



## CALIFORNIA'S REDISTRIBUTIVE ROLE IN INTERSTATE MIGRATION, 1935-1990

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California has for long been the primary geographic focus of westward migration across the United States. In recent decades, while California has continued to attract the greatest number of interstate migrants, the state has also emerged as the country's leading redistributor of population. From 1985 to 1990, nearly 2 million interstate migrants moved to California, and during the same period over 1.8 million interstate migrants left California for other states (U.S. Department of Commerce 1993). For the third consecutive decade, California not only attracted the greatest number of interstate migrants, it was also the most common state of origin for United States internal migration. In the process of California's interstate population exchange, clear geographic patterns have developed: California has gained population from the Northeastern and Midwestern states of the traditional industrial core, and lost population to the states of the peripheral West, most notably to Washington and Oregon (Kirsch 1991). Meanwhile, California now attracts more international migrants than any other state (Muller and Espenshade 1985), and with immigration as the largest component of California's population growth, larger than both interstate migration and natural increase, the state's population reached 29.8 million in 1990 (U.S. Department of Commerce 1993). Bearing in mind these trends in migration flow and population growth, an analysis of California's role as a population redistributor is a crucial step towards understanding the movement and distribution of population in the United States.

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## Background

The westward movement of people across the United States has persisted from frontier days to the present. In the past this westward flow has been accelerated by events such as the Gold Rush and the Dust Bowl migration during the Great Depression, and more recently by the movement of capital to California during the post-World War II defense and high-tech booms. It has been augmented in recent decades by the deconcentration of the Northeastern and Midwestern industrial core which has been associated with the transition to post-industrialism in this country. Migratory patterns of the 1960 and 1970s represent a significant turnaround in the core-periphery relationships, as the Western and Southern peripheral regions have grown largely at the expense of the traditional core (Plane 1984a).

These developments have been the focus of a substantial body of literature in migration research. Some of the major historic trends in internal migration which have been significantly altered during this period include the decline and in some cases reversals of the traditional rural to urban migration (Roseman 1982), the change to net in-migration to the South, i.e. the Sunbelt (Watkins and Perry 1991), and the return migration of Blacks to the South (Johnson and Roseman 1990). These turnarounds have been attributed to deconcentrating trends in population distribution in this country (Vining 1977; Vining 1982).

Large scale net in-migration to California must also be considered an important historic trend in internal migration. This assertion is justified by the sheer number of migrants, which contributed to making California the most populous state in the country by 1964. During the 1960s and 1970s California's role in the process of internal migration experienced a major transformation which persisted through the 1980s; once the country's greatest receiver of interstate migration, California is now its most active redistributor of population.

The concept of redistribution has been pursued primarily at the urban level by Roseman (1977) and Roseman and McHugh (1982). Morrison (1977) looked at Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco as attractors of interstate migration acting to redistribute population throughout the state, while Plane and Isserman (1983) developed the idea of states and areas as regional redistributors of population. Morrill (1988) identified California's redistributive role in interstate migration through the analysis of common systems of net exchange between states. Assessing the patterns of population interchange, Morrill (1988) observed:

... No state exhibited randomness in geographic patterns of net gains or losses; most states were net receivers from a distinct geographic set of states and net distributors to a different set of states.

This study traces the development of California's present role as a population redistributor, and describes the geographic patterns of this interstate population exchange.

The demographic effectiveness of migration, a simple ratio of net migration to total migration, has been utilized to show the extent to which in- and out-migration affect population change (Plane 1984a; Gallaway and Vedder 1985; Morrill 1988). The use of net migration rates and models has been criticized for obscuring regularities in age profiles of migration, as well as for focusing on a nonexistent category of individuals, "net migrants" (Rogers 1990). Still, demographic effectiveness of migration rates, especially when used over a series of time periods, have been valuable measures in shedding light on migration trends; demographic effectiveness provides a generalized picture of the ongoing process of population redistribution.

In the case of California, the dramatic reduction of the total interstate demographic effectiveness rates, despite continued high volumes of migrants to California, illustrate the state's changing role in the process of United States internal migration, while variations in the demographic effectiveness rates between California and specific states isolate the distinct regional patterns associated with California's emergent redistributive role. This is shown through an examination of the interstate population flows between California and the forty-nine other states, as well as California's total interstate migration for the periods 1935-40, 1955-60, 1965-70, 1975-80, and 1985-90,<sup>1</sup> with an emphasis on recent trends. Data are derived from the United States decennial censuses from the question regarding state of residence [five years earlier] (U.S. Department of Commerce 1946; 1963; 1973; 1983; 1993).

