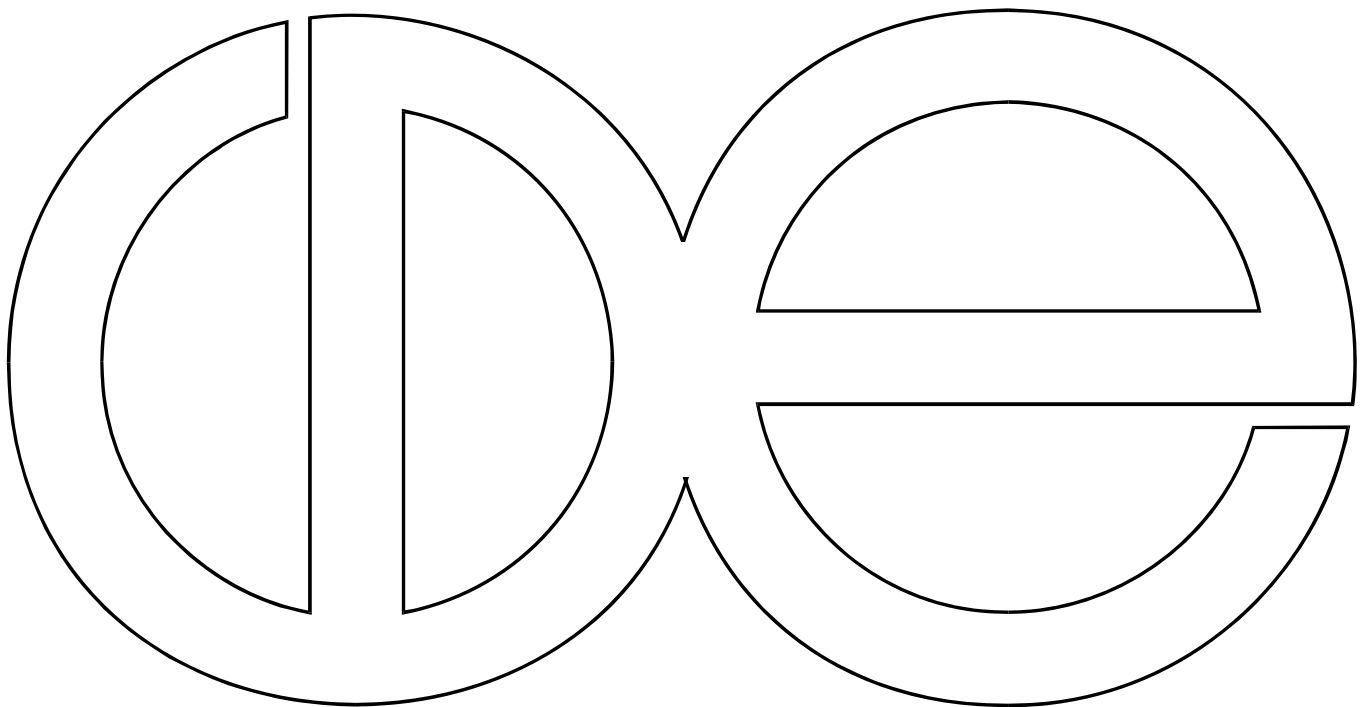


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**Migration of Retirement-Age Blacks to
Nonmetropolitan Areas in the 1990s**

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ABSTRACT

Older Blacks migrated to nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) communities in the 1990s to a degree not true of the past. Some of the nonmetro counties that attracted them are well-known retirement areas also favored by other retirees, mostly Whites. Two-thirds of Black retirement counties, however, are areas in the Old South that are not attracting other retirees at a substantial rate, if at all. Although the data indicate significant rates of retirement-age Blacks migrating to 85 nonmetro counties, most migration by older Blacks is to metro destinations.

Keywords: Black migration, retirement migration

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INTRODUCTION

About 35 years ago social scientists began to notice that many counties in rural and small town America were shifting to population growth, often after many years of decline (Beale, 1974, Beale, 1975). A number of these newly-growing counties were identified as the destinations of elderly migrants, many of whom came from major metropolitan areas. They were found in widely disparate parts of the country, and not just in subtropical winter havens. Over time, the impact of this migrant stream was substantial, as spending by these retirement-age people contributed to further economic and population growth. Retired newcomers also often brought skills and education that benefited their new communities through volunteer activities.

Thus, in recent years many communities have actively sought to attract elderly migrants as a source of development (Longino, 2001).

