

Migration, Immigration, Transformation (circa 1910-1920)

I. Introduction to the Great Migration

A. **Map Analysis Activity:** Visit the Schomburg Center site (search In Motion: The African American Migration Experience →Maps→The Great Migration)

What are three things you can learn from each map or diagram? These can be either generalizations or specific facts of interest.

B. **Art Analysis Activity:** Visit lawrencemigration.phillipscollection.org containing the images and words from Jacob Lawrence's *Great Migration* series. and make a list of PUSH and PULL factors that led to the Great Migration.

C. **Primary Source:** *The Crisis*, June 1917 (see pp. 2-6)

D. **Primary Source Activity:** Letters to the *Chicago Defender* & from Migrants (see pp. 7-15)

E. **Video:** *Up South: African-American Migration in the Era of the Great War* (3 minutes, 38 seconds; search YouTube)

II. The Great Migration to Philadelphia

A. **Reading:** Black Migration North (see p. 16)

B. **Video Activity:** *Philadelphia: The Great Experiment* film clip comparison (see p. 17)

C. **Primary Source Activity:** Sadie Tanner Mossell's Thesis (see pp.18-22)

F. **Reading:** Examining Class and Racial Dynamics on the Anniversary of the 1918 Riots in South Philadelphia (see pp. 24-26)

E. **Primary Source Collection:** The Challenge of Housing (see pp. 27-30)

III. Oral History Research & Simulation: Digging Deeper into the Great Migration to Philadelphia (see pp. 31-34)

IV. Final Assessment (see pp. 35)

V. Current Connections (see p. 36)

VI. Outstanding Websites (see p. 36)

THE CRISIS

A RECORD OF THE DARKER RACES

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF
 COLORED PEOPLE, AT 70 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY, CONDUCTED BY W. E.
 BURGHARDT DU BOIS; AUGUSTUS GRANVILLE DILL, BUSINESS MANAGER

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THE CRISIS for July and August

The July CRISIS will be *Education Number*, with pictures of a hundred and more coming leaders of men. We want information concerning colored *graduates* everywhere. A striking patriotic cover by Lorenzo Harris and a remarkable story—"Grey Eyes."

The August CRISIS will be *Vacation Number*. We offer four *cash prizes* of five dollars, three dollars, two dollars and one dollar for the most interesting essays on the subject: "*The Best Summer I Ever Spent*."

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THE MIGRATION OF NEGROES



By W. E. B. DuBOIS



MUCH has been written of the recent migration of colored people from the South to the North, but there have been very few attempts to give a definite, coherent picture of the whole movement. Aided by the funds of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, THE CRISIS has attempted to put into concrete form such knowledge as we have of this movement.

The data at hand are vague and have been collected from a hundred different sources. While the margin of error is large, the actual information which we have gathered is most valuable.

First, as to the number who have migrated to the North, there is wide difference of opinion. Our own conclusion is that about 250,000 colored workmen have come northward. This figure has been builded up from reports like the following which we take from various personal sources and local newspaper accounts:

From Alabama, 60,000 able-bodied workers; from Savannah, Ga., 3,000; Montgomery, Ala., 2,000; West Point, Ala., 1,000;

Americus, Ga., 3,000; Jefferson County, Ala., 10,000; West Point, Miss., 1,000; South Carolina, 27,000; West Point, Ga., 800; Macon, Ga., 3,000; Florida, 15,000; Notulga, Ala., 3,000. From Abbeville, S. C., "by the hundreds all through the fall and winter." From Muskogee, Okla., "5,000 from the city and vicinity." One day "1,022 Negroes from the South came into Cincinnati." An estimate of the Boston, Mass., *Transcript* gives 200,000 immigrants. From Southwest Georgia, 5,000. *Bradstreet's* estimate: "An immense migration." From Birmingham, Ala., 10,000; Arlington, Ga., 500; Waycross, Ga., 900; Bessemer, Ala., 3,000; Columbus, Ga., 500; Tuscaloosa, Ala., 2,500; Dawson, Ga., 1,500. Immigrants to Springfield, Mass., 500; to Chicago, Ill., 50,000, and "coming in at the rate of 10,000 in two weeks," (estimate of the *Chicago American*).

As to the reasons of the migration, undoubtedly, the immediate cause was economic, and the movement began because of floods in middle Alabama and Mississippi and because the latest devastation of the boll weevil came in these same districts.

A second economic cause was the cutting off of immigration from Europe to the North and the consequently wide-spread



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demand for common labor. The U. S. Department of Labor writes:

"A representative of this department has made an investigation in regard thereto, but a report has not been printed for general distribution. It may be stated, however, that most of the help imported from the South has been employed by railroad companies, packing houses, foundries, factories, automobile plants, in the northern States as far west as Nebraska. At the present time the U. S. Employment Service is not co-operating in the direction of Negro help to the north."

The third reason has been outbreaks of mob violence in northern and southwestern Georgia and in western South Carolina.

These have been the three immediate causes, but back of them is, undoubtedly, the general dissatisfaction with the conditions in the South. Individuals have given us the following reasons for migration from certain points:

Montgomery, Ala., better wages, lack of employment, bad treatment; West Point, Ala., boll weevil; Americus and Cartersville, Ga., lynching, schools, bad treatment, low wages; Birmingham, Ala., right to vote, discontent, bad treatment, low wages; Fairburn, Ga., low wages, bad treatment; Sanford, Fla., low wages, bad treatment; Anniston, Ala., low wages, bad treatment; Jefferson County, Ala., low wages, bad treatment; West Point, Miss., low wages; La Grange, Ga., low wages, bad treatment; Washington, Ga., low wages, schools; Newnan, Ga., low wages; Jackson, Ga., protection, schools; Covington, Ga., low wages; Montezuma, Ga., low wages, oppression; Tallahassee, Fla., unrest, conditions, low wages; Honeapath, S. C., low wages; Douglassville, Ga., bad treatment, poor schools; Raleigh, N. C., protection and the right to vote; West Point, Ga., boll weevil; Franklin, Ga., bad treatment and fear of lynching; Lithonia, Ga., low wages, bad treatment; Rome, Ga., injustice in the courts, low wages, lack of privileges, schools; Live Oak, Fla., low wages, bad treatment; Columbus, Ga., low wages, bad treatment; Atlanta, Ga., low wages; Jackson, Miss., low wages, bad treatment; Augusta, Ga., low wages, bad treatment; Nashville, Tenn., low wages; Meridian, Miss., low wages, discrimination; New Orleans, La., low wages; Mobile, Ala., low wages; South Atlanta, Ga., schools, freedom; Macon, Ga., low wages; Valdosta, Ga., unemployment, bad treatment; Cuthbert, Ga., bad treatment; Wadley, Ga., schools, civil rights; Gainesville, Ga., low wages, bad treatment.

To this we may add certain general statements from colored leaders thoroughly conversant with conditions in their communities and in some cases with large parts of the South.

A colored man of Sumter, S. C., says: "The immediate occasion of the migration is, of course, the opportunity in the North, now at last open to us, for industrial betterment. The real causes are the conditions which we have had to bear because there was no escape."

These conditions he sums up as the destruction of the Negroes' political rights, the curtailment of his civil rights, the lack of protection of life, liberty and property, low wages, the Jim Crow car, residential and labor segregation laws, poor educational facilities.

From Oklahoma we learn that Negroes are migrating because of threatened segregation laws and mob violence.

A colored man from Georgia states: "In my opinion the strongest factor in this migration is a desire to escape harsh and unfair treatment, to secure a larger degree of personal liberty, better advantages for children, and a living wage."

The A. M. E. Ministers' Alliance of Birmingham, Ala., names seven causes for the migration: "Prejudice, disfranchisement, Jim Crow cars, lynching, bad treatment on the farms, the boll weevil, the floods of 1916."

A colored business man of North Carolina believes: "There is a silent influence operating in the hearts of the growing class of intelligent Negroes that the insurmountable barriers of caste unnecessarily fetter the opportunities to which every living soul is entitled, namely, a fair chance to earn an honest living and educate his children and be protected by the laws."

In many sections of Mississippi the boll weevil destroyed the cotton crop; rains and high waters in the spring destroyed other crops.

A well-known investigator reports: "Nothing else seemed left for hundreds of the colored tenants to do but to go into the cities or to the North to earn even their food. Nothing was left on the farms and the landowners could not or would not make any further advances. From the country and even from the cities in these unfortunate sections colored people have in many cases streamed northward."

The centres of this migration have been at Jackson, Hattiesburg, and Meridian, Miss., and many have sacrificed property in order to get away.

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A widely-traveled and intelligent colored man writes:

"I recently made a trip through the South as far down as New Orleans, La., and I saw hundreds who were making their way northward. When in New Orleans, I learned that there were about 800 in the city from the inland district waiting to go, and who expected to leave during the next week. I went with a friend down where I could meet some of the leaders and talk with them. I met them, and they informed me that they were willing to go anywhere rather than continue to live like they had been. These were heading toward Chicago. I was shocked at the statement made by some of them as to how they lived on those big inland farms, and how badly they were treated by the whites. Many of these men were in overalls. I told them that they were unprepared for the climate; but they were willing to run any risk to get where they might breathe freer. Who blames them?"