The influx of population to California has been part of the uniquely rapid development of the state, and cannot be attributed solely to economic push or pull factors. Perceived economic benefits, social freedoms, and environmental preferences all contribute to the migrant's decision to move, and where to move. Mobility itself has come to be ac-

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<sup>1</sup>Due to the circumstances of World War II, the 1950 census asked for the respondent's state of residence in 1949 instead of 1945; consequently the data are not comparable to the other time periods.

cepted as a social and economic freedom in this country (Lewis 1979), and for many the move to California embodied the anticipated freedoms and benefits of a new life. Vance (1972) discussed the role of the "search for the ideal" as a historic factor in American migration, and identified California as the modern locus of this ideal. Recent trends of out-migration from California to its surrounding states, particularly northward to Oregon and Washington, suggest a shift in the geography of the ideal. California's redistributive position is the subject of speculation in the final section of the paper in relation to the broader context of deconcentrating trends in the United States.

### Methodology

**Demographic Effectiveness of Migration to California.** Demographic effectiveness of migration is the ratio of net migration to total migration for region  $j$ , multiplied by 100

$$E_j = 100 N_j / T_j \quad (1)$$

where net migration is equal to the difference between gross in- and gross out-migration

$$N_j = I_j - O_j \quad (2)$$

and total migration equals the sum of gross in- and out-migration

$$T_j = I_j + O_j \quad (3)$$

$E_j$  necessarily falls between -100 and 100, with negative values produced when out-migration exceeds in-migration. Most previous studies have used the method to find the demographic effectiveness for each state's total interstate migration flows with all of the other states collectively. In keeping with the focus on California's role in interstate migration in this paper, the use of demographic effectiveness differs from that of previous studies.  $E_{ij}$  represents the demographic effectiveness of migration to California ( $j$ ) for each other state ( $i$ ) separately (Plane 1984a). The demographic effectiveness rates for California's total interstate migration, that is, its interaction with all other states combined, were also calculated for each of the time periods discussed, and are presented below in Table 1. The results of these direct state to state effectiveness

rates are mapped for each time period (Figures 1 through 5). Demographic effectiveness ratings for the District of Columbia have been included with the state of Maryland in this analysis to ease mapping.

### The Development of California as a Population Redistributor, 1935-90

As shown in Table 1, California's in-migration has persisted at consistently high volumes from 1935 to 1990. Out-migration has risen dramatically during the same period, reducing total demographic effectiveness rates to relatively insignificant levels since 1975, indicating that internal migration is playing only a small role in terms of California's population growth. Of course, the magnitude of California's interstate migrant flows does significantly change the composition of the state's population, so while the demographic variables of the migrants are not the focus of this study, gross migration figures are discussed, along with net migration and demographic effectiveness rates of state to state flows, to emphasize the proportions of internal migration to and from California for each of the time periods listed in Table 1.

**1935-1940.** From 1935 to 1940, migration to California was a common phenomenon across the country. Experiencing net gains from every state but Virginia, California's overall demographic effectiveness was the highest in the country at 61.1, as relatively few people departed the state

	To California	From California	Net	Def. Eff.
1935-40	1,675,677	211,963	1,463,914	61.1
1955-60	1,938,130	815,926	1,122,204	40.7
1965-70	1,783,534	1,413,542	369,992	11.6
1975-80	1,877,289	1,782,831	94,458	2.6
1985-90	1,978,612	1,801,247	177,365	4.7

Table 1. Demographic Effectiveness of Total Interstate Migration to and from California 1935-1990

at this time. While the effectiveness of migration to California was high across the country, Figure 1 reveals definite patterns of migration at this time. The largest migration streams came from rural states of the Great Plains and the Dust Bowl region, due to the push and pull factors associated with the devastating effects of the Dust Bowl and perceived agricultural opportunities in California. These flows represent the most demographically effective migration of the period, among the most highly focused migration flows in U.S. history. Stein (1973) estimates fully one-third of the decade's interstate migrants came from Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, and Missouri, making the now famous trek on U.S. Route 66 aboard overloaded trucks and jalopies. Large, efficient flows also originated from Kansas and Nebraska, while Illinois and New York added large but less efficient population flows to California.

