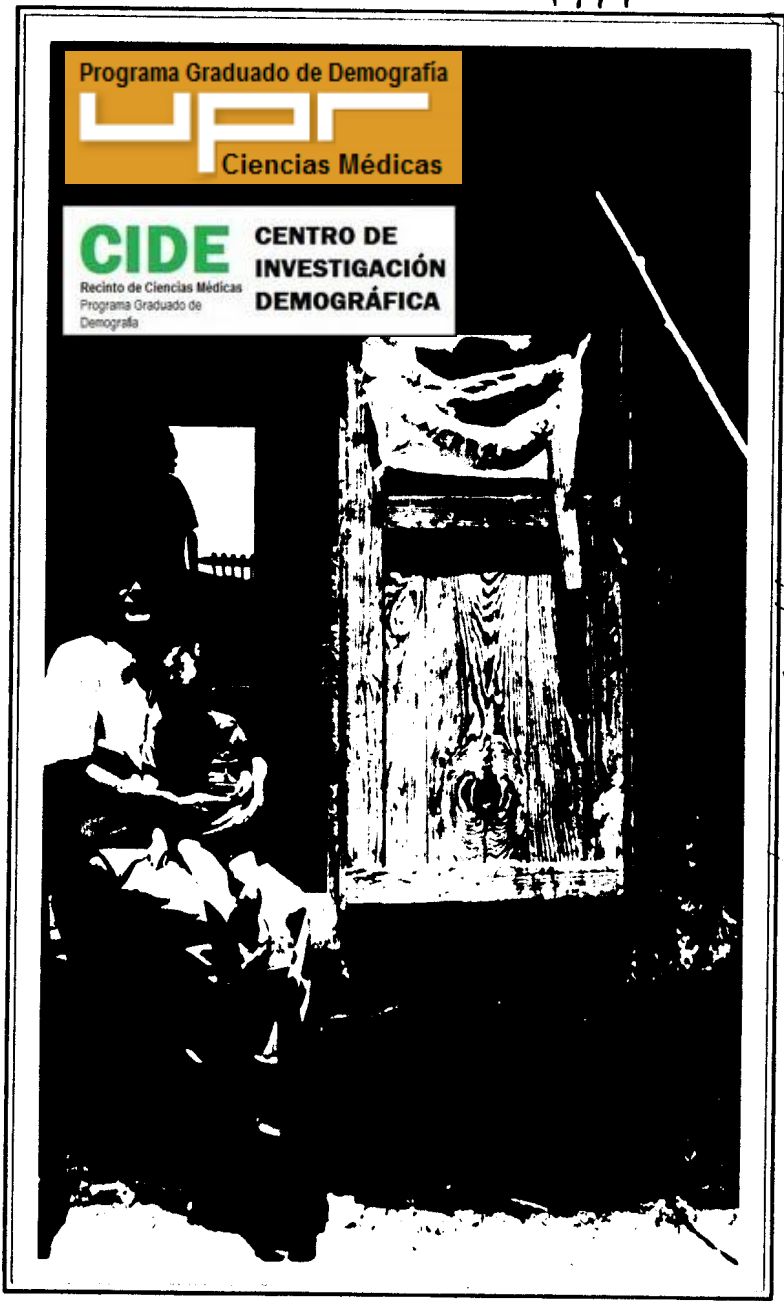


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CHAPTER 7

Demographic Aspects of Migration José L. Vázquez Calzada

Migration has been one of the population topics that has received the least attention from demographers and other social scientists. A few general statements based on common sense constitute what are called "theories of migration." There are very few countries in the world for which reliable information about this phenomenon exists.

Puerto Rico is no exception. The few facts available are incomplete and inaccurate in spite of the fact that today migration is the most important variable of the population equation on the Island. Very little is known about the volume or the social, economic, and cultural effects of the immigration currents of North Americans, Cubans, and other foreigners, or about the massive return of migrants and their children to Puerto Rico.

This work only intends to put together the accumulated knowledge about this important variable. In this way, the existing flaws will be detected and research efforts will be facilitated.