Many of the southern whites, through their newspapers, are confirming this general unrest. A white woman says:

"That which a regard for common justice, fair play, human rights could not accomplish, a fear for our bank account is doing, and we are asking: Why is the Negro dissatisfied? What can we do to keep him in the South? We can't afford to let him go; he means too much for us—financially. He works for little; his upkeep costs us little, for we can house him in any kind of shack, and make him pay us well for that; we do not have to be careful of his living conditions; he is good-natured, long-suffering, and if he should happen to give us trouble we can cope with that and the law will uphold us in anything we do."

The Columbia, S. C. *State* asks: "If you thought you might be lynched by mistake, would you remain in South Carolina? Ask yourself that question if you dare."

The Greenville, S. C., *Piedmont* feels that, "The truth might as well be faced, and the truth is that the treatment of the Negro in the South must change or the South will lose the Negro."

The Greenville, S. C., *News* says:

"The Abbeville outrage may yet prove more of an economic crime than an offense against the peace and dignity of the state. Where is our labor to come from if not from these people who have lived here beside us for so many generations? Immigration has been a distinct failure in the South; it is expressly declared to be against the policy of South Carolina by our laws."

It is interesting to note that this migration is apparently a mass movement and not a movement of the leaders. The wave of economic distress and social unrest has pushed past the conservative advice of the Negro preacher, teacher and professional

man, and the colored laborers and artisans have determined to find a way for themselves. For instance, a colored Mississippi preacher says:

"The leaders of the race are powerless to prevent his going. They had nothing to do with it, and, indeed, all of them, for obvious reasons, are opposed to the exodus. The movement started without any head from the masses, and such movements are always significant."

The character of the people who are going varies, of course, but as the Birmingham, Ala., *Age-Herald* remarks: "It is not the riff-raff of the race, the worthless Negroes, who are leaving in such large numbers. There are, to be sure, many poor Negroes among them who have little more than the clothes on their backs, but others have property and good positions which they are sacrificing in order to get away at the first opportunity."

"Various reasons are assigned for the migration of Negroes from the South to the North. It was believed for a while that they were lured away by the glowing reports of labor agents who promised high wages, easy work, and better living conditions. But there is something more behind their going, something that lies deeper than a temporary discontent and the wish to try a new environment merely for the sake of a free trip on the railroads. . . ."

"The entire Negro population of the South seems to be deeply affected. The fact that many Negroes who went North without sufficient funds and without clothing to keep them warm have suffered severely and have died in large numbers, has not checked the tide leaving the South. It was expected that the Negroes would come back, sorry that they ever left, but comparatively few have returned. With the approach of warmer weather the number going North will increase."

How great this migration will eventually prove depends upon a number of things. The entrance of the United States into the war will undoubtedly have some effect. When the war ends it is doubtful if the labor shortage in Europe will allow a very large migration to the United States for a generation or more. This will mean increased demand for colored laborers in the North. A writer in the New York *Evening Globe* predicts that 1917 will see 400,000 of the better class of Negro workers come to the North.

At any rate, we face here a social change among American Negroes of great moment, and one which needs to be watched with intelligent interest.



Letters of Black Migrants in the *Chicago Defender*, 1916-1918

The *Chicago Defender* was a weekly black newspaper that was read by African Americans in that city as well as throughout the South. Many readers wrote to the newspaper seeking information about life in the North. These letters were published in the *Journal of Negro History* in 1919.

Teaching Idea: After reviewing PUSH & PULL factors involved in the Great Migration, distribute letters to pairs of students (there are 18 in total; you may want some pairs to read two short letters while other pairs read one longer letter). Using two different color highlighters or markers, have students identify PUSH factors using one color and PULL factors using another. Indicate that not every letter will have both.

Then, have students share their findings by having them write on post-it notes or chart paper. This can be followed by a teacher-led debrief with a goal of determining generalizations about why migrants wanted to leave the South and what they expected to find in the North.

Dallas, Tex., April 23, 1917

Dear Sir: Having been informed through the *Chicago Defender* paper that I can secure information from you. I am a constant reader of the *Defender* and am contemplating on leaving here for some point north. Having your city in view I thought to inquire of you about conditions for work, housing, wages and everything necessary. I am now employed as a laborer in a structural shop, have worked for the firm five years.

I stored ears for Armour packing co. 3 years, I also claims to know something about candy making, am handy at most anything for an honest living. I am 31 yrs. Old have a very industrious wife, no children. If chances are available for work of any kind let me know. Any information you can give me will be highly appreciated.

Mobile, Ala., April 27, 1917

Sir: Your advertisement appearing in the *Chicago Defender* have influenced me to write to you with no delay. For seven previous years I bore the reputation of a first class laundress in Selma. I have much experience with all of the machines in this laundry. This laundry is noted for its skillful work of neatness and ect. We do sample work for different laundries of neighboring cities, viz. Montgomery, Birmingham, and Mobile once or twice a year. At present I do house work but would like to get in touch with the *Chicago* I have an eager desire of a clear information how to get a good position. I have written recommendation from the foreman of which I largely depend upon as a relief. You will do me a noble favor with an answer in the earliest possible moment with a description all about the work.

Greenwood, Miss., Apr. 22, 1917

Sir: I noticed in the *Defender* about receiving some information from you about positions up there or rather work and I am very anxious to know what the chances are for business men. I am very anxious to leave the South on account of my children but my husband doesn't seem to think that he can succeed there in business, he is a merchant and also knows the barber trade what are the chances for either? Some of our folks down here have the idea that this Northern movement means nothing to any body but those who go out and labor by the day. I am willing

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to work myself to get a start. Tell me what we could really do. I will do most anything to get our family out of Barn. Please let this be confidential.

Marcel, Miss., October 4, 1917

Dear Sir: Although I am a stranger to you but I am a man of the so called colored race and can give you the very best or reference as to my character and ability by prominent citizens of my community by both white and colored people that knows me although am native of Mississippi. Now I am a reader of your paper the Chicago Defender. After reading your writing ever week I am compell[ed] & persuade to say that I know you are a real man of my color you have I know heard of the south land & I need not tell you any thing about it. I am going to ask you a favor and at the same time beg you for your kind and best advice. I wants to come to Chicago to live. I am a manof a family wife and I child can do just any work in the line of common labor & I have for the present sufficient means to support us till I can obtain a position. Now should I come to your town, would you please to assist me in getting a position I am willing to pay whatever you charge I don't want you to loan me not I cent but *help* me to find an occupation there in your town now I has a present position that will keep me employed till the first of Dec. 1917. now please give me your best advice on this subject. I enclose stamp for reply.

Jacksonville, Fla., April 4, 1917

Dear Sir: I have been taking defender for sevel months and I have seen that there is lots of good work in that section and I want to say as you are the editor of that paper I wish that you would let me know if there is any wheare up there that I can get in with an intucion that I may get my wife and my silf from down hear and can bring just as miney more as he want we are suffing to hear all the work is giving to poor white peples and we can not get anything doe at all I will go to pennsylvania or n y state or N J or Ill. Or any wheare that I can surport my wife I am past master of son of light in Mass. Large Royal arch and is in good standing all so the good Sancer large no.18. I need helpe my wife cant get any thing to due eather can I so please if you can see any body up there that want hands let me no at once I can get all they need and it will allow me to get my wife away from down hear so please remember and ans I will appreciate it.

Looking for ans at once. Please let me no some thing thease crackers is birds in south.

Alexandria, La., June 6, 1917

Dear Sirs: I am writing to you all asking a favor of you all. I am a girl of seventeen. School has just closed I have been going to school for nine months and now I feel like I aught to go to work. And I would like very well for you all to please forward me to a good job. But there isn't a thing here for me to do, the wages here is from a dollar and a half a week. What could I earn Nothing. I have a mother and father my father do all he can for me but it is so hard. A child with any respect about her self or his self wouldn't like to see there mother and father work so hard and earn nothing I feel it my duty to help. I would like for you all to get me a good job and as I haven't any money to come in please send me a pass and I would work and pay every cent of it back and get me a good quite place to stay. My father have been getting the defender for three or four months but for the last two weeks we have failed to get it. I don't know why. I am tired of down hear in this. . . I am afraid to say. Father seem to care and then again don't

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seem to but Mother and I am tired of all of this. I wrote to you all because I believe you will help I need your help hoping to here from you all very soon.

Sumter, S.C., May 12, 1917

Dear Sir: Could you get me a job in the . . . Tin Plate Factory at . . ., Pa. A job for (3) three also a pass from here for (3) I am a common laborer and the other are the same. If you could we will be ever so much ablige and will comply with your advertisement. If you can't get a job where we wish to go we will thank you for a good job any where in the state of Pa. or Ohio. I am in my 50 the others are my sons just in the bloom of life and I would wish that you could find a place where we can make a living and I also wish that you could find a place where we all three can be together. If you will send us a pass we will come just as soon as I receive it. If you find a place that you can send us please let us hear what the job will pay. Nothing more. I am yours respectfully.

Port Arthur Texas, May 5, 1917

Dear Sir: I am a reader of the Chicago Defender I think it is one of the Most Wonderful Papers of our race printed. Sirs I am writeing to see if You all will please get me a job. And Sir I can wash dishes, wash iron nursing work in groceries and dry good stores. Just any of these I can do. Sir, who so ever you get the job from please tell them to send me a ticket and I will pay them. When I get their as I have not got enough money to pay my way. I am a girl of 17 years old and in the 8 grade at Knox Academy School. But on account of not having money enough I had to stop school. Sir I will thank you all with all my heart. May God Bless you all. Please answer in return mail.

