

Moving West: who moved to California in the 1930s, where they came from, and why we think they moved

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The decade of the 1930s is a time when the flow of in-migrants from other states to California became dramatic, with more than 480,000 adults aged 20 or over in 1940 who lived in another state in 1935 present in California in 1940. This is nearly three times as many as the next largest state, Illinois (with 173,000). In this paper we describe who these people were and where they came from, building on a large and well-known literature about the time period, and making use of the newly-available complete-count digital version of the 1940 U.S. Census. Part of what makes this analysis interesting and valuable is our ability to differentiate those who moved both by their previous chain of residence (we know where people were born, in addition to where they lived in 1935), and by some of the detailed characteristics of the places they came from, such as urban status, kind of agriculture practiced in farming places, and the extent to which the county of origin was affected by the drought of the mid-1930s. We also give preliminary results of an effort to explain why people moved, which draws on the characteristics of the places they came from, their own attributes, and what we know about their California destinations.