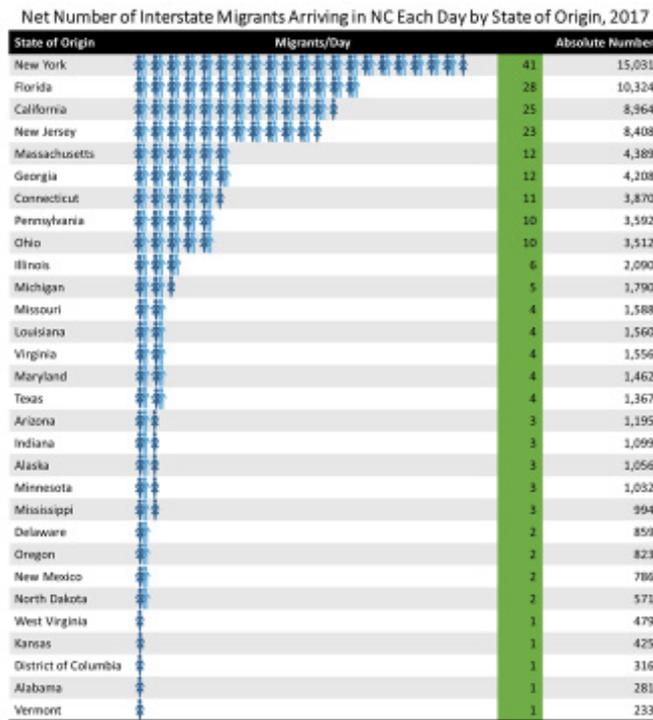
Top 10 Net Exporters and Net Importers of Population, U.S. States, 2017

| Net Exporters | | State | Net Importers | |
|-----------------|--------------|----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Absolute Number | Migrants/Day | | Migrants/Day | Absolute Number |
| -167,328 | -458 | New York | | |
| -144,343 | -395 | Illinois | | |
| -137,895 | -378 | California | | |
| -72,855 | -200 | New Jersey | | |
| -29,376 | -80 | Louisiana | | |
| -26,734 | -73 | Massachusetts | | |
| -20,140 | -55 | Hawaii | | |
| -18,246 | -50 | Maryland | | |
| -15,646 | -43 | Connecticut | | |
| -13,506 | -37 | Kansas | | |
| | | Florida | 326 | 118,890 |
| | | Arizona | 270 | 98,513 |
| | | North Carolina | 194 | 70,628 |
| | | Washington | 170 | 61,974 |
| | | Texas | 157 | 57,173 |
| | | Oregon | 110 | 40,059 |
| | | South Carolina | 103 | 37,776 |
| | | Tennessee | 99 | 36,264 |
| | | Nevada | 95 | 34,848 |
| | | Colorado | 89 | 32,657 |

A radically different set of states were the nation’s top ten net importers of population in 2017. As Figure 2 shows, five were in the South (Florida, North Carolina, Texas, South Carolina, and Tennessee) and the other five were in the West (Arizona, Washington, Oregon, Nevada, and Colorado). Florida and Arizona were the top migrant destinations, receiving on average 326 and 270 migrants each day in 2017, respectively. Each of the next five net importer states (North Carolina, Washington, Texas, Georgia, and South Carolina) received between 100 and 200 migrants daily. The remaining three states (Tennessee, Nevada, and Colorado) gained an average of between 89 and 99 migrants each day in 2017.

North Carolina followed Florida and Arizona as the third most popular migration destination, gaining 194 transplants every day in 2017. New York was the leading next exporter of population to North Carolina, with an average 41 transplants arriving each day. Between 10 and 28 migrants arrived each day from eight other states (Florida, California, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Georgia, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Ohio). Between one and six migrants arrived every day from another 20 states plus Washington DC .

(Figure 3)



These single year statistics reflect longer-term gross migration trends. Between 2010 and 2018, for example, the state of New York lost 1.4 million people through net out-migration, an average of 417 people each day over this nine-year period (Table 1). The share of out-migrants was greater than the share of in-migrants across all age groups (Table 2). Compared to non-migrants, two noteworthy age groups—25<35 and 35<45—were over-represented in the out flow and under-represented in the in-flow, which indicates New York was losing prime working age talent.⁸