Historical Facts

The political relations that resulted from the invasion and conquest of Puerto Rico by U.S. troops in 1898 precipitated the movement of Islanders to the United States. It is estimated that from the date in which the United States took possession of the Island to 1944, around 90,000 persons migrated to the mainland. During that forty-five-year period, the greatest movement occurred during the decade of the 1920s, when more than 40,000 Puerto Ricans mi-

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grated. The Depression in the 1930s not only reduced this exodus considerably, but during some years the current was reversed. Between 1930 and 1934 there was a return migration of almost 10,000 people, which is equivalent to 20 percent of the Puerto Rican population in the United States at that time.

1945
Once World War II was over, one of the greatest population exoduses registered in contemporary history began. It has been said that the abundance of employment opportunities in the United States, as well as the expansion of air transportation and the reduction in the cost of the trip, were factors that gave impulse to this movement.

Thus, during the decade of the 1940s more than 150,000 Puerto Ricans abandoned their native land, and more than 400,000 more did so during the 1950s. According to the data derived from the census, net migration diminished during the last decade (1960-1970), but even then the figure was over 250,000.

Until 1950, the population movement between Puerto Rico and the United States was primarily in one direction. The return of migrants, as well as the immigration of North Americans and of other foreigners, was insignificant. Since that date the migratory balance, referred to in previous paragraphs, only represents the net result of a series of population movements. Hernández Alvarez estimates that approximately 50,000 Puerto Rican migrants returned to the Island during the 1950s, and that the immigration of people of Puerto Rican origin (migrants and children of migrants) reached 283,000 during the 1960s.¹ In addition, around 50,000 North Americans moved to Puerto Rico during that period. Taking all these figures into consideration, it can be concluded that the migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States increased to more than half a million people during the last decade.

In these estimates the immigration of Cubans and other foreigners has not been taken into consideration, which according to the 1970 census amounted to about 45,000 people.²

Table 7.1
Net Migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States, 1900-1969

Period	Number	Annual average	Rate
1900-09	2,000	200	0.0
1910-19	11,000	1,100	0.1
1920-29	42,000	4,200	0.3
1930-39	18,000	1,800	0.1
1940-49	151,000	15,100	0.7
1950-59	430,000	4,300	1.9
1960-69	253,000	25,300	1.0

Sources: For 1900-1950: José L. Vázquez Calzada, "Las causas y efectos de la emigración puertorriqueña," mimeo. (San Juan: Escuela de Medicina, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1968). For 1960-1969: Estimates by José Hernández Alvarez, Sociology Department, University of Arizona, mimeo.

Place of Origin and Destination of Migrants

In the great majority of cases the migrants came from rural zones of Puerto Rico—more than 60 percent in the last decade.³ In contrast, the great majority established themselves in urban areas in the United States. According to the 1970 census, 98 percent of the Puerto Rican migrants lived in U.S. urban areas,⁴ and this has been so at least since the previous census.

In geographic terms, the most populated municipalities on the Island (San Juan, Ponce, and Mayagüez) were the ones that contributed the most to the migration in absolute quantities, that is, in numbers. But if the migration is considered as a percentage of the population of the municipality, no geographic pattern is distinguishable from the 1950s on. (There are no figures before this.) The municipalities with the highest and lowest rates (as per-

Table 7.2
 Migratory Movements Between 1960 and 1970

Immigration to Puerto Rico	333,424
Return of migrants	148,974
Children of migrants	134,450
North Americans	50,000
Emigration of Puerto Ricans	586,636
Net balance of emigration	253,212

Source: Estimates prepared by José Hernández Alvarez, Sociology Department, University of Arizona, mimeo.

centage of total migration) are dispersed throughout the Island.⁵

At the beginning of the century, Puerto Ricans were dispersed throughout various regions of the United States, although New York City held most of them. Since then the city gained increasing importance as a place of residence for Puerto Rican migrants, and in 1940 it accommodated 88 percent of the total number. From that date on, a tendency toward a greater dispersion has been observed, and according to the 1970 census only 58 percent of *boricuas* lived in New York City.

While New York City and state have lost importance in this respect, other states, such as New Jersey and Illinois, have increased significantly in their Puerto Rican migrant population. In spite of the tendency toward dispersion throughout the United States, more than 90 percent of all Puerto Ricans are still concentrated in seven states. Here I am speaking only of Puerto Rican migrants; I do not include the migrants' children.