Until recently, however, this population movement was almost exclusively made up of elderly Whites. In the 1950s the movement of retirement-age Blacks to nonmetropolitan areas was extremely limited. Consider that Florida had a net immigration of 350,000 Whites during the 1950s who were age 60 and older in 1960, a net growth from migration that was more than double the population expected through aging in place. For all other races combined—of which Blacks were the overwhelming majority—older immigrants totaled only about 1,300, or just 2 percent above the population expected without net immigration (Bowles and Tarver, 1965). The low economic status of most Blacks at that time, and their widespread concurrent flight from rural and small-town areas, worked against their playing a role in nonmetro retirement migration. For several decades afterward, the major movement of Blacks continued to be from the South to major cities in the North, but more recently there has been a net return migration to the South (Frey, 2001). During this time, the social and economic status of Blacks improved considerably, making retirement migration more feasible. This research seeks to answer the question of whether--several decades after the great migration of rural Blacks to cities subsided--significant numbers of retirement-age Blacks have begun to migrate to nonmetro destinations. And, if they have, to what extent are they moving to the historically poor counties of the South, from which many urban Blacks originated, or to the popular recreation and retirement areas usually favored by Whites? Our approach has been to replicate the procedures used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in identifying nonmetro retirement destination counties for the total population

across the United States over recent decades. We have contrasted those findings with our comparable ones for Blacks for 1990-2000, and made further comparisons between nonmetro and metro areas.

In the 1950s, Florida and California were by far the most common destinations for migrating retirement-age persons. But retirement areas were beginning to develop in locations not associated with subtropical climates, such as the first of the Ozark dam-reservoir counties, several lake counties in northern Michigan, plus areas in the Texas Hill Country, the southern Blue Ridge Mountains, and along the Atlantic Coast. All of these were recreation-oriented areas, drawing a White clientele.

The settlement of retirement-age Blacks in nonmetro areas has a precedent in Lake County, MI. An area known as Idlewild was developed by entrepreneurs as a resort in the 1910s, at a time when Blacks were prevented by segregation from using the many summer resorts frequented by Whites in northern Michigan (Stephens, 2001). Idlewild drew on the Black urban populations of Chicago, Detroit, and other Midwest cities. By the 1920s, it was attracting year-round residents, including many retirees. The resort and retirement activity by Blacks in Idlewild dwindled greatly after passage of civil rights legislation in the mid-1960s, however. Although retirement opportunities developed elsewhere, modest net immigration of retirement-age Blacks persisted in Lake County in the 1990s.

METHOD

In the 1960s and especially in the 1970s, the movement of older people into rural and small-town areas became a new factor in population growth in more and more nonmetro counties. This was particularly novel and unexpected in areas that lacked mild winters and had not previously been thought of as likely retirement destinations.

It seemed useful, therefore, to measure the trend and systemically identify counties with substantial rates of retirement-age immigration. This was first done by the Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, for the 1970-80 decade, using available estimates of migration by age. County net migration estimates have been made by different researchers for each decade since the 1950s. Although produced by different methods, the results are reasonably comparable. For 1990-2000 the county migration estimates were produced by Voss and associates (2004), using more detailed data than were available previously. The population "expected" for each county for persons age 60-74 in 2000--in the absence of migration into or out of a county during the decade--was calculated by projecting forward to 2000 the 1990 population age 50-64. But unlike those preparing estimates for previous decades, Voss et al. were able to subtract from this projection the number of actual deaths that occurred during the decade, separately for race groups and for the Hispanic population, from data available in National Center for Health Statistics records. For the population age 65 years and older in 1990, mortality data from vital statistics records were reconciled to those from the Medicare system. Medicare age data are regarded as more accurate for the elderly because of less misreporting of age than occurs in vital statistics records.

The difference between the expected number of older people and the 2000 census results (adjusted for incomplete census enumeration) provides an estimate of the net amount of movement into or out of any age group during the decade. **That migration estimate can then be taken as a percentage of the expected population to obtain the rate of change that had occurred above or below the expected number.** Counties that had 15 percent or more persons age 60 or older in 2000 than expected without migration were deemed to be retirement destination counties, which was the criterion used by the Economic Research Service for previous decades. For this study, the same calculation was applied to the Black population and Black retirement destination counties were identified accordingly.

For the population of all races, 277 counties that are currently nonmetro met the retirement destination standard for 1990-2000 (see figure 1). The comparable number for 1980-90 was 168,

[Insert figure 1 about here]

indicating a substantial increase during the 1990s. This rise in the number of nonmetro retirement counties occurred despite the fact that persons entering their sixties in the 1990s were born during the low birth rate years of the 1930s. Not all persons over 60 are retired, but the age group 60-64 is the youngest in which the majority of the population is not in the labor force. In 2000, only 39 percent of Blacks of age 60-64 were in the labor force, compared with 63 percent among those aged 55-59.