Table 1: Gross Migration, New York State, 2010-2018

| Year | In-Migration | Out-Migration | Net Migration | Migrants/Day |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| 2018 | 254,447 | 458,014 | -203,567 | -558 |
| 2017 | 285,252 | 452,580 | -167,328 | -458 |
| 2016 | 260,723 | 450,136 | -189,413 | -519 |
| 2015 | 257,611 | 448,855 | -191,244 | -524 |
| 2014 | 258,571 | 424,074 | -165,503 | -453 |
| 2013 | 272,066 | 401,440 | -129,374 | -354 |
| 2012 | 270,053 | 405,864 | -135,811 | -372 |
| 2011 | 282,209 | 377,800 | -95,591 | -261 |
| 2010 | 269,427 | 363,139 | -93,712 | -257 |
| 2010-2018 | 2,410,359 | 3,781,902 | -1,371,543 | -417 |

Source: American Community Survey, State to State Migration Flows, 2010-2018

⁸Horn reports large cities of more than a half million lost an average of 27,000 residents between the ages of 25 and 39 in 2018. They loss an average of 54,000 in 2017. He asserts that this is evidence of a slowing the urban revival that began at the beginning of the decade. Moshie Horn, 2019, "Why Millennials are Leaving the City for the Suburbs," Neighbor News, December 3, available at <https://patch.com/new-york/brownsville/why-millennials-are-leaving-city-suburbs>.

Table 2: Shares of Non-Migrant, In-Migrant, and Out-Migrant Tax Returns by Age, State of New York, 2016-2017

| Type of Returns | <26 | 26<35 | 35<45 | 45<55 | 55<65 | 65+ | Total |
|-----------------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|------------------|
| Non-Migrant | 8% | 19% | 17% | 19% | 18% | 18% | 7,421,285 |
| In-Flow | 13% | 26% | 9% | 5% | 4% | 5% | 287,324 |
| Out-Flow | 15% | 37% | 18% | 10% | 9% | 11% | 290,076 |

Source: IRS Migration File, 2016-2017

North Carolina’s attractiveness as a migration destination also started well before 2017. Between 2010 and 2018, the state’s population increased by close a half million (495,379) through net in-migration. During this nine-year period, the state gained on average 151 migrants each day (Table 3).

As Figure 4 shows, North Carolina experienced net in-migration flows from large-, medium-, and small-sized metropolitan areas as well as micropolitan and rural communities throughout the nation. Moreover, the newcomers to North Carolina between 2017 and 2018 brought substantial value to the state. One indicator of their value: across the age spectrum, in-migrants had higher per-capita adjusted gross incomes than both non-migrants and out-migrants—a major boost to the state’s economy and tax base (Tables 4 & 5).

Table 3: Gross Migration, State of North Carolina, 2010-2018

| Year | In-Migration | Out-Migration | Net Migration | Migrants/Day |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| 2018 | 318,681 | 238,947 | 79,731 | +218 |
| 2017 | 313,834 | 243,206 | 70,628 | +194 |
| 2016 | 330,896 | 256,563 | 74,333 | +204 |
| 2015 | 310,612 | 237,206 | 73,406 | +201 |
| 2014 | 286,523 | 248,938 | 37,585 | +103 |
| 2013 | 275,922 | 247,090 | 28,832 | +79 |
| 2012 | 273,149 | 238,663 | 34,486 | +94 |
| 2011 | 265,291 | 225,147 | 40,144 | +110 |
| 2010 | 263,256 | 207,025 | 56,231 | +154 |
| 2010-2018 | 2,638,164 | 2,142,785 | 495,379 | +151 |

Source: American Community Survey, State to State Migration Flows, 2010-2018

⁹Wei Lu and Alexandre Tanzi, 2019, “More People are Leaving NYC Daily Than Any Other U.S. City,” Bloomberg, August 29, available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-08-29/new-york-city-metro-area-exodus-soars-to-277-people-every-day>. Notably, ACS county-to-county migration data reveal that New York City lost 35,378 people to other counties with New York State and 83,795 to a different state in the U.S. between 2012 and 2016.

Table 4: Differences in Per Capita Adjusted Gross Incomes of North Carolina In-Migrants & Out-Migrants by Age, 2017-2018

| Age | In-Flow AGI | Out-Flow AGI | Difference |
|-------------|-------------|--------------|------------|
| All Ages | \$36,385 | \$32,338 | \$4,074 |
| Under 26 | \$20,228 | \$19,778 | \$ 450 |
| 26 under 35 | \$27,595 | \$26,504 | \$1,091 |
| 35 under 45 | \$30,242 | \$27,002 | \$3,240 |
| 45 under 55 | \$46,436 | \$44,771 | \$1,665 |
| 55 under 65 | \$67,644 | \$62,166 | \$5,478 |
| 65 and over | \$59,233 | \$51,719 | \$7,514 |