In terms of the location of immigrants on the Island—those migrants who returned, as well as Cubans and North Americans—the picture is totally different. The majority of the immigrants established themselves in urban zones, especially in the San Juan metropolitan area. This is a well-known fact. The great majority of the migrants who returned to the Island during the 1955-1959

Table 7.3
 Percentage of the Total Population Born in Puerto Rico and Residing in New York State and New York City, 1910-1970 (by percent)

Year	New York City	New York State
1910	36.6	42.4
1920	62.3	65.4
1930	84.0	87.1
1940	87.8	90.4
1950	82.9	84.6
1960	69.8	72.9
1970	58.4	62.5

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Censuses of Population, 1960 and Census of Population, 1970*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Puerto Ricans in the United States, 1960 and 1970*.

Table 7.4
 Distribution of Puerto Rican Migrants According to the State of Residence, 1960-1970 (by percent)

	1960	1970
New York	72.9	62.5
New Jersey	6.5	10.3
Illinois	4.2	6.6
Pennsylvania	2.4	3.1
Connecticut	1.8	3.0
California	2.5	2.9
Florida	2.3	2.3
Other states	7.4	9.3
<i>Total</i>	100.0	100.0

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Puerto Ricans in the United States, 1960 and 1970*.

period established themselves in urban areas—Hernández estimated this at 70 percent. For the North Americans and foreigners, as well as the children of the migrants, the proportion that established itself in urban areas was even larger.

Characteristics of the Migrants

In spite of various attempts, the government of Puerto Rico has been unable to obtain reliable information about the sociodemographic characteristics of the migrants. Not even simple facts like age and sex have been obtained on a continuous basis. The facts that are analyzed in this section have been derived from the censuses or taken directly from them.

Sex and Age of the Migrants. According to the data derived from the census, migration does not seem to be too selective in terms of sex. Males and females tend to move to the United States in more or less the same proportion. It should be pointed out that since 1950 a slight predominance of males seems to exist: between 1950 and 1959, there were 118 male migrants for every 100 female migrants, while in the last decade the proportion was 123 males for every 100 females.

In terms of age, the migrants are mainly young adults. During the 1950-1959 decade, 70 percent of those who left the Island were between the ages of fifteen and thirty-nine, and only 18 percent were under fifteen. These proportions contrast sharply with those of the Island's population, clearly showing that migration is selective in terms of age.⁴ As shown in Table 7.5, the migrants are on the average older than the general population of the Island. Due to the impossibility of separating the facts of both migratory currents—that is, the out-migration current and the in-migration current—the corresponding computation of the 1960-1969 decade has not been made. It should be pointed out, though, that the average migrant residing in

Table 7.5
Distribution of the Population Residing in Puerto Rico
and of the Migrants by Age Group
(in percent)

Age	Percentage of migrants 1950-1960	Percentage of population 1960
Under 15	18	43
15-39	70	35
40 and older	12	22
<i>Total</i>	100	100
Median age	24	18

the United States was thirty years old in 1970, as compared to twenty years old for the population residing on the Island.

Level of Instruction. The migrant, contrary to what was believed in the past, has on the average a much higher level of education than that of the population residing on the Island (see Table 7.6). This was demonstrated in the data obtained by the Department of Labor during the 1950s and also by the census. In 1960, the adult Puerto Rican (twenty-five years and older) residing on the Island had an average of five completed years in school, compared with an average of eight years for the migrant

Table 7.6
Median Number of Years of School Completed for the Population
Twenty-Five Years and Older Residing in the Island and for
the Migrant Population Residing in the United States, 1960-1970

Year	Residing in Puerto Rico	Migrants
1960	4.8	7.9
1970	6.9	8.4

residing in the United States. According to the 1970 census, the corresponding figures were 6.9 years in Puerto Rico and 8.4 years in the United States. However, this does not seem to be the case among the younger age groups (twenty to twenty-four years old and fifteen to nineteen years old). In other words, people between the ages of fifteen and nineteen, and twenty and twenty-four, who reside on the Island have a higher level of education than the migrants in the same age groups.

Occupations. No information exists of the occupational skills of the migrants at the moment of departure. Only the kinds of jobs they undertake in the United States are known. Obviously, the kind of job has a lot to do with skills and capabilities, but it is also influenced by language limitations, by prejudice, and by many other problems known to everyone. In spite of these limitations, the census figures can shed some light on this matter.