In deriving Black retirement-age migration estimates for 1990-2000, we looked at all counties that had actual or expected total Black populations in 2000 of at least 1,000, with at least 50 Black residents age 60 or older in 2000. Counties with populations smaller than these thresholds were not deemed likely to have meaningful amounts of Black retirement-age inmovement. We limited our designation also to counties in which the estimated net inmovement of retirement-age Blacks was 25 persons or more. Amounts smaller than 25 persons were not considered demographically meaningful or reliable. Nonmetro status is as of 1993, the year when the Office of Management and Budget first applied its metro-nonmetro criteria to the results of the 1990 Census.

RESULTS

Seventy-four of the 85 nonmetro Black retirement-age destination counties are in the South (figure 2), the 16-state region in which the rural and small-town Black population has historically been concentrated. This distribution is not surprising given that four-fifths of all

[Insert figure 2 about here]

nonmetro counties that met the minimum Black population levels for inclusion in our study were in the South. (Few nonmetro counties outside the South with Black populations of less than 1,000 had significant growth in Blacks of any age in the 1990s.)

Eleven of the 85 nonmetro Black retirement counties are in Florida, the classic mild winter climate destination for retirees in general. But most are scattered through the former Plantation Belt from southern Virginia to east Texas and tend **not** to have had significant

inmovement of older Whites. Inmovement of White retirees was below 15 percent (and in some cases negative) in 58 of the 85 counties. Thus in nonmetro America, the geographic patterns of retirement destination that have emerged for Blacks are substantially different from those of Whites. Although some of the Black retirement destinations are conventional recreation or retirement areas, most are simply counties from which large numbers of today's older urban Blacks originated, and where they may have retained ties of family, friends, or property. Altogether, the 85 nonmetro Black retirement counties attracted a net of 13,700 older Blacks from 1990 to 2000.

The same 85 counties had a concurrent net inmovement of 108,000 older Whites. The much larger number for Whites may seem surprising, given that most Black retirement counties do not qualify as White retirement counties. But over half of the older Whites (59,300) moving into these counties were absorbed by just seven Southern counties--containing Rehoboth, DE, Hendersonville and Southern Pines-Pinehurst, NC; Hilton Head, SC; Homosassa Springs and Sebring, FL; and Hot Springs, AR--that have been prominent retirement destinations for Whites since the 1960s or earlier. So older Blacks are now moving at a significant pace to some well-known nonmetro retirement communities, in a manner not true in the past. However, only 15 percent (2,030) of older Blacks moving to the 85 counties went to those areas. The great majority went to more work-a-day locations in the old Plantation South not normally regarded as retirement destinations. If the criterion used to identify Black retirement counties were lowered to 10-percent growth above expected level, the number of qualifying counties would nearly

double, with almost all of them being other formerly farm-dependent counties in the same region as those that met the 15-percent standard (figure 3). There are numerous other nonmetro

[Insert figure 3 here]

Southern counties that either had net outmovement of older Blacks or rates of inmovement near zero. Why these outwardly similar counties failed to attract retirement-age Blacks is not clear.

The county with the highest growth rate of retirement-age Blacks is an exception to the general pattern of Southern location. Monroe County, PA headed the list with a rate of 301 percent, amounting to net inmovement of 493 older Blacks. Monroe County is in the Pocono Mountains and has attracted immigrants of all races and ages. It is a prominent resort county, but is also surrounded by metro areas, with a high rate of job commuting to those areas.

Orangeburg County, SC, received the largest number of older Blacks moving to a nonmetro county from 1990 to 2000, netting 1,021 new residents for 16-percent growth above the population expected from aging in place. Orangeburg was once one of the largest U.S. cotton producing counties and today--despite much outmigration in the post-plantation era--has the largest Black population of any nonmetro county in the country (56,000 persons in 2000, comprising 61 percent of the total population). With this base, any significant rate of Black retirement immigration into the county has to yield a sizable absolute number. Even so, the amount of inmovement for Orangeburg is impressive considering that only 1 of the 62 other counties with higher rates than Orangeburg had as many as 500 (net) older migrants.

Orangeburg County has some recreation-oriented retirement along Lake Marion (a large dam

reservoir), but had only a 4-percent inmovement of older Whites over 1990-2000, a net of 286 persons. In addition to tapping the large pool of Blacks who left the Orangeburg area as young adults during the 1950s and 1960s, inmovement might be enhanced by the fact that the county is also the seat of two historically Black universities.

