

NEW ASPECTS OF PUERTO RICAN MIGRATION

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Three years ago the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico initiated a new and vastly improved sample survey of migration between Puerto Rico and the United States. Data for the first two years from this survey bring to light several very important and for the most part surprising characteristics of Puerto Rican migration.

First of all, it has been discovered that net migration between Puerto Rico and the United States — to a much greater extent than anyone supposed — is the resultant of a substantial two-way migration movement both into as well as out of Puerto Rico. The reasons why no considerable in-migration was expected to exist are well-known. Net out-migration itself has been so large (averaging 45,000 for the decade and at times reaching flood proportions) that it has been difficult to imagine it to be only the net figure and that the actual number of migrants might be considerably larger. Furthermore, the economic advantages of migration from Puerto Rico (where unemployment continues high, unskilled labor abundant and wages relatively low) to New York (with its scarcity of unskilled and semi-skilled labor) have been so obvious that the existence of large-scale return migration of migrants from earlier years seemed hardly conceivable.

Yet data from our survey reveal an in-migration (not counting the return of seasonal agricultural migrants and of others who had been away from Puerto Rico less than a year) in the neighborhood of 60,000 persons in both 1957 and 1958. Some of this in-migration was undoubtedly temporary and related to the conditions of recession and unemployment prevailing on the Mainland at that time. The major portion of it, however, cannot be understood without taking into consideration the rapid progress of economic development in Puerto Rico and the accompanying growth of economic opportunities — especially for those with above average education and occupational skill. Also, there is the easily understandable fact that most Puerto Ricans prefer to live in Puerto Rico with only a fairly decent income (if they can get it), than to earn maybe 50% more and have to put up with all the disagreeable conditions which confront Puerto Ricans in New York.

As we have already noted, a high level of in-migration implies that gross migration from Puerto Rico to the United States must have been much greater than has generally been supposed on the basis of the net figures. Our data disclose about 85,000 out-migrants in 1958 when net migration was only 26,000. The corresponding figure for 1957, when net migration was 37,000, is estimated at almost 100,000. What was happening during the years prior to 1957 is a matter of conjecture, since there is no data on gross migration for these years. On the one hand, gross migration would tend to be closer to net out-migration since there were fewer Puerto

Ricans living in the United States who could have migrated back to Puerto Rico. On the other hand, net out-migration was averaging 50,000 during the period 1950 to 1956 as compared with 30,000 in 1957 and 1958 so that a heavy gross out-migration for these years would not imply such a large excess over net migration. On balance, it seems not unreasonable to suppose a level of gross out-migration similarly high as the 90,000 or so a year level averaged in 1957 and 1958.

Intelligent forecasting of net migration during the 1960's and 1970's requires separate forecasting of in-migration and out-migration. In-migration from the United States to Puerto Rico should increase as the economic development program leads to an accelerated demand for skilled and some categories of semi-skilled labor. But the pressure to migrate from Puerto Rico should continue and maybe even increase among the unskilled. Because of the disappearance of marginal jobs, especially in agriculture and home needlework, economic development has so far not been able to raise the level of employment; its achievement rests in the improved quality of employment as represented by increased productivity and higher wages.

In the long run, the future of net migration should depend primarily on population pressure. To get a clear picture of present trends in Puerto Rican fertility we shall have to wait the results of the 1960 Census. There are indications of a considerable decline in fertility. The number of births annually has decreased from 85,000 in 1950 to 75,000 in 1958, and the crude birth rate has fallen from almost 39 per thousand to less than 32. However, the heavy migration during the decade has so fouled up our estimates of the age-sex distribution of the population that it is not certain whether the decline in crude fertility rates is attributable to a corresponding drop in age specific fertility or merely to a shifting of births from Puerto Rico to the United States.

There is another very interesting aspect of this Puerto Rican migration. A combination of circumstances has brought Puerto Rico so much closer to New York than it used to be — even though the distance on the map remains 1,600 miles. The airplane has cut the travel time from four or five days to three or four hours. The mass use of the new travel facilities by a more prosperous Puerto Rican population has brought the fare down — in this post-war era of inflation — to not much more than one-third of what it was just at the end of the war. The earnings of the average Puerto Rican have in the meantime more than doubled. As a consequence, the cost of a trip to New York — thirteen or fourteen years ago the equivalent of about three months' earnings — now represents only about two weeks' salary to the average worker in Puerto Rico.

In addition, New York has become close to Puerto Rico in terms of kinship, so much so that

it is now recognized as the largest Puerto Rican city in the world. As a consequence, travel between Puerto Rico and the United States just for the sake of visiting has become as commonplace as migration.