According to the 1970 census, almost 40 percent of the *boricuas* employed in the United States were "operators." This proportion is double the corresponding figure for people employed in Puerto Rico. In general, Puerto Rican migrants have occupations of less status and prestige than Puerto Ricans on the Island, in spite of the fact that they have a higher level of education. So, for instance, while in Puerto Rico the percentage of professionals among the employed population is 12 percent, among the migrants it is only 5 percent. A similar situation occurs with managerial and clerical occupations. An outstanding fact is the high proportion of salesmen among the migrant population as compared to the population residing in Puerto Rico.

Implications of Migration

Migration has been considered by some social scientists, as well as by the majority of our government leaders, as the best solution to the demographic problem of the Is-

Table 7.7
Distribution of the Population of Puerto Rico and of the Migrants
Residing in the United States by Occupational Groups, 1970
(by percent)

	<i>Puerto Rico</i>	<i>Migrants</i>
<i>Agricultural</i>	7.4	1.2
<i>White collar</i>	39.0	25.8
Professionals, etc.	12.0	4.6
Managers, etc.	7.2	3.2
Clerical, etc.	12.3	3.8
Salespeople	7.5	14.2
<i>Manual</i>	41.0	50.5
Artisans, etc.	15.0	11.7
Operators, etc.	19.4	38.8
<i>Nonagricultural workers</i>	6.6	5.9
<i>Service workers</i>	12.6	16.6
All occupations	100.0	100.0

land. Although publicly it was indicated that the government of Puerto Rico was not fostering migration, its actions showed just the opposite. In the population projections prepared by the Planning Board, one of the first variables always included was massive migration. In private conversations I was told that migration, as a solution to the population problem, was less controversial than family planning. Some even publicly proposed a planned massive migration to Brazil and to the islands of the Caribbean.

There is no doubt that mass migration has been a great escape valve for population pressures in Puerto Rico. It is hard to imagine how things would be on the Island if we added the 1.5 million Puerto Ricans in the United States to the present population. Puerto Rico is not the paradise that some want us to believe. In spite of this massive exodus of *boricuas* and the frantic industrialization programs that have placed in the hands of foreign absentee ownership all

Table 7.8
Rate of Unemployment According to Age and Sex, 1970

	Male	Female
14-19	28.7	29.2
20-24	20.4	16.5
25-34	9.3	8.5
35-44	7.5	6.5
45-54	6.7	—
55-64	7.3	—
65 and older	—	—

Source: Puerto Rico Department of Labor. Where there are no data, it is because there were too few cases in the sample.

of our industrial and economic life, Puerto Rico still suffers from many of the same problems of the 1940s, and others have deepened.

Unemployment, one of the most serious problems of the Island, continues to be as high as three decades ago. Official estimates place the figure at 12 percent, although some economists believe that it really reaches more than 20 percent. Hubert Barton, an economist and one of the former government consultants on industrial development, has presented some figures that bring it to 30 percent.

Even according to official figures, unemployment is a critical problem among our youth. Almost 30 percent of the young people between fourteen and nineteen who want to work are unemployed, as are almost 20 percent of those between the ages of twenty and twenty-four.

Another problem that is hardly ever mentioned in Puerto Rico is the extraordinarily high incidence of what has been called voluntary idleness—in other words, laziness. While the unemployed person is searching for a job, the voluntarily idle one is neither in school, at work, or looking for a job. According to the figures obtained from

Table 7.9
Rate of Economic Activity of the Male Population in
Puerto Rico and Three Categories of Countries

Categories	Rate
Industrialized	60.5
Semi-industrialized	62.8
Agricultural	65.1
Puerto Rico	51.0

Source: United Nations, *Demographic Aspects of Manual Labor* (New York, 1963). For Puerto Rico, the figures were computed from figures from the Puerto Rico Department of Labor. The rate is figured by taking the total of males that are active as percentage of the total male population, adjusted according to age. That is, the differences in the age structure of different countries have been considered.

United Nations publications, where figures for all countries can be found, Puerto Rico stands out as the country with the highest proportion of idleness in the world. Its rate of economic activity—that is, the proportion of the population that participates in the production of goods and services—is the lowest among countries for which this information exists in the United Nations yearbook. This situation is much more serious among the male population.