**1955-1960.** Migration to California during the late 1950s was fueled by the state's post-war defense and high-tech booms. During this period immigration was not as focused as it was from 1935 to 1940, but was strong throughout the country. Eighteen states lost over 20,000 people in their net population exchange with California, with only Nevada gaining a modest 4,000 in net migration from California. Although the state's total demographic effectiveness rate of 40.7 was reduced from the previous period, it remained the highest in the country. While there was considerably more interstate movement in and out of California, the net migration of 1,122,204 was only slightly lower than the corresponding 1935-1940 figure.

Clearly, the origins of the large scale migration to California were moving north and east, primarily from the more urban and industrial states (Figure 2), suggesting that these were the primary source states for the selective defense-boom migration (Rischin 1973).<sup>2</sup> Illinois and New York each lost approximately 100,000 in net migration to California. Ohio, Michigan and Pennsylvania were also among the biggest net losers to California. The greatest single flow came from Texas (150,458), but was less efficient than the Northeastern and Midwestern flows. Migration from the Great Plains and Dust Bowl regions was still strong, although not as lopsided as it once was. Effectiveness ratios were lowered for these states, gross flows to California were reduced, and we

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<sup>2</sup>The migration of intellectual and scientific talent to California during this period is characterized by Rischin as an extremely selective, highly educated migrant pool perhaps comparable only to the immigration of European scholars to America during the Hitler years.

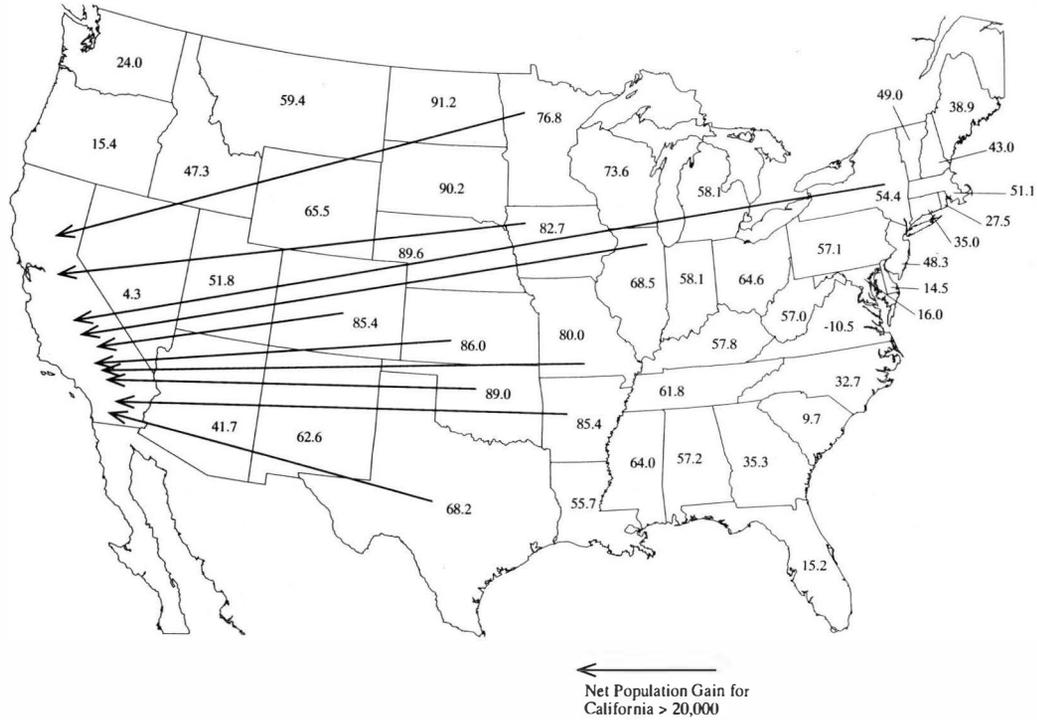


Figure 1. Demographic Effectiveness of Interstate Migration and Large Net Population Exchanges for California, 1935-1940