Palestine, Tex., 1/2/17

Dear Sir: I hereby enclose you a few lines to find out some few things if you will be so kind to word them to me. I am a southerner lad and has never ben in the north no further than Texas and I has heard so much talk about the north and how much better the colard people are treated up there than they are down here and I has ben striveing so hard in my coming up and now I see that I cannot get up there without the ade of some one and I wants to ask you Dear Sir to please direct me in your best manner the stept that I shall take to get there and if there are any way that you can help me to get there and if there are any way that you can help me to get there I am kindly asking you for your ade. And if you will ade me please notify me by return mail because I am sure ancious to make it in the north because these southern white people are so mean and they seems to be getting worse and I wants to get away and they won't pay enough for work for a man to save up enough to get away and live to. If you will not ade me in getting up there please give me some information how I can get there I would like to get there in early spring, if I can get there if posible. Our southern white people are so cruel we collord people are almost afraid to walke the streets after night. So please let me hear from you by return mail. I will not say very much in this letter I will tell you more about it when I hear from you please ans. Soon to Yours truly

Troy, Ala., Oct. 17, 1916

Dear Sirs

I am enclosing a clipping of a lynching again which speaks for itself. I do wish there could be sufficient presure brought about to have federal investigation of such work. I wrote you a few

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days ago if you could furnish me with the addresses of some firms or co-operations that needed common labor. So many of our people here are almost starving. The government is feeding quite a number here would go any where to better their conditions. If you can do any thing for us write me as early as possible.

Troy, Ala., 3/24/17

Dear Sir: I received you of Feb. 17 and was very delighted to hear from you in regards of the matter in which I written you about. I am very anxious to get to Chicago and realy believe that if I was there I would very soon be working on the position in which I written you about. Now you can just imagine how it is with the colored man in the south. I am more than anxious to go to Chicago but have not got the necessary fund in which to pay my way and these southern white peoples are not paying a man enough for his work down here to save up enough money to leave here with. Now I am asking you for a helping hand in which to assist me in getting to Chicago. I know you can do so if you only will.

Hoping to hear from you at an early date and looking for a helping hand and also any information you choose to inform me of, I remain as ever yours truly.

New Orleans, La, Apr. 23, 1917

Dear Sir: Reading a article in the 21st issue of the Chicago Defender about the trouble you had to obtain men for work out of Chicago and also seeing a advertisement for men in Detroit saying to apply to you I beg to state to you that if your could secure me a position in or around Chicago or any northern section with fairly good wages & good living conditions for myself and family I will gladly take same and if ther could be any ways of sending me transportation I will gladly let you or the firm you get me position with deduct transportation fee out of my salary. as I said before I will gladly take position in northern city or county where a mans a man here are a few positions which I am capable of holding down. Laborer, expirance porter, butler or driver of Ford car. Thaking you in advance for your kindness, beg to remain.

Corinth, Miss., Apr. 30, 1917

Dear Sir: I am a good cook age 35 years. I can bring my recermdation with me my name is --- . I am in good health so I would like for you to send me a transportation. I have got a daughter and baby six months old so she can nurse so I would like to come up there and get a job of some kind. I can wait table cook housegirl nurse or do any work. I am ready to come just as soon as you send the passes to us. I want to bring a box of quilts and a trunk of clothes so you please send us the passes for me and daughter. Write me at once I am a negro woman. We will leave her Sat. if you send the passes if you are not the man please give me some infamation to whom to write to a negro friend.

Starkville, Miss., May 28, 1917

Sir: Your name have bin given me as a Relibal furm putting people in touthch with good locations for education there children. Now I am a man of 40 years old. by traid I am a barber of 20 years experence. I am now in the business for white but I can barber for either white or colord. I have a wife and seven children 5 girls and 2 boys. allso I am a preacher. I dont care for the large city life. I rather live in a town of 15 or 20 thousand. I want to raise by family nice and I

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would like for my children to have the advantage of good schools and churches. Now if you are in a persison to help me a long this line I would be glad to here from yo.

Ellisville, Miss., May 1, 1917

Kind Sir: I have been takeing the Defender 4 months I injoy reading it very much I dont think that there could be a grander paper printed for the race, then the defender.

Dear Editor I am thinking of leaving for Some good place in the North or West one I dont Know just which I learn that Nebraska was a very good climate for the people of the South. I wont you to give me some ideas on it, Or Some good farming country. I have been public working for 10 year. I am tired of that, And want to get out on a good farm. I have a wife and 5 children and we all wont to get our from town a place an try to buy a good home near good Schools good Churchs. I am going to leave here as soon as I get able to work. Some are talking of a free train May 15 But I dont no anything of that. So I will go to work an then I will be sure, of my leaving Of course if it run I will go but I am not depending on it Wages here are so low can scarcely live We can buy enough to eat we only buy enough to Keep up alive I mean the greater part of the Race. Women wages are from \$1.25 Some time as high as \$2.50. just some time for a whole week.

Hoping Dear Editor that I will get a hearing from you through return mail, giving me Some ideas and Some Sketches on the different Climate suitable for our health.

P. S. You can place my letter in Some of the Defender Colums but done use my name in print, for it might get back down here.

Lutcher, LA., May 13, 1917

Dear Sir: I have been reading the Chicago defender and seeing so many advertisements about the work in the north I thought to write you concerning my condition. I am working hard in the south and can hardly earn a living. I have a wife and one child and can hardly feed them. I thought to write and ask you for some information concerning how to get a pass for myself and family. I dont want to leave my family behind as I cant hardly make a living for them right here with them and I know they would fare hard if I would leave them. If there are any agents in the south there havent been any of them to Lutcher if they would come here they would get at least fifty men. Please sir let me hear from you as quick as possible. Now this is all. Please dont publish my letter, I was out in town today talking to some of the men and they say if they could get passes that 30 or 40 of them would come. But they havent got the money and they dont know how to come. But they are good strong and able working men. If you will instruct me I will instruct the other men how to come as they all want to work. Please dont publish this because we have to whisper this around among our selves because the white folks are angry now because the negroes are going north.

New Orleans, LA. April 22, 1917

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Sirs: Noticing and ad in Chicago Defender of your assistance to those desiring employment there I thought I mayhaps you could help me secure work in your Windy City. I'm a married man have one child. I have common school education, this is my hand write. I am presently employed as a miner has been for 14 years but would like a Change. I'm apt to learn would like to get where I could go on up and support myself and family. You know more about it than I but in your opinion could I make anything as pullman porter being inexperienced? I'd be so grateful to U. to place me in something I've worked myself too hard for nothing. I'm sober and can adjust my life with any kind and am a quiet christian man.

Selma, Ala., May 19, 1917

Dear Sir: I thought that you might help me in Some way either personally or through your influence, is why I am worrying you for which I beg pardon.

I am a married man having wife and mother to support, (I mention this in order to properly convey my plight) conditions here are not altogether good and living expenses growing while wages are small. My greatest desire is to leave for a better place but am unable to raise the money.

I can write short stories all of which portray negro characters but no burlesque can also write poems, have a gift for cartooning but have never learned the technicalities of comic drawing. these things will never profit me anything here in Natchez. Would like to know if you could use one or two of my short stories in serial form in your great paper they are very interesting and would furnish good reading matter. By this means I could probably leave here in short and thus come in possession of better employment enabling me to take up my drawing which I like best. Kindly let me hear from you and if you cannot favor me could you refer me to any Negro publication buying fiction from their race.

Bessemer, Al., May 14, 2017

Dear Sir: Permitt me to inform you that I have had the pleasure of reading the Defender for the first time in my life as I never dreamed that there was such a race paper published and I must say that its some paper.

However I can unhesitatingly say that it is extraordinarily interesting and had I know that there was such a paper in my town or such being handled in my vicinity I would have been a subscriber years ago.

Nevertheless I read every space of the paper dated April 28th which is my first and only paper at present. Although I am greatly anticipating the pleasure of receiving my next Defender as I now consider myself a full fledged defender fan and I have also requested the representative of said paper to deliver my Defender weekly.

In reading the Defenders want ad I notice that there is lots of work to be had and if I havent miscomprehended I think I also understand that the transportation is advanced to able bodied working men who is out of work and desire work. Am I not right? with the understanding that those who have been advanced transportation same will be deducted from their salary after they have begun work. Now then if this is they proposition I have about 10 or 15 good working men who is out of work and are dying to leave the south and I assure you that they are working men and will be too glad to come north east or west, any where but the south.

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Now then if this is the proposition kindly let me know by return mail. However I assure you that it shall be my pleasure to furnish you with further or all information that you may undertake to ask or all information necessary concerning this communication. Thanking you in advance for the courtesy of a prompt reply with much interest.

Migrants' Letters Home

These letters were collected and printed in the *Journal of Negro History* in 1919.

Teaching Idea: As a follow-up to the letters to the *Chicago Defender* activity, have students read one or more of the following six letters. As with the previous activity, students can work in pairs using different colored highlighters or markers, this time to indicate positive and negative experiences and conditions experienced by the letter writers. Process their findings as described in the previous activity.

Philadelphia, Pa., Oct. 7, 1917

Dear Sir:

I take this method of thanking you for yours early responding and the glorious effect of the treatment. Oh. I do feel so fine. Dr. the treatment reach me almost ready to move.

I am now housekeeping again I like it so much better than rooming. Well Dr. with the aid of God I am making very good I make \$75 per month. I am carrying enough insurance to pay me \$20 per week if I am not able to be on duty.