Because of extensive rule changes made by the Office of Management and Budget for defining metro areas, many former nonmetro counties were reclassified as metro after the 2000 Census. However, the new rules also caused some metro counties to revert to nonmetro status. One of this latter group, Flagler, FL, would be the leading destination for Black retirees (rather than Orangeburg, SC) if counties were classed by their current nonmetro status rather than by their status in 1990, the start of the period examined here. Flagler is just north of the Daytona Beach area and was attached to that metro area in 1990. But it did not qualify in the 2000 census because of more stringent job commuting criteria that were put in place. The county attracted a net of 1,175 retirement-age Blacks from 1990 to 2000, some 245 percent above the expected population level. Nearly two-thirds of the county's population lives in a huge second-home and retirement development, Palm Coast, that is absorbing most of the very rapid growth, including the Black newcomers.

Age Differences in Net Migration Rates

Inmigration rates into Black retirement counties were highest for persons who were 60-69 in 2000, reaching 25.4 percent for those age 65-69 years. The rates dropped into the mid-

teens for ages over 70. Thus, inmovement was more common in the early retirement years than at older ages, a finding consistent with studies of the total population. There was also a noticeable movement into the retirement counties of persons still in their late fifties in 2000. People of this age are seldom characterized as being of retirement age--or beyond middle age--and we have not done so. But a number of careers--such as police work, emergency services, or Federal employment—enable and even promote retirement under age 60. And net immigration rates to Black retirement areas exhibit a distinct upswing between age groups 50-54 and 55-59 (14.4 percent versus 20.4 percent).

Nonmetro Black retirement counties do not necessarily attract young adults as well. As a whole, the 85 counties had net outmovement of Blacks who were ages 15-19 and 20-24 in 1990 and 25-29 and 30-34 in 2000. At these ages, the rates of outmovement were not high (-8.2 percent for those 25-29 in 2000 and -3.0 percent for those 30-34 in 2000), but they demonstrate that the features of Black retirement areas that proved attractive to older persons were not as compelling for young adults.

We thought it likely that the age distribution of Black migrants to nonmetro counties that were both Black and White retirement areas might be different from that of Black migrants to counties that were Black retirement areas only. In particular, we expected that net outmigration of younger Blacks would be more common in Old South counties because they are not usually recreation-oriented or warm winter areas. This proved true (compare the two lines of figure 4)

[Insert figure 4 about here]

in the sense that the counties that were White retirement locales had net Black outmovement only at one age group (25-29 years old in 2000), whereas Black-only retirement counties had outmovement both at ages 25-29 and 30-34 and a higher rate of loss at ages 25-29 than in the counties attracting both Black and White retirees.

The greatest difference between the two classes of counties proved to be at ages 75 and older. At this advanced age, inmovement of Blacks was much higher into counties qualifying as both White and Black retirement counties. We have no explanation for this pattern.

Comparison with Metro Black Retirement Counties

The number of Black metro retirement counties (141) was considerably larger than the nonmetro number (85). This is consistent with the fact that the Black population nationally is disproportionately located in metro areas, in contrast to its distribution 60 years ago. Unlike the 85 nonmetro counties--five-sixths of which were in the South--somewhat fewer than half of the metro Black retirement counties are Southern (figure 5). They vary in type. Some are long-

[Insert figure 5 about here]

established Florida winter refuges, such as the counties containing Fort Lauderdale, Orlando, or Palm Beach. Indeed, Broward County (Fort Lauderdale) attracted more older Black migrants (8,875) than any other county in the nation in the 1990s. Some were immigrants from Caribbean countries rather than American-born migrants. The second largest destination was the resort and

gambling mecca of Clark County, NV (Las Vegas) (6,736), which also was the second most prominent county destination for older Whites in the 1990s.

Other major metro destinations for older Blacks were burgeoning suburban counties with fairly young age distributions. Such counties may not be commonly thought of as retirement areas, but do, in fact, attract many older Blacks. Prominent among them were De Kalb and Clayton, GA (Atlanta), Oakland, MI (Detroit), San Bernardino, CA (Los Angeles), and Montgomery, MD (Washington, DC). Although these counties ranked very high on Black retirement-age inmovement, that influx was typically accompanied by extensive net outmovement of older Whites. Some central metro counties that are not resort areas-- such as Shelby, TN (Memphis), Dallas, TX, and Sacramento, CA—still attracted older Blacks, but not at a pace of 15 percent or higher. Altogether, metro Black retirement counties attracted a net of 89,000 Black older migrants over 1990-2000, compared with the 13,700 who went to nonmetro destinations.

CONCLUSION

Older Black Americans are moving to nonmetro locations in a manner and degree not found a generation ago. Some of their moves have been to the same natural-amenity destinations favored by other retirees. Most of the influx, however, has gone to a cross-section of Southern counties from which thousands of Blacks migrated during the exodus from farming in the 20 years or so after World War II. For many retirement-age Blacks, it is probably return migration.