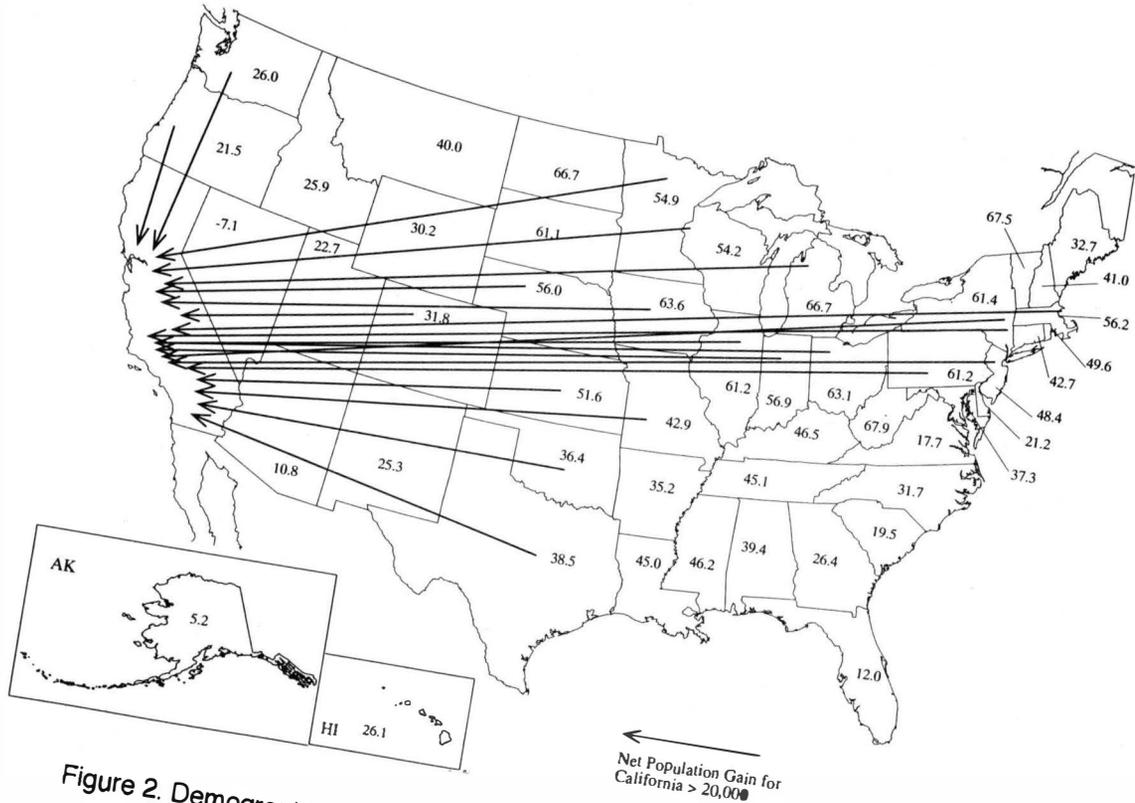


Figure 2. Demographic Effectiveness of Interstate Migration and Large Net Population Exchanges for California, 1955-1960

begin to see signs of a return migration to the Dust Bowl states. Nearly five times as many migrants moved from California to Oklahoma as during 1935 to 1940.

**1965-1970.** The 1965-1970 period marks the emergence of California's redistributive role in interstate migration (Figure 3). Total movement in and out of California actually increased by 443,020, but the net population gain was reduced by 752,212 from the previous decade. Out-migration increased by roughly 75 percent from 1955-60. California's overall demographic effectiveness of migration shrank to 11.6, dropping in rank from first to ninth in the country. In general, net gains were smaller than those of the previous decade. California's largest net gains came from New York and Illinois, with 77,946 and 60,593 respectively.

Significantly, out-migration flows to Oregon and Washington were among the greatest flows in the country, as California experienced net losses of 44,169 and 42,748 to these states. Also of note, California lost in its exchanges with Oklahoma and Arkansas, was near even with Missouri, and saw increasing out-migration to Texas, Kansas, and Nebraska, each of these states being among California's large donors of population from 1935-1940. These figures may be influenced by the return migration of retirement-age Dust Bowl migrants to California, as evidence suggests that the 1930s Dust Bowl migration was being made in reverse (Morrill 1988; Plane 1984a; Roseman 1977; Roseman 1982).

It is important to note that, while net gains in interstate migration were reduced for California from 1965-70, gains in international immigration increased. By 1960 California had surpassed New York as the leading international port of entry state. The 1965 Immigration Act, which took effect in 1968, reinforced California's port of entry role by allowing for the freer entry of Asians into the country (Muller and Espenshade 1985). California surpassed New York to become the most populous state in the country by 1964, and also surpassed New York to become the leading state of origin for interstate migration from 1965-70.