I don't have to work hard. dont have to mister every little white boy comes along I havent heard a white man call a colored a nigger you no now -- since I been in the state of Pa. I can ride in the electric street and steam cars any where I get a seat. I dont care to mix with white -- what I mean I am not crazy about being with white folks, but if I have to pay the same fare I have learn to want the same acomidation. and if you are first in a place here shoping you dont have to wait until the white folks get thro tradeing. yet amid all this I shall ever love the good old South, and I am praying that God may give every well wisher a chance to be a man regardless of his color, and if my going to the front would bring about such conditions, I am ready any day -- well Dr. I dont want to worry you but read between lines; and maybe you can see a little sense in my weak statement.

Dr. when you find time I would be delighted to have a word from the good old home state.

Wife join me in sending love you and yours. I am your friend and patient.

Pittsburg, Pa., May 11, 1917

My dear Pastor and wife: It affords me great pleasure to write you this leave me well & O.K. I hope you & sis Hayes are well & no you think I have forgotten you all but I never will how is

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ever body & how is the church getting along well I am in this great city & you no it cool here right now the trees are just peeping out. fruit trees are now in full bloom but its cool yet we set by big fire over night. I like the money O.K. but I like the South betterm for my Pleasure this city is too fast for me they give you big money for what you do but they charge you big things for what you get and the people are coming by cal Loads every day its just pack out the people are Begging for some whears to sta. If you have a family or children & come here you can buy a house easier than you can rent one if you rent one you have to sign up for 6 months or 12 month so you see if you don't like it you have to stay you no they pass that law because the People move about so much I am at a real nice place and stay right in the house of a Rve.--- -- and family his wife is a state worker I mean a missionary she is some class own a plenty rel estate & personal Property they has a 4 story home on the mountain, Piano in the parlor, organ in the sewing room, I daughter and 2 sons but you no I have to pay \$2.00 per week just to sleep and pay it in advance. . . .

Pittsburg, Pa., May 11, 1917

My dear Pastor and wife: It affords me great pleasure to write you this leave me well & O.K. I hope you & sis Hayes are well & no you think I have forgotten you all but I never will how is ever body & how is the church getting along well I am in this great city & you no it cool here right now the trees are just peeping out. fruit trees are now in full bloom but its cool yet we set by big fire over night. I like the money O.K. but I like the South betterm for my Pleasure this city is too fast for me they give you big money for what you do but they charge you big things for what you get and the people are coming by cal Loads every day its just pack out the people are Begging for some whears to sta. If you have a family or children & come here you can buy a house easier than you can rent one if you rent one you have to sign up for 6 months or 12 month so you see if you don't like it you have to stay you no they pass that law because the People move about so much I am at a real nice place and stay right in the house of a Rve.--- -- and family his wife is a state worker I mean a missionary she is some class own a plenty rel estate & personal Property they has a 4 story home on the mountain, Piano in the parlor, organ in the sewing room, I daughter and 2 sons but you no I have to pay \$2.00 per week just to sleep and pay it in advance. . . .

Chicago, Illinois

My dear Sister: I was agreeably surprised to hear from you and to hear from home. I am well and thankful to say I am doing well. The weather and everything else was a surprise to me when I came. I got here in time to attend one of the greatest revivals in the history of my life over 500 people joined the church. We had a Holy Ghost shower. You know I like to have run wild. It was snowing some nights and if you didn't hurry you could not get standing room. Please remember me kindly to any who ask of me. The people are rushing here by the thousands and I know if you come and rent a big house you can get all the roomers you want. You write me exactly when you are coming. I am not keeping house yet I am living with my brother and his wife. My sone is in California but will be home soon. He spends his winter in California. I can get a nice place for you to stop until you can look around and see what you want. I am quite busy. I work in Swifts packing co. in the sausage department. My daughter and I work for the same company-We get \$1.50 a day and we pack so many sausages we don't have much time to play but it is a matter of a dollar with me and I feel that God made the path and I am walking therein.

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Tell your husband work is plentiful here and he won't have to loaf if he want work. I know unless old man A----- changed it was awful with his sould and G----- also.

Well I am always glad to hear from my friends and if I can do anything to assist any of them to better their condition. Please remember me to Mr. C----and his family I will write them all as soon as I can. Well, I guess I have said about enough. I will be delighted to look into your face once more in my life. Pray for me for I am heaven bound. I have made too many rounds to slip now. I know you will pray for prayer is the life of any sensible man or woman. Well goodbye from your sister in Christ.

P.S. My brother moved the week after I came. When you fully decide to come write me and let me know what day you expect to leave and over what road and if I don't meet you I will have some ther to meet you and look after you. I will send you a paper as soon as one come along they send out extras two and three times a day.

Chicago, Illinois

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Chicago, IL

Dear Old Friend: These moments I thought I would write you a few true facts of the present condition of the north. Certainly I am trying to take a close observation—now it is tru the (col) men are making good. Never pay less than \$3.00 per day or (10) hours—this is not promise. I do not see how they pay such wages the way they work labors. they do not hurry or drive you.

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Remember this is the very lowest wages. Piece work men can make from \$6 to \$8 per day. They receive their pay every two weeks. this city I am living in, the population 30,000 (20) miles from Big Chicago, Ill. Doctor I am some what impress. My family also. They are doing nicely. I have no right to complain what ever. I rec. the papers you mail me some few days ago and you no I enjoyed them reading about the news down in Dixie. I often think of so much of the conversation we engage in concerning this part of the worl. I wish many time that you could see our People up there as they are entirely in a different light. I witness Decoration Day on May 30th, the line of march was 4 miles. (8) brass band. All business houses were close. I tell you the people here are patriotic. I enclose you the cut of the white press. the chief of police drop dead Friday. Burried him today. The procession about (3) miles long. Over (400) auto in the parade—five dpt—police Force, Mayor and alderman and secret societies; we are having some cold weather—we are still wearing over coats—Let me know what is my little city doing. People are coming here every day and are finding employment. Nothing here but money and it is not hard to get. Remember me to your dear Family. Oh, I have children in school every day with the white children. I will write you more next time. how is the lodge. Yours friend,

**From the Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia, African American Migration
by James Wolfinger**

Black Migration North

The greatest wave of black migrants in Philadelphia’s history to that point came during World War I when the conflict overseas choked off European migration and Northern businesses across the United States looked to the South for labor. This massive population movement, known as the Great Migration, changed the face of American cities from Boston and New York City to Detroit, Chicago, and beyond. Philadelphia’s black population more than doubled, rising from 63,000 in 1900 to 134,000 in 1920, with most of the migrants coming from the Eastern seaboard. Other industrial cities in the area, such as Camden, Chester, and Norristown, also saw their black communities grow, but the great bulk of the immigrants moved to Philadelphia. Women played a critical role in the migration, helping establish communal and kin networks that brought migrants to Philadelphia.

Most newly arrived African Americans were best described as the “working poor” and they sought employment at the area’s major companies such as the Pennsylvania and Reading Railroads, Baldwin Locomotive, Midvale Steel, Cramps Shipyard, and the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company. White Philadelphians, many from families only recently arrived in the United States as immigrants, regarded African Americans as competitors for jobs and decent housing. Their consternation about blacks in their workplaces and neighborhoods led to a number of racial conflicts that mirrored events across the nation. Philadelphia and Chester, Pennsylvania, both had riots in 1918 that killed five people in each city, and Coatesville (45 miles west of Philadelphia) a few years earlier in 1911 witnessed the lynching of a steelworker named Zachariah Walker. Surveys showed that Philadelphia was so inhospitable that many new residents contemplated returning to the South. Some formed the Colored Protective

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Association or supported the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to assert their rights.

Philadelphia: The Great Experiment Film Clip Questions
(Clips available at historyofphilly.com/education)

Awakening:

What challenges did the Anderson family face upon migrating to Philadelphia?

Where did they find comfort and support?

Corrupt:

What did middle class African Americans think of Bessie Smith's music?

Why did African Americans tend to live in only certain sections of Philadelphia, including South Philadelphia?

How did African Americans react to being banned from Center City establishments?

Answer Key

What challenges did the Anderson family face upon migrating to Philadelphia?

- Annie could not get teaching job without certification
- John could not find employment other than hauling coal and ice

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Where did the Andersons find comfort and support?

- Their Baptist Church

What did middle class African Americans think of Bessie Smith's music?

- It was "the devil's music"

Why did African Americans tend to live in only certain sections of Philadelphia, including South Philadelphia?

- Deed restrictions and redlining

How did African Americans react to being banned from Center City establishments?

- Forming their own separate establishments

The Standard of Living Among One Hundred Negro Migrant Families in Philadelphia

By SADIE TANNER MOSSELL, PH.D.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Negro Migration of 1916, 1917, 1918.
 A Detailed Statement of the Migration to Philadelphia During This Period.

Social { poor schools
 segregation
 monotonous farm life
 lynching }
 Political { disfranchisement
 mistreatment and persecu-
 tion by representatives of the
 law. }

It is estimated that four hundred thousand Negroes suddenly moved North during the years 1916, 1917, 1918.¹ The movement embraced Negroes of all classes² and from every state south of Delaware, east of, but including Texas.³ The causes for their coming were two-fold: on the one hand, certain conditions in the South impelled them to leave; on the other, fortuitous circumstances made it desirable to invite them to come north.⁴

The most important of the impelling circumstances we have classified as follows:

Economic { low wages
 failure of crops due to the
 boll-weevil, resulting in un-
 employment
 dissatisfaction with the ten-
 ant and crop sharing system. }

¹ Emmett J. Scott, *Negro Migration During the War*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1920, p. 5.