Source: IRS Migration File, 2017-2018

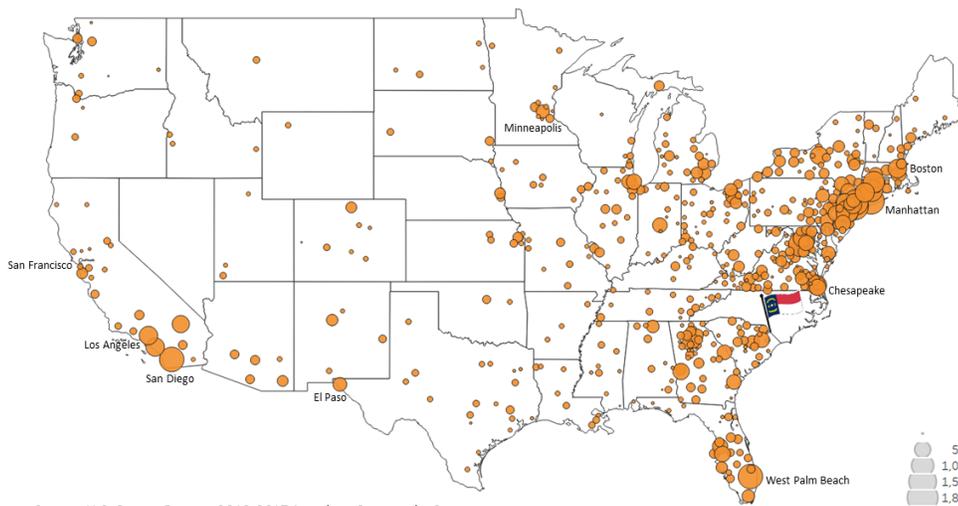
Table 5: Differences in Per Capita Adjusted Gross Incomes of North Carolina In-Migrants & Non-Migrants by Age, 2017-2018

| Age | In-Flow AGI | Out-Flow AGI | Difference |
|-------------|-------------|--------------|------------|
| All Ages | \$36,385 | \$34,072 | \$ 2,313 |
| Under 26 | \$20,228 | \$17,061 | \$ 3,167 |
| 26 under 35 | \$27,595 | \$21,819 | \$ 5,776 |
| 35 under 45 | \$30,242 | \$25,842 | \$ 4,440 |
| 45 under 55 | \$46,436 | \$37,745 | \$ 8,691 |
| 55 under 65 | \$67,644 | \$48,991 | \$18,653 |
| 65 and over | \$59,233 | \$47,483 | \$11,750 |

Source: IRS Migration File, 2017-2018

(Figure 4)

Origins of Net Migration Flows to North Carolina, 2013-2017



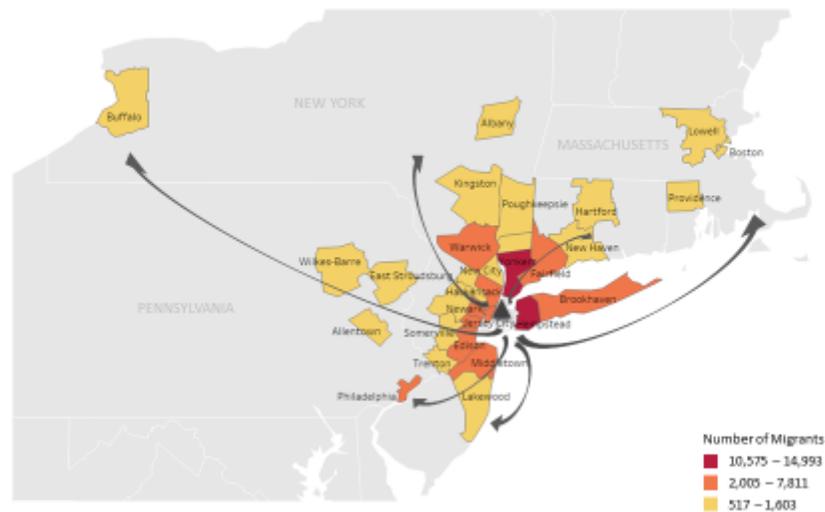
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey

Transplants from New York City played a major role in the redistribution of population to the South. Prior to the pandemic, New York City lost 227 residents per day through net out-migration in 2018.⁹ Continuing a pre-pandemic trend and paralleling the exodus during the pandemic, a significant share of those leaving relocated to nearby dormitory suburbs and other more affordable communities in the Northeast (Figure 5). However, some made long distance moves to small, medium, and large-sized cities and towns in other regions of the U.S. (Figure 6).

