Create a Migrant's Scrapbook from the First Great Migration

In this activity you examine documents from the period of the First Great Migration of African Americans to the North. As you look at the documents, you take notes to build a character of a migrant. Then you create a scrapbook that shows your characters' personal journeys and experiences during the Great Migration. You will use art supplies such as construction paper, tape or glue, scissors, and markers to make the scrapbooks.

Objectives

1. You will determine why so many African Americans "voted with their feet" and moved north between 1910 and 1920. (Cause and Effect)
2. You will be able to describe how the Great Migration changed individual lives and the broader experiences of African Americans.

Instructions

1. Step 1: Please locate the worksheet and the map of the routes travelled by migrants during the Great Migration. Today you will be learning about the experiences of the men, women and children who left the South for better economic, political and social opportunities in the North between 1910 and 1920. You will be creating a character, a typical migrant, and a scrapbook for that character as you look through primary sources. Working individually or in pairs, you should fill out Part I of the worksheet. You should look at the map to determine where your characters are from and where your characters are headed. You should make sure your characters' routes reflect historical reality (i.e., characters from Florida do not end up in Chicago) -- i.e. migrants tended to follow routes set by railroads that connected urban areas.
2. Step 2: Hand out a pack of the documents to each student/pair. Project each of the documents and discuss them with students. For some documents, ask students to read aloud portions of the text. As they read and view the documents, students should make notes in the graphic organizer about how evidence from the documents reflects the experiences of their characters.
3. Step 3: Before creating your scrapbooks, answer the questions in Part III of the worksheet.
4. Step 4: Gather your art supplies and create a scrapbook about your characters' experiences during the Great Migration.

   - Scrapbooks must be at least 4 pages in length
   - Scrapbooks must include images and words that address why the person left the South and what happened to him or her in the North
   - Scrapbooks must include words and images that show what kind of work the person did in both places, what kind of community experiences he/she had in both places and how he/she was or was not able to exercise the rights of citizenship

Note: After having time in class, the scrapbook-making activity becomes homework -- so if you’re working as a pair you need to make sure that you can finish outside of class. A scrapbook or two will be presented in class the Do Now next class.
Historical Context
The years between 1910 and 1920 marked the beginning of a major shift of the African-American population within the United States. The nation's African-American population was transformed from a predominantly rural and agricultural people to a largely urban and industrial people. It has been estimated that nearly 500,000 to one million African-American men, women and children left the South before, during and shortly after World War I to settle in areas such as New York, Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh and other areas in the North and Midwest.

Historians contend that this mass movement of sharecroppers and wage workers commonly referred to as "The Great Migration" was spurred on by economic and social factors. These factors include the decline of cotton production, an increase in lynchings and other forms of racial violence and discrimination, recruitment of African Americans by northern industries and the influence of African-American newspapers in the North. The movement "up South" created a large African-American population in northern cities, who faced new social, economic and political dilemmas. These dilemmas inspired the creation of new social and political movements within the African-American population to confront the new structures of institutionalized racism in the North.
Migrant’s Scrapbook Who Am I? Worksheet

Part 1: Develop your character.

Name: ______________________________________________      Male    /   Female

Age: __________________

Where am I coming from?
______________________________________________________________________

Where do I move to?
______________________________________________________________________

Part 2: Use the graphic organizer to take notes about how each document relates to your character’s experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Segregation/Rights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

(See questions on back)
Part 3: After looking through the documents and making notes, answer the following questions.

1. What happened to your family during the Great Migration?


2. What sort of work do you do? Where do you work?


3. What thoughts and feelings go through your mind as you are working?


4. What are your days like? What are your nights like?


5. Describe your spiritual life, if any.


African-American migrants to the North chose their destinations primarily based on their state of origin: those from Georgia and the Carolinas headed to cities along the eastern seaboard like New York and Philadelphia; migrants from Alabama and Mississippi headed for the Midwestern cities like Chicago; and those from Texas, Louisiana, and Tennessee often headed west to California.


**CREATOR** | American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning

**ITEM TYPE** | Map
Mahalia Jackson Remembers Chicago

Gospel singer Mahalia Jackson (1911-1972), the granddaughter of former slaves, was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, where she learned to sing in her family's baptist church. In 1927, at the age of sixteen, Jackson migrated to Chicago where she found a job as a domestic. She joined a gospel choir and earned money as a soloist at churches and funerals. In 1937, she began recording gospel music professionally. Jackson became a strong supporter of the civil rights movement and performed at many rallies, including the 1963 March on Washington. In her autobiography Movin' On Up, she remembers her early years in Chicago.

I can still remember the darkness and cold of those days. The winter wind in Chicago just takes your breath away and, while I was saving up to buy a warm coat, all I had to cut that wind was sweatshirts and sweaters. Shivering in that elevated train, watching the snow blow and swirl in the streetlights and the sun just starting to come up—those were the days when I was low and lonely and afraid in Chicago. The cold and the noise seemed to beat on me and the big buildings made me feel as if I'd come to live in a penitentiary. Oftentimes, I wished I could run away back home to New Orleans. But after I got up to Chicago, I stuck. I didn't go back to New Orleans for fifteen years. And whatever I am today I owe to Chicago, because in Chicago the Negro found the open door.

In Chicago, our people were advancing. Not only were they making money they were active in clubs and all sorts of organizations. And I don't mean this was just organizations like the NAACP. There were all kinds of civic organizations and social clubs. The people were church people, but they were talking about different things than we ever did down South—things like getting educated and going into business. The Negro was doing more than just singing and praying, and I began to see a new world.