² Negro Migration in 1916-1917, U. S. Department of Labor, Division of Negro Economics, 1919, p. 11.

³ Carter G. Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration*, Washington, 1918.

⁴ W. O. Scroggs, Interstate Migration of The Negro Population, *Journal of Political Economy*, 1917, p. 1034; How the War Brings Unprecedented Opportunities to the Negro Race, *Current Opinion*, Dec., 1916, p. 404-405; Lure of the North for Negroes, *Survey*, April 7, June 2, 1917; *The Crisis*, Oct., 1916, p. 270. June, 1917, p. 63.

PREFACE

THE exodus of the Negro from the southern to the northern states during 1916, 1917, and 1918 called forth numerous dissertations on the causes and effects of the movement. Some of these dealt with the entire migration, while others limited themselves to a particular aspect of the influx to a given territory. The latter method has been adopted in the following discussion, which is an attempt to arrive at conclusions concerning the migrants to Philadelphia, through an intensive analysis of the budgets of a small number of their group. The statements leading to these conclusions would perhaps be more forceful if supported by charts and diagrams. But, for publication purposes it was found necessary that these be omitted.

For whatever value the study has, the author is particularly indebted to Dr. Raymond T. Bye of the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, who gave untiring and sympathetic guidance, and to her mother, who checked the statistical work, read the manuscript and rendered in other ways inestimable aid.

SADIE TANNER MOSSELL.

High wages
 Little or no unemployment
 Educational facilities, the best in the land
 The lure of the city
 The ballot
 Greater justice in the courts.

Of the four hundred thousand Negroes who took advantage of the oppor-

tunity to move north, at least forty thousand⁶ came to Philadelphia. Since the present investigation deals entirely with the migrant who came to that city it seems advisable that as a background for the study we should inquire more in detail into the exodus to Philadelphia.

The migration to Philadelphia began in the spring of 1916⁶ and was maintained at a normal rate of 150 per week from that time on to the spring of 1918 when the city was confronted with the largest influx of Negroes in its history. Eight to ten thousand arrived during the months of April, May and June alone. After this time, however, the migration dropped back to its normal rate.⁷ But with the signing of the Armistice in November of 1918, war orders and the accompanying need for an increased labor supply ended. The demand for a further exodus of Negroes no longer existing, migration to Philadelphia, in the proportions previously described, ceased.

In an exodus based so largely on economic and social motives one is not surprised to find that many migrants sought of their own accord to settle in Philadelphia, an industrial center, a city of "brotherly love," reputed to have a favorable attitude

⁶ The approximation that 40,000 Negroes came to Philadelphia during the period of migration above described is derived from an estimate made by the Division of Negro Economics and based on the number of Negroes employed in Philadelphia in 1917 in excess of the number employed in 1915, which number is given as 83,500.⁸ To this we added the conservative estimate of 10,000 for 1918. The sum of these two numbers assures us of a minimum influx of 40,000. The reader is cautioned against considering that Philadelphia's colored population was permanently increased to this extent; since with the closing down of war industries there was a readjustment of population.

⁷ Scott, *Negro Migration During the War*, p. 55.

⁸ Philadelphia Public Ledger, July 28, 1918.

⁹ Negro Migration in 1916-1917, Appendix.

toward colored people. We find, nevertheless, that regardless of the attractions of the city *per se*, there were definite influences at work to induce Negroes to come to Philadelphia. The chief of these were the railroads of Pennsylvania and the industries of Philadelphia.

The Pennsylvania and Erie Railroads found it impossible to keep their systems in repair because of a shortage of labor. They, therefore, sent labor agents into the South to persuade Negroes to supply this demand. Early in the summer of 1916 the agents of these railroads picked up trainloads of Negroes promiscuously from Jacksonville, St. Augustine and Pensacola, Florida. They brought twelve thousand of them into Pennsylvania, one thousand of whom were sent to Philadelphia.⁹

The industrial plants situated in and adjacent to Philadelphia were also influential in attracting Negroes to the city. As early as August, 1916, The National Hosiery and Underwear Manufacturers of Philadelphia proposed bringing colored girls from the South to work in knitting mills. In preparation for this work, girls were at that time being trained at Endfield, North Carolina, to take permanent positions in the northern mills.¹⁰

Similar propositions were made by other manufacturers. The sending of labor agents into the South was, however, for the most part rendered unnecessary for the manufacturers of Philadelphia, because the majority of the migrants who had their transportation paid by the railroads left their employ on finding wages higher in other industries.¹¹ The extent of the

⁹ Scott, *Negro Migration During the War*, pp. 55, 135.

¹⁰ Philadelphia North American, August 2, 1918.

¹¹ Scott, *Negro Migration During the War*, p. 135.

NEGRO LABORERS EMPLOYED IN INDUSTRIAL PLANTS OF PHILADELPHIA IN 1917

Pennsylvania Railroad Camps	170
Girard.....	300
Mantau Junction.....	60
Frankford Junction.....	150
Eastern Pennsylvania Camp.....	120
Baltimore and Ohio Camps.....	300
Reading Camps.....	1,100
Total for Railroad Camps.....	4,000
Midvale Steel Co.....	1,000
Atlantic Refining Co.....	700
Franklin Sugar Co.....	1,100
Keystone Paving and Construction Co. (Chester)	600
Westinghouse-Church-Kerr.....	600
(Essington)	600
Eddystone Munition Corporation.....	400
Disston Saw Co.....	8,400
Total Estimated Number in Plants Visited.....	7,750
Estimated Number in Plants Not Visited.....	16,250
Children.....	33,500
Total Estimate for Philadelphia.....	

Housing conditions in the city were deplorable. Press comments describe the Negroes as herded together like cattle and tell us of one room measuring 16 by 20 feet in which twenty men slept on the floor, as no beds were provided, and for which the proprietor charged \$1.50 a week.¹² It was found necessary, therefore, immediately to ameliorate the housing condition and its accompanying social problems.

To that end, interested organizations and individuals in the city formed committees to assist in the work. The Philadelphia Housing Association sent out inspectors to inquire into the na-

demand for Negro labor by the industries of Philadelphia may, however, be judged from the following press comment:

Four hours after the Federal Labor Exchange had opened yesterday it was apparent that if requisitions for Negro labor filled by various manufacturers in the metropolitan zone were filled, Philadelphia and this section of Pennsylvania would have a fresh race problem. For in the 850 requisitions were demands for 257,164 men for August, September, and October in war industries in this state, and of that number were requisitions for 186,000 Negroes alone, to be used in unskilled labor.¹²

The demand for Negro labor having come entirely from the industries and for unskilled labor, we are not surprised to find the migrants almost wholly employed as unskilled laborers in the industrial plants of Philadelphia. In the column opposite is a statement of the plants in which they worked largely in this capacity and the number employed, during the year 1917.

The sudden increase, in such large proportions, in the Philadelphia Negro population, which, as we have just seen, was the result of unusual opportunities for work offered by the city and of the purposeful efforts of the industries to secure labor, created serious problems. The most pressing of these was the housing of the new comers. The Pennsylvania Railroad was the only industry which provided any kind of housing for the migrant. The camps in which it lodged him, however, proved to be of little assistance, since the camps themselves, consisting of ordinary tents and box cars, did not provide adequate shelter and since many of the men left the employ of the railroad, while others abandoned the camps as soon as they were able to bring their families north.¹³

¹² Philadelphia Public Ledger, August 2, 1918.

¹³ Scott, *Negro Migration During the War*, p. 135.

¹⁴ Philadelphia Public Ledger, Jan. 26, 1917; Jan. 31, 1918.

ture of the housing situation and to find possibilities for improving it. They were also active in forming committees on Negro migration among other organizations. Through their efforts the Civic Club of Philadelphia joined in the work being carried on in the interest of Negro migration by the Central Committee of the Department of Health and Charities.¹⁵

A committee was appointed by Bishop Rhinelander, of the Protestant Episcopal Church, to take action in the promotion of better housing conditions for the Negro migrant. The committee consisted of social workers, church officials, and representatives of such industries as the Franklin Sugar Refining Company and the Pennsylvania Railroad.¹⁶ Representatives of the Armstrong Association, the Travelers' Aid, the Society for Organizing Charity, the Philadelphia Housing Association and various Negro churches formed a joint committee to provide suitable housing for Negro families arriving in the city and to aid them in securing work.¹⁷

The Philadelphia Academy of Medicine, composed of Negro physicians, dentists and druggists, put into effect measures calculated to meet requirements for housing, sanitation, medical attention and education. Eighty colored physicians of the city collected information which took the form of a weekly report to the Bureau of Health. Real estate dealers were asked to submit lists of houses immediately available and to provide hundreds of new ones, cheaply but substantially built. Stereoptical lectures and talks were given on a large scale in all the Negro churches, telling the new arrivals how to care for themselves in Philadelphia,

¹⁵ *Public Ledger*, Jan. 26, 1917; Jan. 31, 1918; *Evening Bulletin*, March 26, 1917.

¹⁶ *Evening Bulletin*, Dec. 24, 1920.