Notably, as Figure 7 shows, there were salient flows into North Carolina’s two largest cities (Charlotte and Raleigh); centers of governance (Raleigh) and finance (Charlotte); higher education, health care, and innovation hubs (Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill, Greensboro, Greenville, Fayetteville, Wilmington and Winston-Salem); military towns (Fayetteville and Jacksonville); and amenity rich retirement communities (Asheville and Wilmington). Relocation to these communities constituted a form of life style migration that also characterized the redistribution of population from New York City and other northeastern cities into select cities in, among other southern states, Tennessee (Nashville and Chattanooga) and Texas (Austin).

(Figure 5)

New York City, NY
Out Migration Fields in the Northeast, 2017-2018



Source: IRS Migration File

(Figure 6)

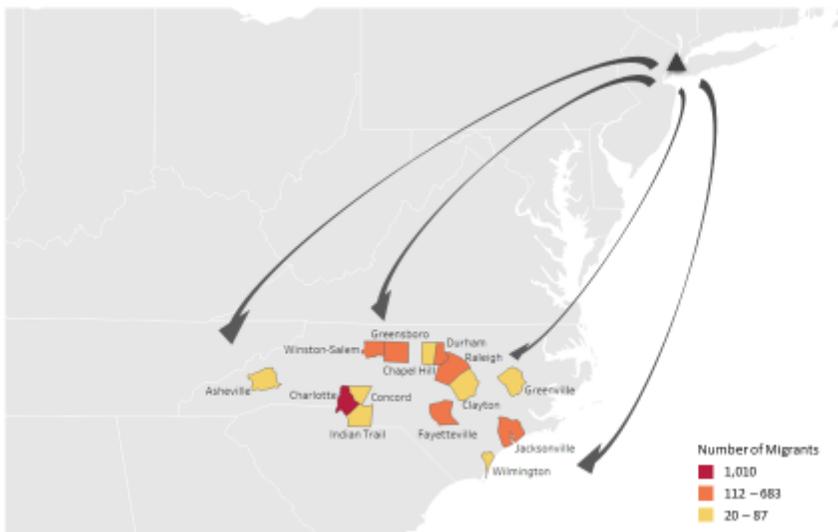
New York City, NY
Out Migration Fields in Other Regions, 2017-2018



Source: IRS Migration File

(Figure 7)

New York City, NY
Out Migration Fields in North Carolina, 2017-2018



Source: IRS Migration File

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. CITIES

Studies of earlier pandemics and other major crises suggest that the exodus from New York City observed during the coronavirus pandemic may be temporary. In past pandemics, refugees reportedly have typically returned remaining attracted to the social and cultural dynamism cities like New York offer.¹⁰ This was certainly the case following the 9/11 terrorist attacks when a strong sense of patriotism supplanted fears of subsequent attack.¹¹ However, the circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic raise questions about the future attractiveness of large cities like New York as places to live and do business.

First, a major exodus of both people and jobs was underway prior to the pandemic. Corporations were relocating headquarters and transferring jobs from large cities like New York to smaller and more affordable cities in the South.¹² And crumbling infrastructure, the high cost of living, wintry weather, and dwindling job prospects were forcing some New York residents to follow--and in some instances to lead--the exodus of businesses and jobs.¹³

Second, large U.S. cities, especially the immigrant gateways, were already, prior to the pandemic, beginning to experience a slow-down in the influx of international migrants as a function of the Trump Administration's anti-immigration rhetoric and anti-immigrant policymaking.¹⁴ The situation has worsen during the coronavirus pandemic. Travel bans have been imposed on entry from a host of countries, including China, Brazil, and the United Kingdom. In addition, entry restrictions have been imposed on just about everyone seeking entry into the U.S. on immigrant and non-immigrant visas, including temporary workers (agricultural and high tech), family members of legal permanent residents, asylum seekers, and international students.

The economic impact of these draconian policies on the tax base of large U.S. cities could be devastating. It is conceivable that both international tourists and aspiring international migrants offended by the Trump Administration's scapegoating of immigrants in the pandemic might choose cities in other countries as places to visit, study, and take up residence in the future.¹⁵

¹⁰Justin Davidson, 2020, "The Return of Fear: New York, A Child of Disaster, Remembers Its Past," City Scape, April 13, available at <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/04/return-of-fear-nyc-coronavirus.html>.