**1975-1980.** California redistributive role in interstate migration crystallized during the late 1970s, as migration trends which were emerging in the 1960s became well established. The 1975-80 period is characterized by a great deal of movement in the U.S. as a whole (Plane and Isserman 1983), as the number of interstate migrants entering or leaving California reached unprecedented levels. However, with a net migration of just 94,458, California's overall demographic effectiveness of migration was a minuscule 2.6, indicating that the high mobility of the United States



population during the 1970s did not greatly affect California's total population size.

California attracted large net gains from the Northeastern and Midwestern states of the nation's industrial core, and lost population throughout its own periphery, most dramatically to the Northwestern states (Figure 4). California's unique redistributive role during this period, which could be seen emerging during the previous decade, followed a clear regional bias. In terms of demographic effectiveness of migration, California's relationships with the industrial Northeastern and Midwestern states were very efficient, moving westward into a transitional area through the rural Midwest and Great Plains, and finally we find negative demographic efficiencies everywhere west of the Dakotas. California experienced small to moderate net gains and losses with the states of the South, and efficient net outflows to the former Dust Bowl states of Oklahoma and Arkansas.

Demographic effectiveness rates do not reveal the high volume of movement during the 1975-1980 period. Total migrants from New York was 179,601, for a net gain of 133,461. Conversely, California sent gross flows to Oregon and Washington of 165,157 and 177,466 respectively, and experienced net population losses of 105,818 and 105,054. While only losing 23,297 in net migration with Arizona, the interchange included some 200,713 migrants.

**1985-1990.** It is clear from the total interstate migration flows presented in Table 1 that California's redistributive role in interstate migration persisted during 1985-90, as the state was again the U.S. leader in both gross in-migration and gross out-migration but experienced relatively little population growth as a result of total interstate migration. The geographic patterns of the population redistribution during this period, illustrated in Figure 5, reveal both continuities and change from the previous decade. Demographic effectiveness and net gains from the populous states of the Northeast and Midwest declined, but net gains persisted throughout the region. Combined net population gains from New York, Illinois, Ohio, and Michigan (California's largest contributors in 1975-80 in terms of net population exchange) were reduced from approximately 300,000 in 1975-80 to 140,000 in 1985-90. Symptomatic of the reduced effectiveness rates, only ten states gained or lost greater than 20,000 in net population exchange with California, as compared to fifteen states the previous decade. While California was again a net population loser to the Northwestern and Southwestern states, net losses were generally lower and negative demographic effectiveness rates were cut approximately in half.