¹⁷ *Public Ledger*, July 28, 1918.

how to avoid colds, and giving them other useful information.¹⁸

The Interdenominational Ministerial Union embracing all Negro ministers of the city mapped out a detailed plan to assist the migrants. They tried not only to enroll them in the churches but to give them aid through the church. One of the most active churches in carrying out the program was Calvary M. E. Church, Broad and Bainbridge Streets, which enrolled 4,200 children in its Sunday School, gave out 50 buckets of soup daily during the winter of 1918, and coal to all who needed it. This same church formed a Committee of One Hundred to deal with the idle and indolent among the migrants.¹⁹ Many other churches while not administering physical comforts, nevertheless played their part by giving sound advice to the migrant. They urged him to send his children to school, to take advantage of the libraries and night schools, himself, to give the best service to his employer regardless of pay, and above all to remember that in him the race was on trial; for now he was given a chance to work at a living wage, to buy a home, save money and become an active part of Philadelphia's citizenry. The entire country was watching to see what advantage he would take of this opportunity.²⁰

It is difficult to measure just what each of the committees and associations which we have mentioned did accomplish, but for our purpose it is sufficient to point out that most of the social organizations of the city tried to aid the Negro migrant to become adjusted to his new environment. Their voluntary and cheerful efforts must

¹⁸ Scott, *Negro Migration During the War*, p. 137.

¹⁹ *Evening Bulletin*, July 30, 1917; *Public Ledger*, Jan. 31, 1918.

²⁰ Scott, *Negro Migration During the War*, p. 138.

not, however, be taken as an indication of the manner in which the Philadelphia public, white and colored, received the migrant. If we may judge the attitude of the whites by their efforts to segregate him, it would seem that he was highly unwelcome. The housing problem was itself a result of the determination on the part of the white people that the migrant should live only in that part of the city in which Negroes had previously lived. Vacant houses in other sections were not for rent or for sale to Negroes.²¹ The increase in Negro population greatly stimulated the movement, already on foot, to segregate Negro children in the schools. Also such social privileges as the service of eating houses and the attending of white churches and theatres by Negroes, were practically withdrawn after the influx of Negro migrants into Philadelphia.²²

Actual conflicts between the two races were not numerous; only one of any importance occurred during the period of the migration, and this was a result of the impending housing problem. A colored probation officer of the Municipal Court, a woman of refinement and training and an old citizen of Philadelphia, purchased and took up her residence at the house numbered 2936 Ellsworth Street. The white people in the neighborhood resented her living there and besieged the house. A race riot ensued in which two men were killed and sixty injured.²³

This incident explains the attitude of the Negro public of Philadelphia toward the coming of the migrant. As in the case of the probation officer

so in numerous other occurrences, the colored people of every class received harsh treatment at the hands of the white population. Jan. 26, 1918; Scott, *Negro Migration During the War*, p. 135.

²² Scott, *Negro Migration During the War*, p. 135.

²³ *Public Ledger*, July 29, 1918.

white public. This was virtually unknown to the Philadelphia Negro, for the city had long possessed a relatively small population of Negroes of culture, education and some financial means. They had always enjoyed the same social and educational facilities as the whites and courteous treatment from them. But, with the increase in population by a group of generally uneducated and untrained persons, these privileges were withdrawn as has already been discussed. The old colored citizens of Philadelphia resented this, placed the blame at the migrant's door and stood aloof from him. Negro preachers invited the new arrivals into the church but many of the congregations made him know that he was not wanted. In some cases the church and their sympathizers withdrawing and forming a church for themselves.

The Negro migrants were not absolutely blameless in the attitude assumed toward them by the white and colored public. While crime and immorality among them never developed beyond control, many of their number were to be seen lounging on corners, frequenting dens of vice and saloons and arming themselves with razors and pistols, thereby increasing the number of court cases and greatly marring the records of the Negroes in Philadelphia and the peace of the city.²⁴ Although the numbers indulging in these practices may have composed only a small percentage of the total migrants, in such cases the action of the few condemned all.

This situation brings clearly before us the principal inquiries which the migration as a whole has raised in the minds of all who have studied it. Even from our brief discussion of the migration to Philadelphia the same questions occur to us: Was the mi-

²⁴ *Evening Bulletin*, July 30, 1917.

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NEGRO MIGRANT FAMILIES IN PHILADELPHIA

grant to Philadelphia able to adapt himself to the environment of an industrial economy, and did his presence help or hinder the racial condition in that city? Believing that the standard of living maintained by a people is an index of the extent to which they have

adapted themselves to a given environment, we have undertaken to analyze the incomes and expenditures of a group of migrant families in order to ascertain the character of their standards of living and thereby to judge of the degree of adaptation obtained by them.



The Standard of Living Among One Hundred Negro Migrant Families in Philadelphia by Sadie Tanner Mossell, PhD

<https://archive.org/details/stadardofliving00moss>

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Negro Migration of 1916, 1917, 1918.

A Detailed Statement of the Migration to Philadelphia During This Period

Getting the Facts

1. How did World War I (the Great War) change the labor market in the North?
2. What generalizations can be made about the type of work done by the migrants?
3. How did Philadelphia's existing black community help the migrants?
4. How did white Philadelphians react to the influx of black Southern migrants?
5. How did the influx of the migrants impact the lives of "old Philadelphians," members of Philadelphia's long-standing black community?
6. According to Alexander, why were the migrants in part to blame for the negative views that whites and "old Philadelphians" had of them?

Analysis:

1. Sadie Tanner Mossell was a member of the elite and well-established "old Philadelphia" black community, yet she chose to write her dissertation about the lives of the migrants.
2. Based on what you've read in the Introduction, how do you think she feels about the steep increase in Philadelphia's black population?

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Answer Key

Getting the Facts

1. How did World War I (the Great War) change the labor market in the North?
European immigrants stopped coming to the US leading industries to turn to Southern blacks
2. What generalizations can be made about the type of work done by the migrants?
Many worked on the railroads or heavy industry; some women worked in textile mills; low-skilled labor
3. How did Philadelphia's existing black community help the migrants?
 - Black churches helped other agencies seeking to provide better housing*
 - Black doctors, dentists, and pharmacists helped with housing, medical needs, and education*
 - Churches offered lectures on how to care for themselves*
 - Cavalry Church (Broad & Bainbridge) put kids in Sunday School, gave out soup and coal*
 - Other churches helped by giving advice such as to take advantage of educational opportunities and to be good workers*
4. How did white Philadelphians react to the influx of black Southern migrants?
 - Blacks were restricted to certain parts of the city for housing, contributing the severe housing problems*
 - Schools were segregated*
 - Churches, restaurants, and theaters that had previously welcomed blacks barred their presence*
5. How did the influx of the migrants impact the lives of "old Philadelphians," members of Philadelphia's long-standing black community?
 - Social and educational facilities that had previously been open to them no longer were*
 - Some churches split up because old Philadelphians didn't want migrants to join their congregations.*
6. According to Alexander, why were the migrants in part to blame for the negative views that whites and "old Philadelphians" had of them?
 - Some "lounged on corners" or went to "dens of vice and saloons"*
 - Some were armed and became involved in crime*

Analysis:

1. What is the significance of the race riot that occurred when a "colored probation officer...a woman of refinement and training and a citizen of old Philadelphia" purchased a house on previously all-white block?
Answers will vary
2. Sadie Tanner Mossell was a member of the elite and well-established "old Philadelphia" black community, yet she chose to write her dissertation about the lives of the migrants. Based on what you've read in the Introduction, how do you think she feels about the steep increase in Philadelphia's black population?
Answers will vary

NOTE: Images and video clip available on Hidden City website (*search Hidden City Amy Cohen*)

EXAMINING CLASS AND RACIAL DYNAMICS ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1918 RIOTS IN SOUTH PHILADELPHIA JULY 25, 2019 | BY AMY COHEN

We are living in an era of degrading racial norms. President Donald Trump’s tweets and statements regularly use defamatory language to describe people of color both in our nation and abroad. According to FBI statistics, hate crimes based on race, ethnicity, and ancestry increased 18.4% from 2016 to 2017, the last year for which statistics are available.

Between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 1920s, Philadelphia experienced similar escalations in both discrimination and racial violence. In fact, one of the worst episodes of racial violence in the city’s history took place exactly 101 years ago. To understand the context of the events of July 26-31, 1918, it helps to examine the early lives of two of Philadelphia’s most noteworthy African American women.

World-renowned singer Marian Anderson (1897-1993) was born in South Philadelphia during an era of relative racial peace in Philadelphia. At the turn to the 20th century, the city’s black population was fairly small (only about 60,000 people in a city of over 1.2 million residents) and led by an educated, intellectually engaged elite that had coalesced in the late 18th century. Members of this community attended the venerable Institute for Colored Youth at 9th and Bainbridge Streets, mixed within the ranks of the exclusive black social clubs, and frequented restaurants and theaters alongside white Philadelphians.

The Anderson family was not of this ilk. Like many poor black Philadelphians, her grandparents had been enslaved and her parents were recent migrants from the South. Although Marian’s mother Anna had been a teacher in Virginia, she was unable to find work in her profession once she came to Philadelphia. In spite of her education, she took in laundry and worked in a tobacco factory. Marian’s father, John, shoveled coal and did odd jobs for the Pennsylvania Railroad.

John was also a church officer with Union Baptist Church, proud that his daughter was able to join the choir at the age of six. Known as the “baby contralto,” Anderson was soon invited to sing at varied events and gatherings, thus bringing in a much-needed bit of money. Her budding talent also gave the family a sense of specialness within their community—albeit a less elevated community than that of their wealthier and more established African American peers.

Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander (1898-1989) was born a year after Anderson. The extended Tanner Mossell family epitomized Philadelphia’s black elite. Her family tree includes the painter Henry Ossawa Tanner. Her father, Aaron Mossell, was the first African American to attend the University of Pennsylvania’s Law School and her uncle, Nathan Mossell, was Penn’s first black medical school graduate.