¹¹Anne Kadet, 2020, "Escape from New York City," The Wall Street Journal, April 21, available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/escape-from-new-york-city-11587477601>.

¹²One writer notes that, in aftermath of the pandemic, the age of senior managers in corporate America is likely to be a deterrent to locating headquarters in large cities. Tyler Cowen, 2020, "What will Post-Pandemic New York City Look Like?," Marginal Revolution, March 31, available at <https://marginalrevolution.com/marginalrevolution/2020/03/what-will-post-pandemic-new-york-city-look-like.html>. Prior to the pandemic, Google, Apple, Dropbox, and Oracle all had set up expanded offices in Austin, TX. See Catey Hill, 2019, "3 Reasons So Many People are Getting the Hell Out of the Northeast," MarketWatch, December 19, available at <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/3-reasons-so-many-people-are-getting-the-hell-out-of-the-northeast-2018-10-20>.

¹³Jack Kelly, 2019, "New Yorkers are Leaving the City in Doves: Here's Why They're Moving and Where They're Going," Forbes, September 5, available at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2019/09/05/new-yorkers-are-leaving-the-city-in-doves-heres-why-theyre-moving-and-where-theyre-going/#349683ad41ac>; Catey Hill, 2019, "3 Reasons So Many People are Getting the Hell Out of the Northeast," MarketWatch, December 19, available at <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/3-reasons-so-many-people-are-getting-the-hell-out-of-the-northeast-2018-10-20>.

¹⁴Muzaffar Chishti and Sarah Pierce, 2020, "Crisis within a Crisis: Immigration in the United States in a Time of COVID-19," Migration Information Source, March 26, available at <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/crisis-within-crisis-immigration-time-covid-19>; Alex Nowrasteh and Andrew C. Forrester, 2020, "No, Mr. President, Immigration is Not Correlated with COVID-19 in the United States," Cato at Liberty, April 21, available at <https://www.cato.org/blog/no-mr-president-immigration-not-correlated-covid-19-united-states/>; Ilya Somin, 2020, "The Dangers of America's Coronavirus Immigration Bans," The Atlantic, June 28, Available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/06/danger-america-coronavirus-immigration-bans/613537/>; Sruthi Darbhamulla, 2020, "Trump's COVID-19 Visa Ban May Alter the Face of American Immigration beyond the Pandemic," The Chicago Reporter, July 8, available at <https://www.chicagoreporter.com/trumps-covid-19-visa-bans-may-alter-the-face-of-american-immigration-beyond-the-pandemic/>; NAFSA, 2020, "COVID-19 Restrictions on U.S. Visas and Entry," June 22, available at <https://www.nafsa.org/regulatory-information/covid-19-restrictions-us-visas-and-entry>; Coronavirus (COVID-19) Resources—Migration Management Tools—Border Closures, Travel Restrictions, and Bars on Asylum, available at <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/topics/coronavirus>.

¹⁵Patrick McGeehan, 2020, "Broadway is Dark. Liberty Island Is Empty. Will the Tourists Come Back?," The New York Times, July 24, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/24/nyregion/nyc-tourism-coronavirus.html>. McGeehan reports that New York City's tourism "industry...brought in \$45 million annually and supported 300,000 jobs."

Third, closer to home, it is difficult to predict future migration behavior given the evolving spatio-temporal pattern of coronavirus infections and deaths. Some New York City coronavirus refugees fled to destinations perceived to be safe havens from the pandemic, such as Florida, which subsequently have turned out to be hotspots for community spread of the virus.¹⁶ Given that the flashpoint of the coronavirus pandemic shifted from the Northeast and is now widespread throughout the South—the nation’s most rapidly growing region for the past several decades—raise serious questions about future regional population shifts. Will Florida and the rest of the South’s migration magnet states, including North Carolina, remain highly desirable destinations for migrants?

Fourth, aside from regional preference in migration decisions, it remains to-be-seen what impact the pattern of community spread of the coronavirus will have on desires for dense urban living and how that will vary across the life course in the near future. Some urban experts forecast a major move away from dense urban living and a renewed preference for suburban and exurban living where it is easier to practice social distancing.

Assessing the likely impact of the pandemic, Kotkin asserts, “...cities were already in trouble. And in the age of social distancing...dense cities particularly have a lot going against them.” He continues by stating, “People will continue to move more into the periphery and into smaller cities, where basically you can get around without getting on (public) transit.”¹⁷

Commenting on pandemic-induced migration, Bendix quotes a real estate developer who said,

...rural demand is much stronger right now than urban demand, and that’s a flip from where it’s been for the longest time, where everybody want to live in the city. There seems to be a profound, psychological change among consumers who are looking for houses...