Where an influx of older people has occurred in nonmetro counties with low or no immigration of people under age 35, the average countywide age of Blacks rose from 1990 to 2000. Though data on the economic characteristics of the newcomers are not available here, Black retirement-age migrants to popular resort-retirement destinations may well have higher incomes and assets than older Blacks already residing in such communities. Whether this is true—and also true of those moving into the counties that are not also White retirement areas—is an interesting question for additional research.

Counties attracting Black retirees ranged from areas having rapid overall population growth (30 percent or more) in the 1990s to three that declined in total population. The overall population increase of the 85 counties was 19 percent, versus 9 percent in nonmetro America as a whole over 1990-2000, and the counties were typically growing from other sources as well as from retirement. Yet, these retirement-destination counties were not in most cases prosperous, as measured by income. In three-fourths of the 85 Black retirement-destination counties, the poverty rate was above the national nonmetro average of 14.6 percent in 2000. This could hardly have been otherwise, given the Southern location of most of them and the above-average poverty levels that still characterize the rural South. Thus, on balance, Black retirees were not seeking average-to-high income locations, although the destinations were usually areas of population growth nevertheless.

The overall demographic impact of Black retirement on nonmetro counties was not large. The inmovement of Black retiree-age people added at most 1-1.5 percent to the population of

any of the 85 destination counties. In a dozen counties, though, the retirement-age Blacks comprised 10 percent or more of the total county growth across all age groups. Since 2000, nonmetro population growth has slowed, but the Black retirement counties have continued to outpace the national trend (8.0 percent increase vs. 2.4 percent from 2000 to 2007).

Given the rapid rise in the number of Blacks of Southern origin who are now reaching retirement age, it seems likely that the trend of Black retirement-age migration to both nonmetro and metro locations will strengthen and that its impact will grow. The Black population age 60 and over is projected to rise by 26 percent from 2000 to 2010 as those born in the high birth rate years of the 1940s enter this age group and life expectancy continues to rise. (This estimate is based on application of recent life table survivorship values for Blacks to the Black population age 50 years and older in 2000). Growth is projected to be particularly high (38 percent) for the large cohort of persons entering their sixties during the decade, the time of life when retirement-age migration is most likely to occur. By contrast, the Black population as a whole is projected by the Census Bureau to grow by just 13 percent during 2000-2010.

Looking further out, the great majority of Northern and Western Black urbanites will become generationally more removed from their Southern farm belt family origins and might show increased choice of more conventional nonmetro retirement areas, rather than those favored in the 1990s.

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Figure 1. Nonmetro retirement destination counties for the total population, 2000