After earning a BA from the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Education in 1918, she stayed on at Penn to become the second African American woman in the country to earn a

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PhD. She married attorney Roy Pace Alexander, another descendent of the black aristocracy. In 1927, Mossell became the first black female University of Pennsylvania Law School graduate and the first admitted to the Pennsylvania Bar.

In order to understand a key turning point in the life of Marian Anderson, we must turn to the work of the young scholar, Sadie T. Mossell. Her thesis written in pursuit of a master's in economics was entitled *The Standard of Living Among One Hundred Negro Migrant Families in Philadelphia*. Completed in 1919, her research documented the quickly shifting racial dynamics that existed in early 20th century Philadelphia.

During the early years of Marian Anderson's life, her family lived in several South Philadelphia locales, neighborhoods that were characterized by a mix of African American, Jewish, Irish, and Italian residents. Although racial tensions surely existed, these diverse communities of recent arrivals to the city struggled and thrived in proximity and generally in peace. Anderson attended the integrated Stanton Grammar School at 17th and Christian Streets throughout her childhood and early adolescence.

But, as Mossell explains, the steep influx of Southern migrants during the era of the Great War changed the racial mood of the city. As European immigration screeched to a halt, uneducated, unskilled black families were lured to Philadelphia as to other industrial cities of the North. Philadelphia's black population skyrocketed, causing consternation among the city's white residents. The increase was particularly steep from 1916-1918 when an estimated 150 black migrants arrived from the South each week.

Finding a place to live became the biggest challenge for the new arrivals. In her thesis Mossell describes attitudes toward the black migrant: "If we may judge the attitude of the whites by their efforts to segregate him, it would seem that he was highly unwelcome. The housing problem was itself a result of the determination on the part of the white people that the migrant should live only in that part of the city in which Negroes had previously lived. Vacant houses in other sections were not for rent or sale to the Negroes."

The black elite, who had become known as the Old Philadelphians or OPs, were also wary of the new arrivals who posed an enormous threat to their comfortable, genteel way of life. According to Mossell, "The increase in Negro population greatly stimulated the movement....to segregate children in schools. Also, such social privileges as the service of eating houses and the attending of white churches and theaters by Negroes, were practically withdrawn after the influx of Negro migrants into Philadelphia."

It is in this context that we must understand a key turning point young Anderson's life, as illustrated in the video below. With the encouragement of her community, in 1914 Anderson walked from her South Philadelphia home to the Philadelphia Musical Academy at 1617 Spruce Street—later The Garden Restaurant and now a condominium. (*video clip available on Hidden City website; search Hidden City Amy Cohen*)

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Nearly five decades later, Anderson still sharply recalled the sting of this rejection. Given the Philadelphia of her early years, she claimed that this was when she first experienced a “painful realization of what it meant to be a Negro.”

Unfortunately, Adella Bond learned about the change in more dramatic fashion. In 1918, she bought a home at 2936 Ellsworth Street. Mossell describes Bond as “a colored probation officer of the Municipal Court, a woman of refinement and training and an old citizen of Philadelphia.” In this new racially-hardened city, however, being a member of the “OP” class did not insulate blacks from anti-migrant anger.

On July 26, 1918, a crowd of roughly 100 white men and boys, many of them armed, congregated in front of Bond’s new home. After a rock was thrown through her parlor window, she shot a rifle through her second story window to alert the police. Bond was arrested and several days of rioting ensued. Large swaths of the area from Dickinson Street to Washington Avenue and 23rd to 30th Streets were engulfed in violence. A police officer was shot by a black man. Subsequently, two black men were killed while in police custody. 60 blacks and three whites were arrested during the days of violence. Many witnesses, however, thought the police exacerbated the situation by antagonizing the black men and protecting the whites. Overall, four people died, hundreds were injured, and black neighborhoods were severely damaged. It was the first race riot the city had experienced since 1871.

During the years of the First World War, racial attitudes in Philadelphia had changed. Increased hostility and discrimination affected not only struggling blacks like the Andersons, but also members of the established black elite like the Alexanders. As Mossell describes in her thesis, “As in the case of the probation officer (Adella Bond) so in numerous other occurrences, the colored people of every class received harsh treatment at the hands of the white public.” No wonder Anderson chose to leave the city to pursue her career; and no wonder that Alexander chose to stay, continuing to fight for civil rights as an attorney and early member of Philadelphia’s Commission on Human Relations.

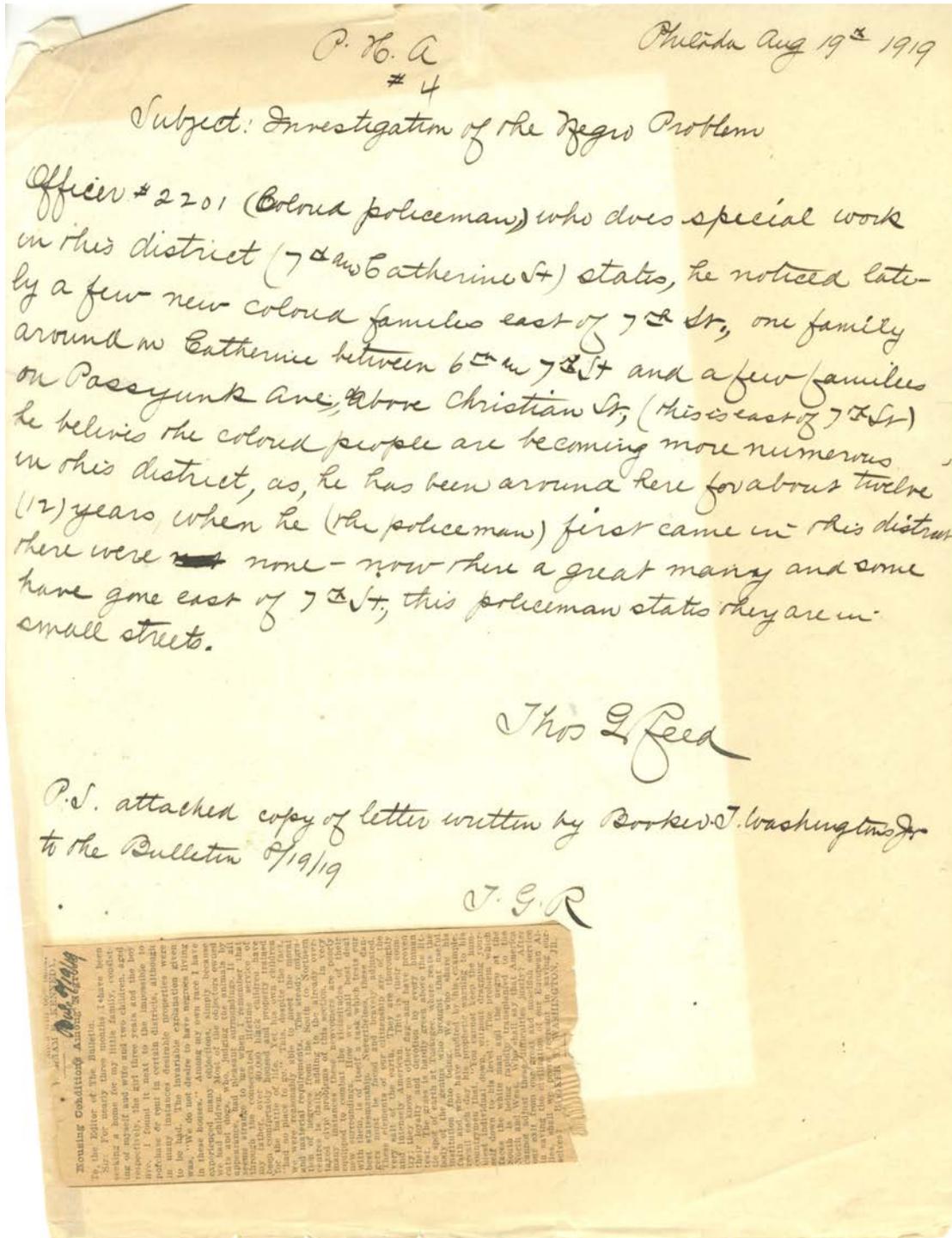
The Challenge of Housing

The following documents from the Temple University's Urban Archives offer primary source evidence of the difficulties facing African Americans who migrated from the South to Philadelphia.

Philada Aug 19th 1919

P.H.A.

Subject: Investigation of the Negro Problem



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Officer #2201 (colored policeman) who does special work in this district (7th and Catherine St) states, he noticed lately a few new colored families east of 7th St., one family around Catherine between 6th and 7th St and a few families on Passyunk Ave, above Christian Street, (this is east of 7th st) he believes the colored people are becoming more numerous in this district, as, he has been around here for about twelve (12) years, when he (the policeman) first came in this district there were none—now there are a great many and some have gone east of 7th St., this policeman states they are in small streets. Thos. G. Reed
P.S. attached copy of letter written by Booker T. Washington, Jr. to the Bulletin 8/19/19 T.G.R.

August 19, 2019

To the Editor of the Bulletin.