CREATOR | Mahalia Jackson
ITEM TYPE | Biography/Autobiography
Chicago’s Urban League Offers Assistance to Southern Migrants

Between 1910 and 1920, as the Great Migration swept north, the African-American population in Chicago and other northern cities more than doubled. Members of established African-American communities tried to help new arrivals adjust to city life. Organizations such as the Urban League distributed cards like the ones below offering advice and assistance with housing and employment.

If You are a Stranger in the City

If you want a job
If you want a place to live
If you are having trouble with your employer
If you want information or advice of any kind

CALL UPON

The CHICAGO LEAGUE ON URBAN CONDITIONS AMONG NEGROES
3719 South State Street
Telephone Douglas 9098 T. ARNOLD HILL, Executive Secretary

No charges—no fees. We want to help YOU

SELF-HELP

1. Do not loaf. Get a job at once.
2. Do not live in crowded rooms. Others can be obtained.
3. Do not carry on loud conversations in street cars and public places.
4. Do not keep your children out of school.
5. Do not send for your family until you get a job.
6. Do not think you can hold your job unless you are industrious, sober, efficient and prompt.

Cleanliness and fresh air are necessary for good health. In case of sickness send immediately for a good physician. Become an active member in some church as soon as you reach the city.

Issued by

SOURCE | Card distributed by Chicago Urban League, circa 1920. Arthur and Graham Aldis Papers, Special Collections Department, University Library, University of Illinois at Chicago.
CREATOR | Chicago Urban League
ITEM TYPE | Pamphlet/Petition
In 1917, ten-year-old Rubie Bond left Mississippi with her parents and migrated to Beloit, Wisconsin. Her father, who worked as a tenant farmer in the South, had been recruited to work at a factory in Beloit. In 1976, she was interviewed as part of an oral history project documenting the experiences of African-American migrants who moved to Wisconsin between the 1910s and 1950s. In this excerpt, Bond describes why her parents decided to leave the South.

I'm wondering why your family decided to leave Mississippi. How was that decision made and why was it made?
Well, the North offered better opportunities for blacks…. I've heard that recruiters were often in danger in Mississippi if they came down to get workers for northern companies.

Do you recall him ever expressing any fear about this job that he was doing?
Yes. I know that many of the blacks would leave the farms at night and walk for miles. Many of them caught the train to come North... Usually they would leave with just the clothes on their backs. Maybe the day before they would be in the field working and the plantation owner wouldn't even know that they planned to go and the next day he would go and the little shanty would be empty. These people would have taken off and come up here.

Was there a fear that the plantation owner wouldn't let them go or that they couldn't leave?
That's very true. They wouldn't. Plantation owners had much to lose. [African-American farmers] were illiterate and they had to depend on the plantation owner. He would give them so much flour for use during the year, cornmeal or sugar or that sort of thing and then at the end of the year you would go to settle up with him and you would always be deeply in debt to him. That was his way of keeping people. You never got out of debt with him. . . .

Now, as a young girl, did you agree with this decision to move North? Did you think it was a good idea?
Yes. I think I did. Because even as a child I think I was pretty sensitive to a lot of the inequalities that existed between blacks and whites, and I know that after we came here my mother and dad used to tell me that if I went back to Mississippi, they would hang me to the first tree.

What role did the church play in your early life in Mississippi?
Well, I think the church played a very important part in the life of all blacks in Mississippi because it was religious center as well as social. That was one place that they could go and meet and discuss their problems. Relax. So just the--their big picnics and big church meetings they used to have. . . .

Given the opportunities that were available in the North, why did anyone decide to stay in Mississippi?
Well, I think that it was a lack of knowledge of about what the North had to offer until these agents came there to get them to come up here to work.

You were leaving at least a few of your relatives and friends behind. How did you feel about those people that you left behind and weren't ever going to see again?
Well, I think it comes back to a matter of trying to exist, really, and trying to improve your own lot.

In the United States, the outbreak of World War I (1914-1918) increased the demand for industrial production while decreasing the flow of European immigration. Labor shortages in both factories, mines, fields, and service industries meant greater economic opportunities for African Americans willing to move north. Many African Americans heard about jobs through African-American newspapers that circulated in the South. Help wanted advertisements, such as the ones below compiled from the Chicago Defender, attempted to attract workers with the promise of higher wages, housing, and other benefits.

Source: The Chicago Defender (Big Weekend Edition), Nov. 11, 1916; Sept. 29, 1917; Dec. 1, 1917; Oct. 26, 1918
In the early twentieth century, African Americans had plenty of reasons to leave the rural South: disfranchisement, segregation, poverty, racial violence, lack of educational opportunities, and the drudgery of farm life. As the cartoon below from The Crisis magazine shows, lynching stood out as particularly horrific and unjust. Violently reinforcing the legal system of discrimination in the South, white mobs tortured and murdered black men for alleged wrongdoings or for the “crime” of prospering economically. More than 3,700 people were lynched in the United States between 1889 and 1932, the vast majority of them in the South.

"The Reason"

ITEM TYPE | Cartoon
"The New Negro Has No Fear"

African-American life in the North was sharply affected by World War I. Many African Americans saw the war as a chance to show the nation they deserved equal rights. Almost 300,000 African Americans served during World War I. But military life was stained by bias and segregation. African Americans were affected by the experience of living among Europeans, who regarded them not as outcasts but as human beings. When African-American veterans returned, they spoke out against lynching, segregation, and other forms of racism. In the below image, supporters of Marcus Garvey parade in Harlem during the U.N.I.A. convention in 1920.

UNIA parade organized in Harlem, 1924
The sign reads: “THE NEW NEGRO HAS NO FEAR.”

ITEM TYPE | Photograph