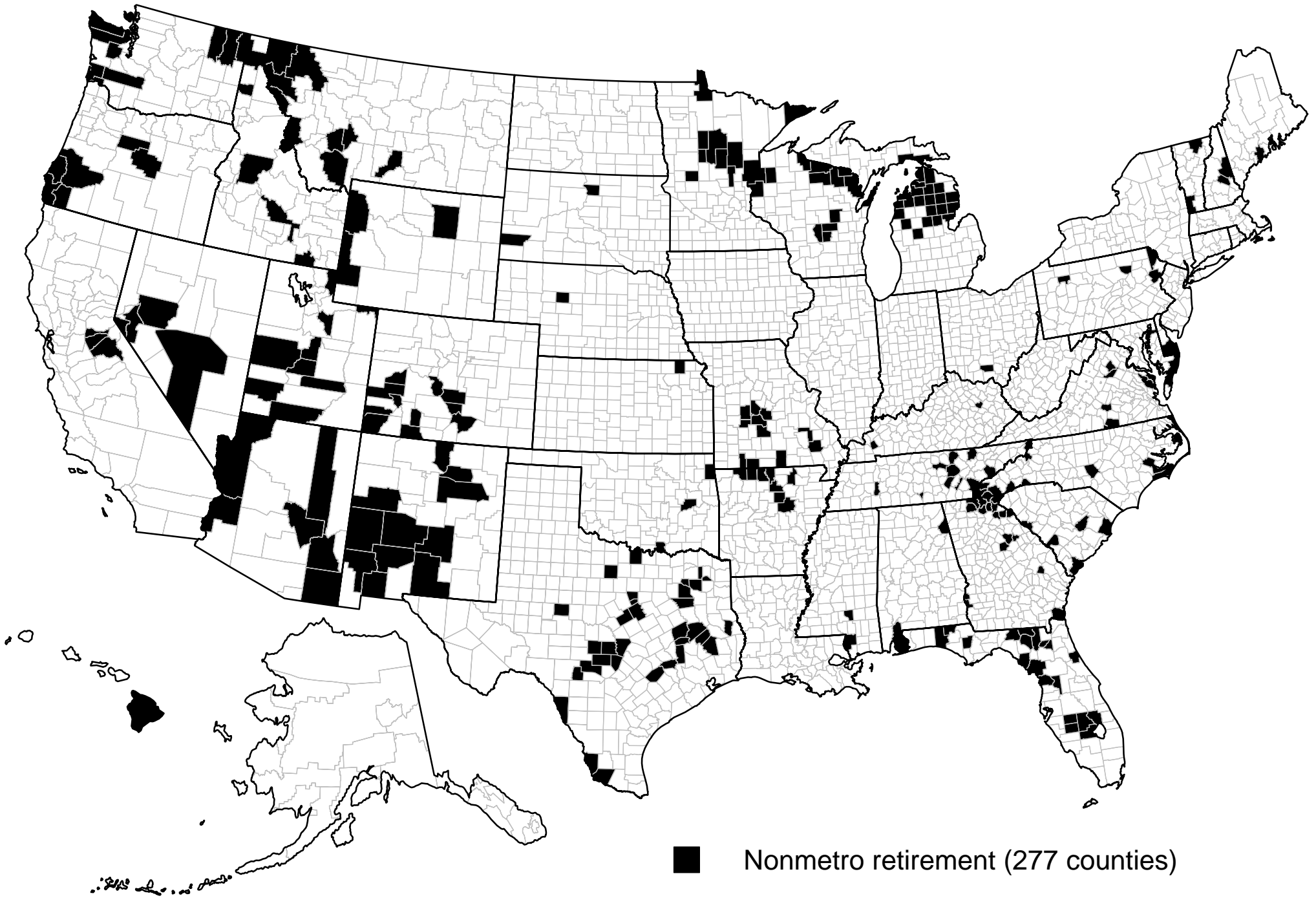


Figure 2. Nonmetro Black retirement destination counties, 2000



Figure 3. Nonmetro Black retirement destination counties, with lower threshold also shown, 2000