In 1958 the number of trips between Puerto Rico and the United States amounted to almost 700,000 — slightly more than half of which were departures. These 700,000 trips represented approximately 420,000 different passengers who break down into about 140,000 migrants and 280,000 round trip passengers. The extraordinary thing to note here is that as many as 140,000 of the round-trip passengers — about half of the 280,000 — consisted of Puerto Ricans who visited friends or relatives either in the United States or in Puerto Rico. In other words, the 140,000 migrants and the 140,000 visitors together add up to 280,000 Puerto Ricans who in 1958 made a trip between the United States and Puerto Rico either to migrate or to pay a visit. Together they comprise two-thirds of the 420,000 passengers who travelled between Puerto Rico and the United States. The significance of these figures is tremendous and we shall return to them presently.

Meanwhile, we observe that many, although certainly not all, of these 280,000 Puerto Ricans were either of low income or sufficiently youthful as not to own much property. For such persons the decision to migrate (providing the trip can be made at all) can be a relatively casual affair since the matter of disposing of property is no great problem. This reason together with the factors that have drawn New York and Puerto Rico close together in travel time, travel costs and in kinship relations have combined to make this Puerto Rican migration a large-scale, long-distance population movement in which for perhaps the first time in history many of the participants travel first and decide later what the purpose of their trip was — whether to migrate or just to visit friends or relatives. The purpose of the trip can depend on how one makes out after arriving.

At this point a comment and a point of clarification have to be made. The comment is that as a statistician I want to go on record as deploring this state of affairs. It becomes very difficult to identify migrants in a survey where many of the passengers by the time they board the plane have not yet made up their mind why they are travelling. We have been forced to fall back on indirect methods of identification where the margin of error is uncomfortably large. Although most of the figures used here may well be off by 20% or so, the conclusions we have drawn from them would not be affected. However, we have much other interesting data on such characteristics as age, sex, education and occupation for the in-migrants, the out-migrants and the net migrants; but conclusions based on this data are not reliable and therefore cannot be released.

The point of clarification is that most of this visiting is from the United States to Puerto Rico, whereas the migration is preponderantly in the opposite direction. While 60% of the 140,000 migrants were moving from Puerto Rico to the

United States, only about 30,000 (21%) of the 140,000 visitors were residents of Puerto Rico making a visit to the United States. In view of the higher wage levels in the United States and the fact that the Puerto Ricans living in the United States were the ones away from home, it confirms our expectations to find more of the visiting done by them. But the figure of 110,000 is so surprisingly high as to jolt the general impression most of us have of the economic potentialities of Puerto Ricans living in New York.

Some general conclusions may be drawn. The 280,000 Puerto Ricans who travelled between Puerto Rico and the United States in 1958 either to migrate or to visit friends or relatives represent almost 10% of all Puerto Ricans living either in the United States or in Puerto Rico. According to newspaper reports, Dr. Handlin in his book *The Newcomers* characterized Puerto Ricans as differing from previous immigrant waves by the extent to which they have retained close ties with the land from which they came. The evidence we have presented certainly supports Dr. Handlin's observation.

The observation, however, is easily susceptible of misinterpretation. Those who see in it nothing more than an exaggerated sense of clanishness together with a refusal to adapt to new conditions have missed the whole point. The observation really cannot be understood except in the context of the tremendous economic and social transformation that is going on these days back in Puerto Rico.

The truly bewildering rate of social and economic change in contemporary Puerto Rico is sufficient evidence that Puerto Ricans are neither unwilling nor unable to adapt to new conditions. By its accelerated program of modernization, Puerto Rico is trying to pass through in one generation a process of development which took the United States perhaps a century and a half. It is hard to communicate what this implies as an abrupt calling in question of long-accepted values, attitudes and patterns of behavior. Two radically different ways of life — the pre-industrial and the post-industrial — are being suddenly and drastically confronted face to face, and the separate parts of each are being weighed in the balance.

The significance of 280,000 Puerto Ricans either moving or visiting between Puerto Rico and the United States in the short space of one year is that the adaptation to new conditions — whether through preference or through necessity — is being made collectively as well as individually. The going back and forth serves a double purpose: (1) It permits Puerto Ricans to experience modern industrial life in the more advanced forms it has taken in the United States as well as its manifestations in Puerto Rico. The social transformation is thereby accelerated so that it may keep pace with the economic. (2) It enables a collective sharing and exchanging of experiences among the migrants, the visitors and those engaged on the home front.

Along with much agonizing self-interrogation,

an intense debate is taking place among the Puerto Rican people. The basic question, however, is not whether Puerto Rico should industrialize. Hardly anybody in Puerto Rico, I dare say, would dispute this. The question is whether the values historically associated with industrialized society have to be accepted wholesale as a package deal, or whether and to what extent it is possible to pick and choose. Is it possible

to have a highly dynamic industrial society founded on mass education, individual initiative and enlightened self-interest without accepting at the same time the vulgarity of the comic strips and the shabby morality of the TV quiz programs? And if it is possible, is it desirable? There is much difference of opinion among Puerto Ricans on this score. And evidently among Americans as well.