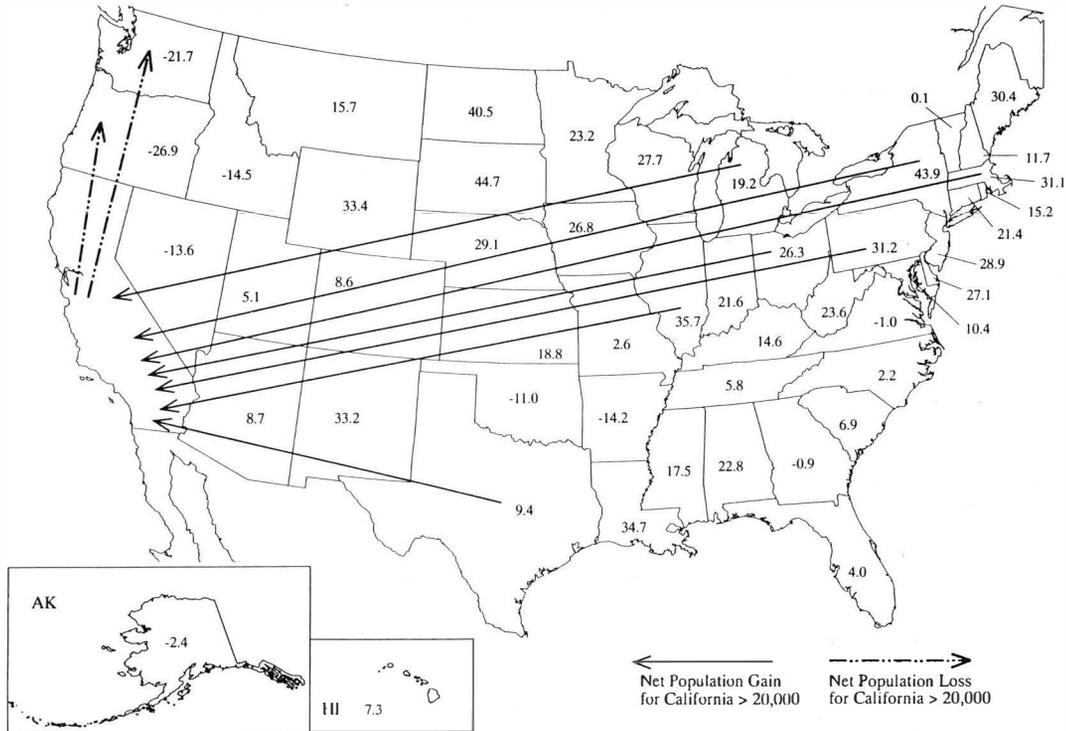


Figure 3. Demographic Effectiveness of Interstate Migration and Large Net Population Exchanges for California, 1965-1970

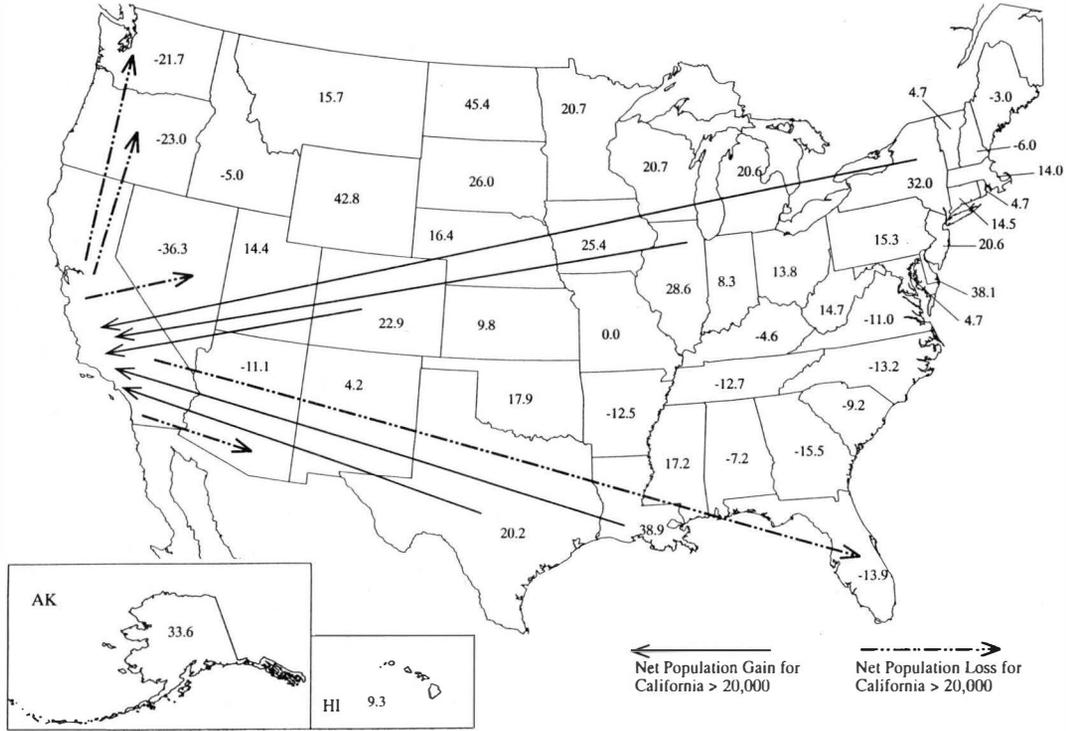
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In the West, California's migration patterns can be divided into three subsystems: the Northwest, the Southwest, and the Rocky Mountain region. In the Northwest, California lost a combined 104,000 migrants in its population exchange with Oregon and Washington, roughly half of what it lost to those states during 1975-80, a change reflected in the demographic effectiveness rates. Still, the 155,000 people moving to Washington was California's largest gross out-migration flow. The demographic effectiveness rate for California's interaction with Idaho was dramatically reduced during the period of relatively even population exchange. In the Southwest, both net losses to and demographic effectiveness rates for interaction with Nevada and Arizona were similar to those of 1975-80. The net population loss of nearly 60,000 to Nevada was California's greatest loss to any state during this period, and the net outflow of Californians to Nevada was the most effective of any of California's population exchanges from 1985-90, at -36.3. A significant turnaround occurred in California's exchange with the Rocky Mountain states of Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, and Wyoming, as demographic effectiveness changed from negative to positive for California. These changes also were evident in California's interaction with Texas and Alaska, and may be associated with the economic decline of these states following the oil bust of the 1980s (Plane 1991). The reversal from negative to positive demographic effectiveness between Oklahoma and California occurring between 1975-80 and 1985-90 may be influenced by demographic factors; there are fewer Dust Bowl-era migrants left in California to make a return migration to Oklahoma.