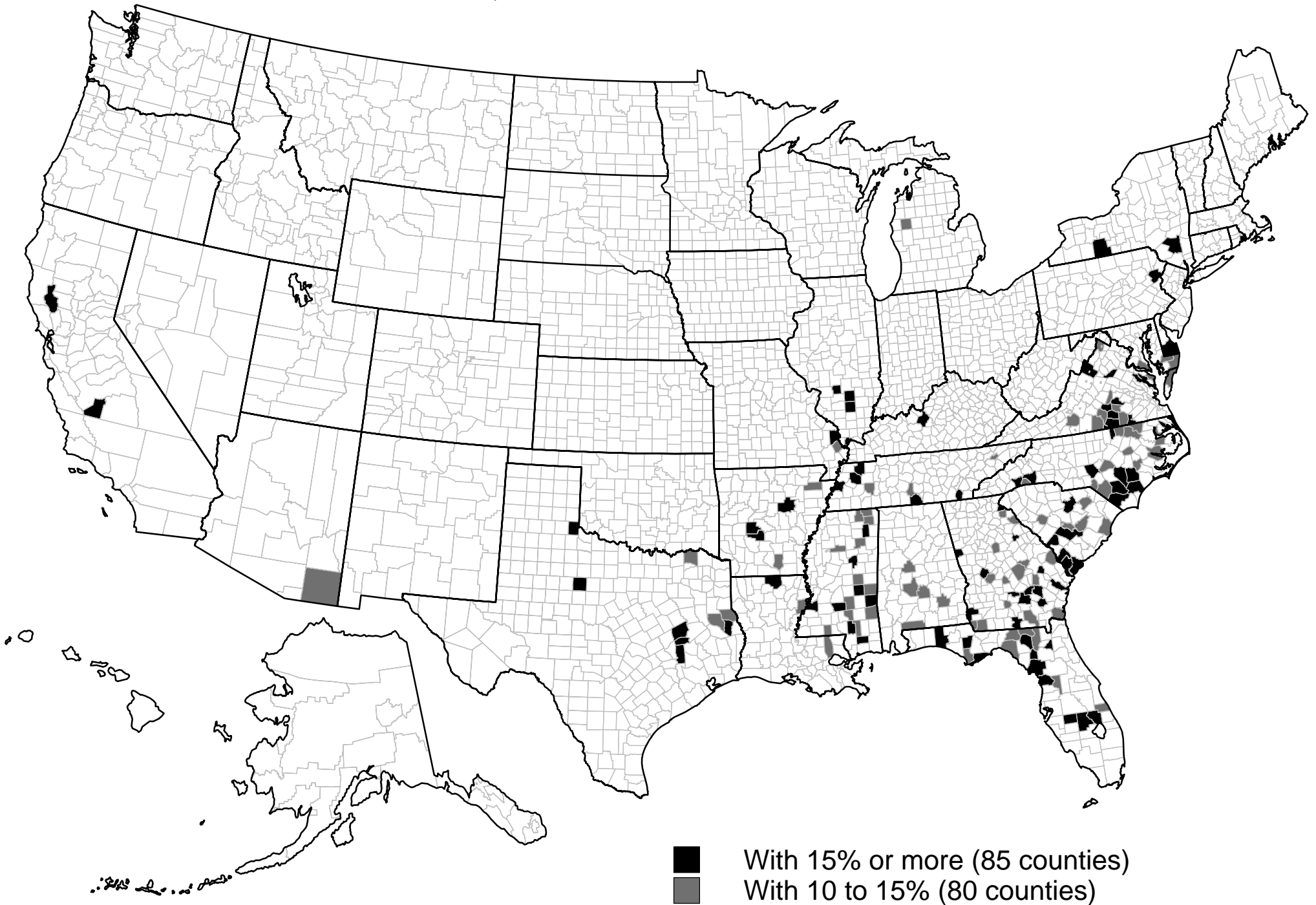


Figure 4. Percent more than expected Black migration rates by 5-year age groups for Black retirement counties