The levels of income of the average Puerto Rican are still very low. In spite of the economic growth, government leaders feel so proud of, the real per capita income is still around \$500, as it was in 1940—and the dollar today has the buying power of \$.30 then. Neither have we advanced when compared to the poorest state in the United States, Mississippi. In 1940, the per capita income in Mississippi was 80 percent higher than that in Puerto Rico; in 1970, it was 81 percent higher. If we have achieved anything, it has been only a worsening of the situation, if compared with Mississippi. In relation to the economic objectives our political leaders drew up for themselves back in the

1940s, that is, to reach the level of the poorest state of the United States, the failure has been complete.

In addition, income distribution has worsened significantly.⁷ It is enough to say that, according to the 1970 census, 64 percent of our families lived on the threshold of poverty. For the rural population, this proportion reached to more than 80 percent and in some municipalities, like Maricao, it surpassed 90 percent.

And to achieve an economic growth that has not yet been able to reduce the grave problems of idleness and low income levels, Puerto Rico has been mortgaged and most of our economic life has been placed in the hands of huge U.S. corporations with absentee owners. Absenteeism, another ill that, it was said in the 1940s, was to be eradicated, today dominates almost all of our industries, banking, and commerce. Puerto Ricans have become errand boys in their own land.

Migration is, then, only the symptom of a critical socioeconomic situation. It is the escape valve for those who have seen their aspirations frustrated in their own land. Many Puerto Ricans migrate with the hope that things cannot be worse in the United States than they are on the Island. But migration is not, and cannot be, the solution to the problem of an imbalance between resources and population. It could be used to give an initial impulse to socioeconomic development since it relieves demographic pressure, and thus a greater proportion of resources can be dedicated to nondemographic (i.e., social, economic) investment. What cannot be done is to structure a people's development and economy on the premise, implicit or explicit, of mass migration on a continuing basis. To do such a thing is dangerous, inefficient, and questionable.

It is a dangerous recourse because the volume and direction of these movements are out of our control, out of the control of the people of Puerto Rico. Migration seems to be closely linked to the conditions of the job market in the United States, as well as the economic situation in that country. Any economic disturbance in the United

States will be felt in Puerto Rico in all its intensity. Examples of this close association are the economic crisis of the 1930s, the small recessions in the 1950s, and the situation that we are going through at this moment.

Migration tends to decrease during periods of crisis in the United States and sometimes, as I said before, the current has reversed itself; more than 280,000 people of Puerto Rican extraction have returned to Puerto Rico, and the current of returning migrants seems to have increased considerably since 1970. An economy which depends on its ability to get rid of its excess population by means of migration cannot be expected to have great stability and finds itself on a very unsound base.

Furthermore, migration turns out to be a very costly solution. In the long run, these movements represent a great loss in terms of the economic and social investment made by our society, by our community. This is a very unfortunate situation in a country with such scarce resources. Our migrants are young people, at the age of greatest economic productivity; they have a level of education which is higher than that of the average Puerto Rican, and they apparently have a better disposition toward work.

Migration has also been questioned from a moral and human point of view. It is inhuman and unjust to think of the migrants as simple statistics. Their suffering, their dreams, their aspirations and frustrations cannot be, nor should they be, ignored by those who see migration as the solution to the demographic problem and who would like this exodus to continue so that they can accommodate themselves better in Puerto Rico.

It is pitiful and incredible how little importance and attention population movements have received from our government. Even more incredible has been the position that many of our social scientists have assumed. The relative passivity of our intellectuals in the face of the exodus of Puerto Ricans is disturbing and exasperating, more so when, in the last few years, it has been accompanied by a massive immigration of North Americans and other

foreigners. I do not think, though, that we should act simply out of prejudice or guided by emotions. It is necessary that we first understand the nature and magnitude of these movements, as well as their causes and consequences. This is one of the real challenges for the Puerto Rican social scientist.

Notes

1. José Hernández Alvarez, *Return Migration to Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 16.
2. This number is somewhat doubtful and has been questioned by many experts in the field.
3. Estimates done by the demographic studies section of the School of Public Health, University of Puerto Rico.
4. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Puerto Ricans in the United States, 1970*, Table 2.
5. José L. Vázquez Calzada, "Las causas y efectos de la emigración puertorriquena," mimeo. (San Juan: Escuela de Medicina, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1968).
6. Hernández Alvarez, *Return Migration to Puerto Rico*.
7. José L. Vázquez Calzada, "El desbalance entre recursos y población en Puerto Rico," mimeo. (San Juan: Escuela de Medicina, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1966).