The emergence of out-migration trends to the states of the Southeast, particularly along the Atlantic coast from Virginia to Florida, was another major development during this period. This phenomenon marks a significant geographic shift in the patterns of California's out-migration field. Changes in California's geography of population redistribution are largely consistent with national interstate migration trends identified for the 1980s, which include a dominant pattern of bi-coastal population distribution and out-migration from the "energy states" of the Rocky Mountains and West South Central (McHugh and Gober 1992).

### **Proposed Causes of California's Redistributive Role**

The transition to post-industrialism in the U.S. has been characterized by the redistribution of economic functions and the loss of dominance of the traditional core area. While individual decisions to move are the results of complex decision making processes, it is clear that mi-

gration flows are influenced in part by shifts in the location of economic activity (Plane and Isserman 1983). Population movement in the 1960s and especially the 1970s was flowing down the national urban hierarchy, and from the core metropolitan areas to those of the traditional periphery (Plane 1984a).

During the past half century, it can be argued that California has developed as a secondary national core in three principal areas: economics, population, and as a cultural hearth (Kirsch 1991). As California has developed into a secondary core, migration from the traditional core of the Northeast and Midwest has been just a step down the urban hierarchy, shorter as a functional distance than a physical distance (Kirsch 1991).<sup>3</sup>

With the largest net migration flows to California in recent decades having originated from the traditional core region, the shorter functional distances as well as the reduced friction of distance between the regions due to advances in technology and communications must be taken into consideration. Moreover, the deconcentration of economic and social functions also has a center in California. In light of California's continuous population growth, it would be far fetched to refer to California as deconcentrating. Still, the outward dispersal of population and capital from California indicates the presence of deconcentrating trends (see Plane 1984a).

California continues to be a large attractor of migrants from the traditional core region while at the same time distributing population throughout its periphery. Of course, anyone who has made a decision to move (and where to move) knows that the components that go into the decision making are not purely economic. It is difficult to evaluate the role of search space, but it is clear that migration decisions are constrained by the search space of the migrant. Individuals build up an awareness space based on information gathered through both mass media and interpersonal relations throughout their lifetimes, without necessary reference to migration, to formulate mental maps (Roseman 1977). The attractiveness of an area is constrained by communications as well as transportation networks (Roseman and McHugh 1982). California's high visibility in the mass media certainly gives it a place in most people's mental maps. For migrants from the core region it is likely

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<sup>3</sup>An analysis of the functional distances of California's interstate migration patterns derived through the use of a singly constrained reverse gravity model is presented and mapped in Kirsch (1991) based on techniques utilized in Plane (1984b).

that California is the most well known destination for a move to the West, due to its high media visibility as well as kinship ties and "beaten path" effects. For those living in California and contemplating a move, the search space may expand to include much of the West. Roseman and McHugh (1982) postulate that the role of individual ties to place in recent migration has favored metropolitan to non-metropolitan areas. This pattern seems to exist at the state level for California's out-migration field. The continued deconcentration of economic functions, aided by technological advances such as fax machines and computer modems, have made it possible for many businesses to locate almost anywhere. While California may still represent the American dream to some interstate migrants, others who have lived in California are taking their dreams elsewhere. Certainly, recent disaster coverage of earthquakes, fires, floods, and the Los Angeles riots of 1992 will do little to enhance California's image for future migrants.