Bendix goes on to contend,

The pandemic has fundamentally changed the way we live, work, and socialize: We conduct business on laptops in makeshift home offices and attend classes on Zoom. The amenities that urbanites prize—concerts, museums, and cafes—are shuttered. At a time when physical proximity to others is a danger, many city dwellers are beginning to fundamentally question the appeal of density—and how much they’re willing to pay for urban apartments.”¹⁸

And he further surmises that

The coronavirus...seems to be catalyzing a trend that had already started: slow-moving migration toward suburbs, exurbs, and smaller, less-dense cities. The era of the big city has, yet again, run its course.

¹⁶Prior to the pandemic, a real estate developer in South Florida reportedly averaged one or two calls per day from wealthy suburbs of New Jersey, Manhattan and Long Island, as well as other parts of the Northeast. When the pandemic struck, the number of calls increased to an average of 8 to 10 per day. See Sabrina Tavernise and Sarah Mervosh, 2020, “America’s Biggest Cities Were Already Losing Their Allure. What Happens Next?,” The New York Times, April 19, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/19/us/coronavirus-moving-city-future.html>.

¹⁷Catherine E. Shoichet and Athena Jones, 2020, “Coronavirus is Making Some People Rethink Where They Want to Live,” [cnn.com](https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/02/us/cities-population-coronavirus/index.html), May 2, available at <https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/02/us/cities-population-coronavirus/index.html>.

¹⁸Aria Bendix, 2020, “The Coronavirus Pandemic Spells the End for Big Cities—Again,” Business Insider, May 8, <https://www.businessinsider.com/cities-are-over-again-coronavirus-2020-5>.

Citing a Harris Poll, Menton reports, “nearly a third of Americans are considering moving to less densely populated areas in the wake of the pandemic.” She goes on to note that “[p]eople want to stay away from public elevators and sharing of common laundry areas...People are expressing concern about living in high rises with common amenities.” She concludes by citing an economist from the National Association of Realtors who states “people will be much more cautious about living in high density areas with so many people.”¹⁹

And, because of the pandemic, Frank notes,²⁰

...sprawling homes with multiple rooms and living quarters, large land parcels and remote locations have become an asset rather than a liability. Reversing the back to the city movement, pools, large home offices, strong internet and cell services are major assets in suburbs.

Fifth, while only time will tell if the foregoing prognoses will fully materialize, the extent to which remote work will become the new norm in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic also will likely strongly influence future migration decisions and residential settlement patterns. Several major corporations, including Twitter, Facebook, and Spotify, have already decided to allow certain segments of their workforce to work remotely on a permanent basis.²¹ Other corporations as well as some government and nonprofit organizations may do the same. Such decisions will have enormous implications for whether coronavirus pandemic refugees will return to expensive urban markets like New York City or whether they will seek out less dense suburban, exurban, and rural destinations with broadband access in the South and perhaps other regions of the country.

A recent survey of 4000 employees in major tech companies reportedly found that “... 69 percent of New Yorkers in the tech and finance fields would consider relocating if they knew they could work from home permanently. 18% would leave the metro area, 36 percent would move out of state, and 15% would leave the country.”²² This shift to virtual works has led one group to forecast that 25-30% of the U.S. workforce will work from home multiple days a week by the end of 2021, up from 3.6% prior to the pandemic.²³

¹⁹ Jessica Menton, 2020, “Get Me Out of Here! Americans Flee Crowded Cities Amid COVID-19, Consider Permanent Moves,” USA Today, May 1, available at <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2020/05/01/coronavirus-americans-flee-cities-suburbs/3045025001/>.

²⁰ Robert Frank, 2020, “Coronavirus: Wealthy New Yorkers Flee Manhattan for Suburbs and Beyond,” CNBC, April 20, available at <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/04/30/wealthy-new-yorkers-flee-manhattan-for-suburbs-and-beyond.html>.