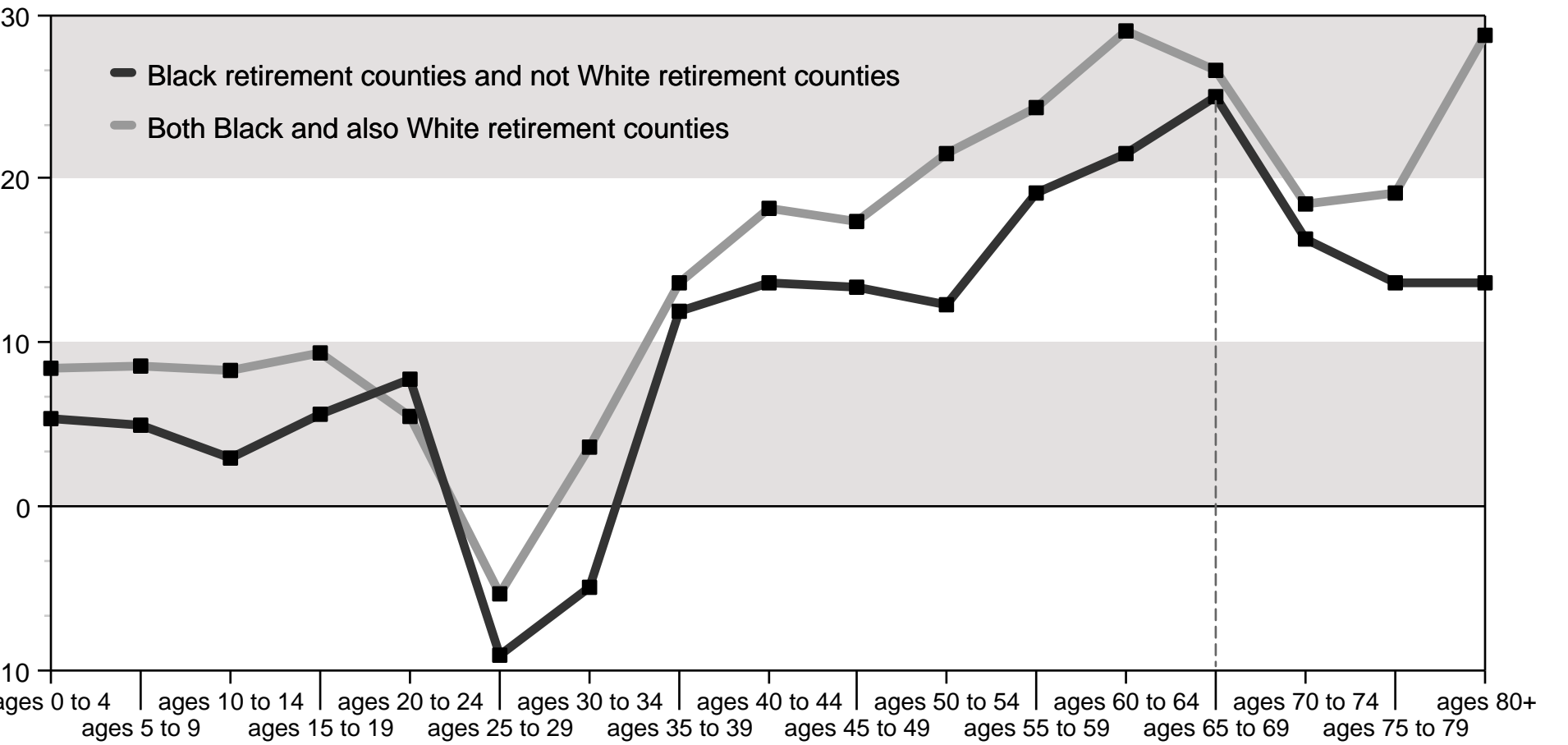
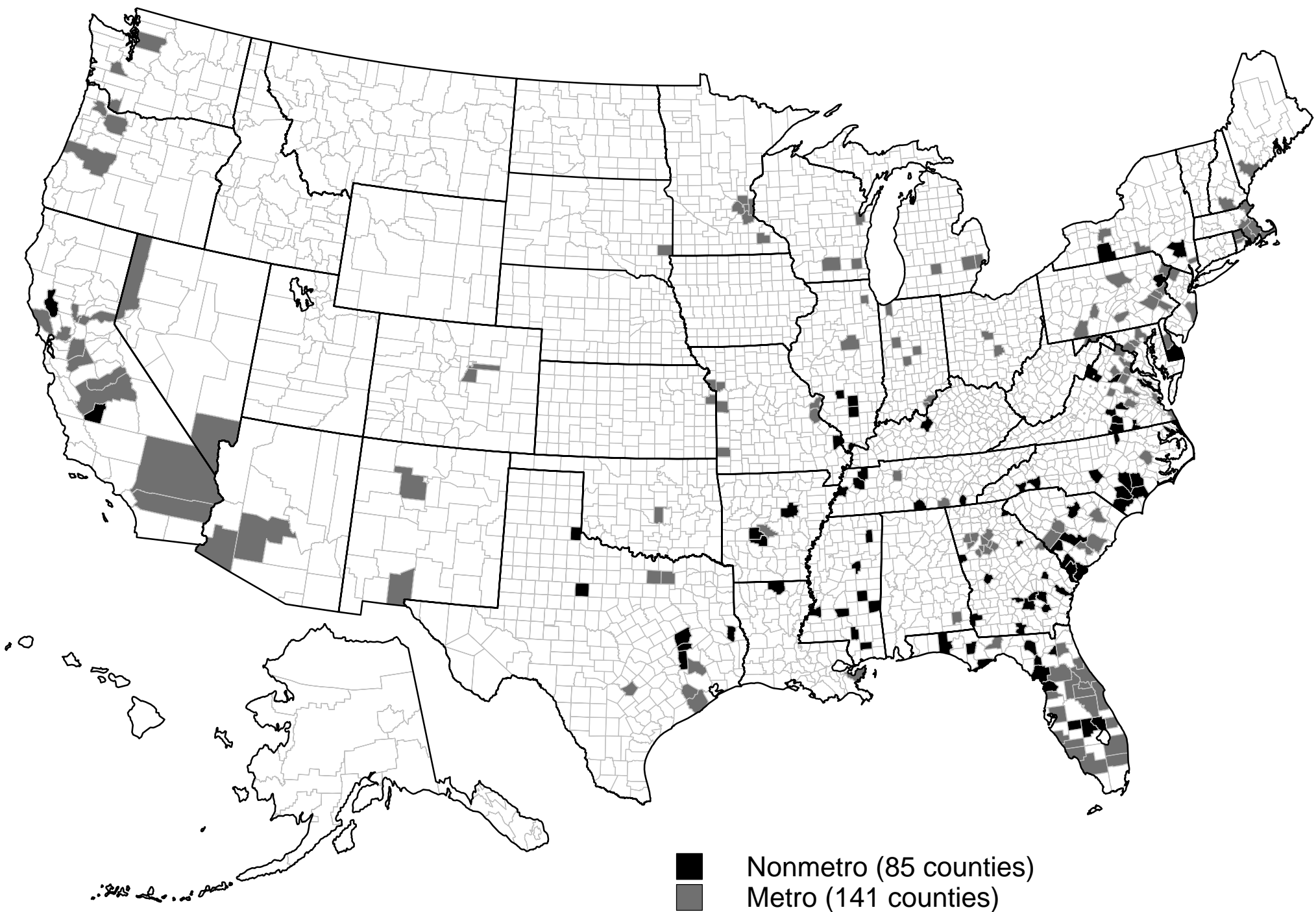


Figure 5. Nonmetro and metro Black retirement destination counties, 2000



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