International immigration to California, the largest component of the state's population growth, may also have impacts on California's role in interstate migration. As stated above, California became the leading international port of entry state in 1960, and due in part to the new national immigration policy adopted in 1965, migration to California during the 1970s and 1980s has been increasingly dominated by international immigration from Asia as well as from Mexico and Central America. Although the 1965 Act set limits on the number of immigrants allowed in the U.S. from the western hemisphere, it did not actually reduce the number of Mexican immigrants entering the United States. Muller and Espenshade (1985) maintain that it did serve to make "illegal" many of those future migrants who would have otherwise been legal.

California's role as the nation's leading international port of entry, which can also be seen as a core function, may have contributed to this dispersal of interstate population. This may not be a case of "white flight" in reaction to the internationalization of the state's population, nor are there sufficient data available to substantiate such a claim. There is some evidence indicating that the new wave of unskilled Mexican immigration has led to increased blue collar out-migration from California (Walker et al. 1991; Muller and Espenshade 1985). It seems apparent that immigration, simply as an agent of dramatic population growth, has had an impact on the acceleration of out-migration trends.

California has received wave after wave of migration, both interstate and international, since the days of the Gold Rush. With roughly eighty percent of the population clustered within forty miles of the coast

(Houston 1986), there has been tremendous environmental and social stress on California's urbanized areas. In terms of real estate and cost of living, California's urban centers are among the most expensive in the country. The sale of a house in California may purchase a larger or more attractive house in a peripheral Western state and also support a higher standard of living, or a sum of money to retire on. The lowest demographic effectiveness rate and greatest net loss from 1985-90 was to Nevada, suggesting a scenario of perceived low cost of living benefits. A survey of California's in- and out-migrants would yield useful knowledge concerning the perception associated with the migration trends identified in this paper.

### Conclusions and Implications

The history of California is one of continuous and often explosive growth in population and economy. With the state's population reaching 30 million, the question arises as to how much growth California can sustain in the future, and at what costs? Urban sprawl, traffic jams, environmental degradation and pollution are consequences of this growth in California's urban centers. Recent trends of regional net out-migration may also be a consequence of the development of modern California, as well as a symptom that, for some, life in California no longer embodies the geographic ideal which Vance (1972) identified over two decades ago.

The impacts of the dispersal of people from California into the state's periphery have been observed, somewhat ambiguously, in the recent catchphrase, "the Californication" of the West. In the Northwest, bumper stickers commonly expound anti-California rhetoric, while some newspaper columnists in Seattle ". . . build careers fevering about encroaching Californians" (Zukovic 1992, p. 9). While the popular news media of late has been spouting about the out-migration of Californians to the western states (e.g. see Bonfante 1993), the image created has been of a mass exodus of Californians, fleeing Sodom with their carphones and their flashy lifestyles.

This paper reveals the actual patterns of California's interstate migration, which tend not to be as one-sided as the popular images would imply, and to identify the geography of California's redistributive role. I have focused on a measure of net migration to evaluate the impact of total migration on population growth, but there is certainly a great deal more that can be learned from these migration patterns through a demographic analysis of gross migration flows, micro-level analysis of deci-

sions to move, and a study of the social, economic, and political impacts of California's out-migrants on their new places of residence.

It should be evident from the dramatic changes in California's demographic effectiveness of migration that interstate migration patterns are volatile. While California's redistributive role in interstate migration persisted during the 1980s, both net gains and losses occurred at lower levels than the previous decade. These findings are consistent with national trends in which core-to-periphery migration continued during the 1980s, but in a slower fashion (Morrill 1988). It seems likely that California will continue its redistributive role in U.S. internal migration in the 1990s, attracting migrants from the Northeast and Midwest and redistributing population to a distinctly different set of states. From 1985-90, the leading states in terms of attracting population from California were Washington, Oregon, Nevada, and Arizona, but the pattern of negative demographic effectiveness rates along the South Atlantic coast may indicate an important emerging trend.

California has always occupied a unique position in U.S. internal migration. It is still the country's greatest attractor of interstate migrants, but this has been overshadowed by the fact that it is also now the country's leading state of origin for out-migrants. California has developed into a large scale population redistributor. This phenomenon can be expected to continue, with its volume and regional variation dependent on a complex environment of local, regional, national and international influences. It is probable that higher rates of in-migration, immigration, and overall population growth will amplify the volume of out-migration, if the prospect of life in a California megalopolis becomes less attractive. While changes in United States internal migration will be difficult to predict, it seems clear that the migratory patterns associated with California will, as ever, play an important role.



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