²¹ Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg estimates about half of his 50,000 staffers will work remotely within the next 5-10 years. See “Young People are Joining the Rich in Leaving NYC for Cheaper, Less Dense Cities After Coronavirus,” Sound Health and Lasting Wealth, available at <https://www.soundhealthandlastingwealth.com/covid-19/young-people-are-joining-the-rich-in-leaving-nyc-for-cheaper-less-dense-cities-after-coronavirus/>

²² Karen Ruiz, 2020, “Exodus from New York...,” Daily Mail, May 23, available at <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8345919/Young-people-joining-rich-leaving-NYC-cheaper-dense-cities-coronavirus.html>; Also see, Zillow, 2020, “A Rise in Remote Work Could Lead to a New Suburban Boom,” May 13, available at <http://zillow.mediaroom.com/2020-05-13-A-Rise-in-Remote-Work-Could-Lead-to-a-New-Suburban-Boom>; Rex Crum, 2020, “Coronavirus: Glassdoor Survey Finds People Confident About Long-Term Working from Home,” The Mercury News, March 23, available at <https://www.mercurynews.com/2020/03/23/coronavirus-glassdoor-survey-finds-people-confident-about-long-term-working-from-home/>

²³ Kate Lister, 2020, Work-at-Home After Covid-19—Our Forecast, Global Workplace Analytics, available at <https://globalworkplaceanalytics.com/work-at-home-after-covid-19-our-forecast>.

Reflecting on the implications, one writer says, “That means employees may not need to live in the city where their company is headquartered.” Another posed the question: Is this the end of the Tech Hub? ²⁴ Does it also mean the demand for co-working spaces in cities will decline sharply or perhaps end? ²⁵

Sixth, efforts by communities with slowly growing or declining populations offering incentives for remote workers and others to leave high cost urban centers and relocate to their communities could potentially influence such migration decisions. ²⁶ A list of communities currently offering a variety of migration incentives, including relocation expenses, tax credits, forgivable mortgages, student loan repayment, cash, and land, appears in Table 6.

²⁴Young People are Joining the Rich in Leaving NYC for Cheaper, Less Dense Cities After Coronavirus,” Sound Health and Lasting Wealth, available at <https://www.soundhealthandlastingwealth.com/covid-19/young-people-are-joining-the-rich-in-leaving-nyc-for-cheaper-less-dense-cities-after-coronavirus/>.

²⁵Lisa Rabasca Roepe, 2020, “Will COVID-19 be the Death of Co-working Spaces? Marketplace, April 3, available at <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.marketplace.org/2020/04/03/will-covid-19-be-the-death-of-coworking-spaces/amp>; Michael Novogradac, Grant Baskerville, and Kyrene Clarke, 2020, “Opportunity Zones Market Trends and Covid-19,” Forbes, April 30, available at <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.forbes.com/sites/sorensonimpact/2020/04/30/opportunity-zones-market-trends-and-covid-19/amp/>

²⁶Alicia Adamczyk, 2019, “6 US cities and States that will Pay You to Move There,” cnbc.com, August 31, available at <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/08/31/6-us-cities-and-states-that-will-pay-you-to-move-there.html>; Nicole Lyn Pesce, 2019, “These 13 Cities, States, and Countries Will Pay You to Move There,” MarketWatch, December 17, available at <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/these-9-cities-states-and-countries-will-pay-you-to-move-there-2018-10-26>; Glassdoor Team, 2019, “Cities & State Will Pay to Move There,” Glassdoor, June 17, available at <https://www.glassdoor.com/blog/cities-states-that-will-pay-you-to-move-there/>; The Penny Hoarder Staff, 2019, “These 9 Cities Will Pay You to Move There,” The Penny Hoarder, December 27, available at <https://www.thepennyhoarder.com/make-money/places-that-will-pay-you-to-move-there/>; Aditi Shrikant, 2019, “11 Places Around the World That Will Pay You to Move or Live There,” CNBC Newsletter, December 25, available at <https://grow.acorns.com/places-around-the-world-that-will-pay-you-to-move-there/>; Leanna Garfield and Libertina Brandt, 2020, “11 Places in the US that Are Offering New Residents to Move There,” Business Insider, February 4, available at <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-cities-pay-people-move-incentives-2018-7>; Sergio Ocampo, 2020, “Places that Pay You to Move There in 2020,” MoveBuddha, March 4, available at <https://www.movebuddha.com/blog/get-paid-to-move/>; Matthew Hoagland, 2020, “Commentary: Millennials, Restart Your Life in a Small Town,” Daily Yonder, July 28, available at <https://dailyyonder.com/commentary-millennials-restart-your-life-in-a-small-town/2020/07/28/>.

Table 6: Migration Incentive Programs

| City | Incentive Program | Description |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Hamilton, OH | The Talent Attraction Program Scholarships. https://hamiltonfoundation.academicworks.com/donors/talent-attraction-program-tap-scholarship | \$5,000 toward student loan repayment |
| North Platte, NE | WorkNP.com | \$5,000 to those who move for a job |
| Detroit, MI | Challenge Detroit https://www.challengedetroit.org/ | Paid Fellowship for out-of-state college graduates to work with local company |
| Osborne, KS | Industrial Park & High Plains Addition (commercial) Sunset Addition (residential) http://www.discoverosborne.com/ECONOMICDEVELOPMENT/BusinessIncentives.aspx | Free commercial and residential lots |
| | Rural Opportunity Zones https://www.kansascommerce.gov/programs-services/community-development/rural-opportunity-zones/ | State Income Tax Waived for up to 5 years & \$15,000 in Student Loan Repayments |
| Lincoln, Kansas | “Free Lot Plan” http://www.lincolnks.org/Housing_Development_Full_Packet_2017.pdf | Free lots ranging from 12,000 square feet to 36,000 square feet. Contingent upon a contract with a building contractor. Lots qualify for City’s 10-year tax rebate program. |
| Manilla, IA | Sunrise Addition Phase II https://www.manillaia.com/business.asp?key=3#Article | Free land—single family lots |
| Tulsa, OK | Tulsa Remote Program https://tulsaremote.com/#hero | Pay remote workers up to 10,000 & spot in a co-working community in city. Must have a full time remote job to qualify. |
| St. Clair County, MI | Come Home Award Fund https://www.stclairfoundation.org/funds/more/reverse_scholarship_fund | Provide college graduates with student debt up to \$15,000 to move there. Must have a degree in science, technology, arts, or math and must secure a job within 120 days of award. |
| Topeka, KS | Choose Topeka https://choosetopeka.com/ | City teams up with employers to pay up to \$15,000 if recruit purchases home in the city. \$10,000 if recruit rents. |
| Claremont, MN | Claremont House Lot Program https://www.claremontmn.com/ | Free residential lots to individuals willing to build on them. |
| | Geek Move Program https://www.thegigcity.com/geekmove/ | Offers computer developers \$1,250 in relocation expenses and a \$10,000 forgivable mortgage |
| Newton, IA | “Get to Know Newton” https://newtongov.org/806/Housing-Initiative | Offers up to \$10,000 cash to new homebuyers and a welcome package of over \$3,000 |
| Maine | Educational Opportunity Tax Credit https://www.maine.gov/revenue/faq/eotc_faq.html#eotc1 | Tax credit depending on graduation year and type of degree earned that saves big on student loans. |
| Vermont | The Remote Worker Grant https://www.thinkvermont.com/remote-worker-grant-program-2019/ | Offers up to \$10,000 in relocation expenses. |

Source: compiled by author.

Finally, a critical question: Will the way states and cities respond to the Black Lives Matter Protest Movement influence future migration trends? The protest over systemic racism has encapsulated nearly every city in America, including violent confrontations in some instances, at the same time we are battling the coronavirus pandemic. The impact of these twin crises on the human psyche and future migration intentions remains unknown and difficult to predict.

POSTSCRIPT

One thing is clear: our lives and mobility behaviors as well as the way we sort ourselves out residentially probably will be radically different in the future. The emphasis on social distancing is likely to be with us for quite some time—even if we come up with vaccine. It is therefore reasonable to surmise that urban sprawl—the expansion of growth and development beyond the city limits once viewed as responsible for a number of urban ills²⁷—may very well become in vogue again. This is especially likely for older adults and millennials with young children who “social distance moves” to be one way of slowing the spread of the virus.²⁸

Further, the rebound of New York City and other large urban centers, including Miami, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego, will hinge on our nation’s willingness to reverse the current anti-immigration policy orientation. It will further depend on whether such a policy shift will renew aspiring immigrants’ perceptions and beliefs that the U.S. remains the land of opportunity—a great place to visit, live, work, and launch business enterprises.

Living here in the U.S., our response(s) to the coronavirus pandemic will be rooted in our stage in the life cycle, family composition, living arrangements, economic circumstance, and ability to work remotely as well as our residential zip code, which largely determines our personal and community experiences with the virus. Efforts to develop predictive models of post-pandemic migration behavior must take all of these factors into consideration.

²⁷Reid Ewing and Shima Hamidi, 2015, Compactness versus Sprawl: A Review of Recent Evidence from the United States,” *Journal of Planning Literature*, July 22, available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0885412215595439>.

²⁸Alex Williams, 2020, “Rich City Tykes Swell Schools in Hamptons and Hudson Valley,” *The New York Times*, August 1, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/01/style/wealthy-rich-parents-coronavirus-schools-hamptons.html>.

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