Sir: For nearly three months I have been seeking a home for my little family, consisting of myself and wife and two children, aged respectively, the girl three years and the boy five. I found it next to impossible to purchase or rent in certain districts, although in many instances desirable properties were to be had. The invariable explanation given was, "We do not desire to have negroes living in these houses." Among my own race I have experienced many objections, simply because we had children. Most of the objectors owned cats and dogs, who judging the animals by appearance, had pleasant surroundings. It all seems strange to me when I remember that through the consecrated lifetime service of my father, over 40,000 black children have been comfortably housed and properly trained for the battle of life. Yet his own children "had no place to go." This is despite the fact we were reasonably able to meet the moral and material requirements. The steady migration of negroes from the South to Northern centres is daily adding to the already overtaxed civic problems of this section. In very many instances these newcomers are poorly equipped to combat the vicissitudes of their new surroundings. How we shall best deal with them is of itself a task which tests our best statesmanship. Nevertheless, these dangers must be faced and bravely adjusted. These elements of our citizenship are of the very salt of the earth. They are thoroughly and intensely American. This is their country: they know no other flag—and have proved their loyalty and devotion by every human test. The grass is hardly green above the little spot of earth at Tuskegee where rests the body of the genius who brought that useful institution into being. We who share his faith and who have profited by his example recall each day his prophetic warning to his countrymen, "You cannot keep the humblest individual down without dragging yourself down to his level." The problem which faces the white man and the negro at the South is being rapidly transplanted to the North and West. Who shall say that America cannot adjust to these difficulties justly? After our exit from our great and unselfish service in saving the civilization of our European Allies, shall we prove recreant in saving ourselves?
Booker T. Washington, Jr.

Vicissitudes – Changes of circumstance

Recreant – Cowardly

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ISADORE MARTIN
REAL ESTATE AND INSURANCE
6 NORTH 42ND STREET
PHILADELPHIA, PA.

March 11, 1920

Mr. John Ihlder,
Philadelphia, Pa.
My dear Sir:-

You may remember me in connection with several conferences held in your office relative to making better housing conditions for colored people. Do you know if the United States Shipping Board made any provision for taking care of colored people when they built houses in Elmwood and other places in Philadelphia? I see by the papers that the government will sell houses in Elmwood for a nominal sum down and the balance in regular monthly or yearly payments. Would it not be a fair thing for our government to take the colored brother into this plan and give him a chance also to get a home?

I am of the opinion that if given the chance, colored people numbering more than a hundred would gladly take advantage of the terms offered by the government. Inside of two months, I could get more than 100 who would gladly pay down the amount asked by the government as an initial payment and more. Will you please see what you can do. I have calls from an average of 25 colored people a week but cannot supply the demand.

*Yours truly
Isadore Martin*

ISADORE MARTIN
REAL ESTATE AND INSURANCE
6 NORTH 42ND STREET
PHILADELPHIA, PA.

March 12, 1920

Mr. Isadore Martin,
6 N. 42nd street,
Philadelphia, Pa

Dear Sir:-

In response to your favor of March 11th, I would say that I have communicated with Mr. Wilmoth, of the Emergency Fleet Corporation. He confirms my impression that all the Elmwood houses have now been sold and that it will not be possible to get accommodation there for negroes.

He assured me, however, that he is much interested in this matter of housing for negroes and that he has a plan in mind. He is to come in and see me about this plan in the near future.

Sincerely yours,
Secretary

JJ-mbf

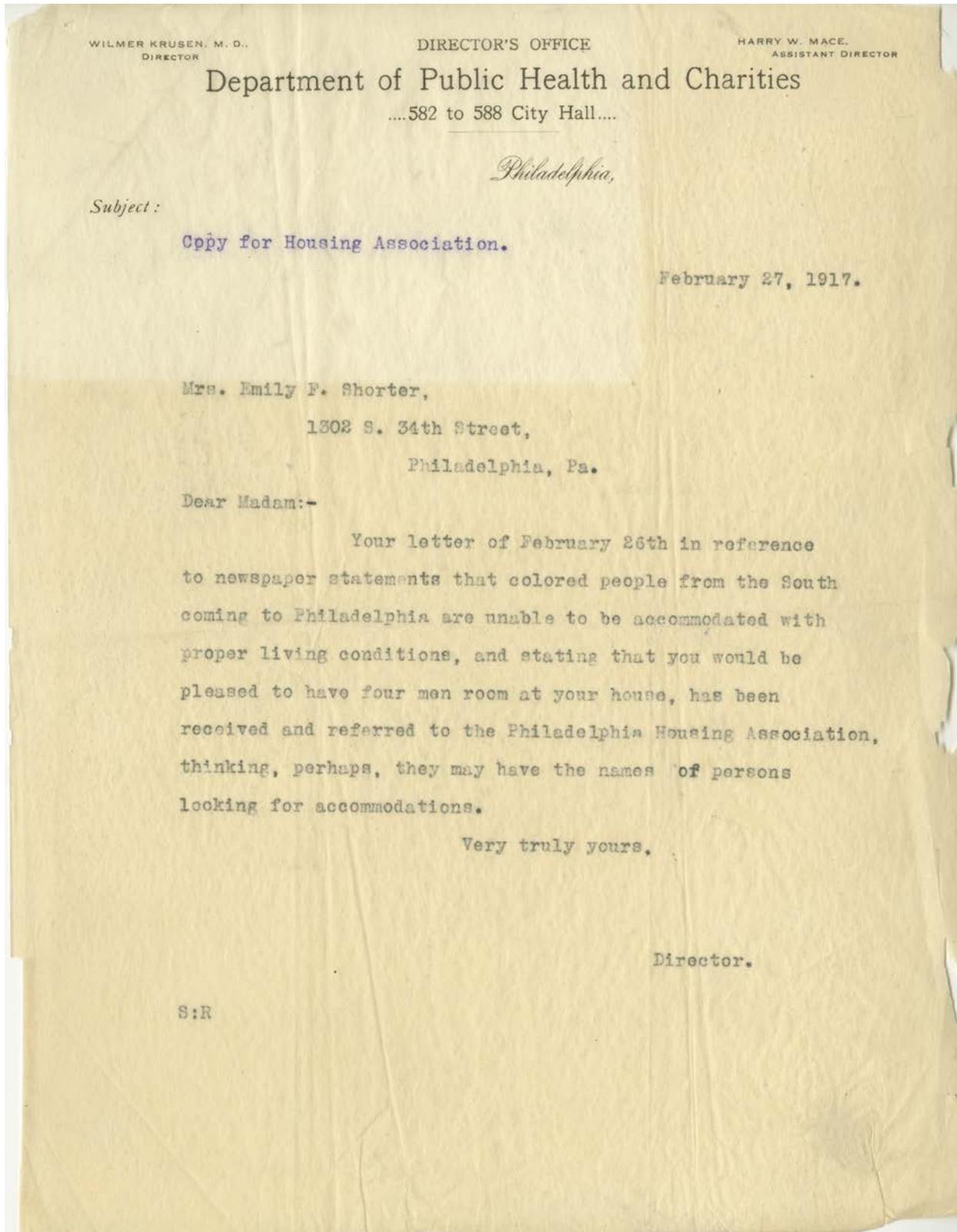
*33
I have called on you several times and you have been very kind and helpful.*



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Digging Deeper into the Great Migration to Philadelphia

Go to goinnorth.org/oral-histories. There are 36 interviews of men and women who came to Philadelphia during the early 20th century. Either assign or let students choose an interview to listen to. Then, distribute a **Great Migration Oral History Sheet** to each student. As the interviews differ in length, students may need to skip some sections in order to complete the sheet within a 50-minute class period; the interviews are divided into clearly labeled sections.

Explain that the next day, students will be playing the role of the person whose interview they listened to. (Optional: require students to bring a small prop of some kind to help them tell the runaway’s story.) For homework, have students complete a Venn Diagram comparing the story of their migrant to those of John and Marie Anderson.

The next day, you will host an imaginary reunion of people of Philadelphia’s Great Migration. **Great Migration Reunion** (see Student Materials) sheet to each student. Students should circulate, getting stories from others while sharing their own. They should not fill out their own story on the grid. Once each student has gathered the stories of six other migrants, put students in groups of 3 to 5 to see if they can determine any generalizations about the migrants in terms of age, reasons for leaving, jobs in Philadelphia, etc.

As a follow-up assessment of this activity, students can write a letter to a friend or relative about their experiences at the **Great Migration Reunion**. The letter should focus on generalizations about the experiences of migrants to Philadelphia.

UK Interview with Lillie McKnight, August 2, 1983
Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries
Charles Hardy, Interviewer | 2014OH177 GN 029
[Go in' North - Tales of the Great Migration](#)

00:00 0:36:40

00:00:19 - Deciding to move to Philadelphia
00:03:56 - Domestic work in Columbia, South Carolina
00:06:02 - Early impressions of Philadelphia
00:08:07 - Arriving in Philadelphia
00:09:54 - McKnight's first job
00:12:29 - McKnight keeps to herself
00:13:47 - Views on taking responsibility
00:14:22 - Bringing her children north
00:18:43 - On having a good experience as a domestic worker
00:22:40 - Experience with the employment office
00:25:06 - Experiences in church
00:30:24 - Visit to the South
00:35:29 - Advice about keeping one's heart clean

Transcript Index

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Digging Deeper into the Great Migration to Philadelphia: Oral History Note Sheet

Fill in the information below listening to the oral history interview you were given in class. Not all information will be available for each story. You can continue on back or on an additional piece of paper if needed.

Name:

Age at time of migration:

Year of migration:

Location/conditions/experiences while in the South:

Impetus to migrate (Note any PUSH/PULL factors):

Reasons Philadelphia chosen as a destination:

Mode of transit to Philadelphia:

Experiences in Philadelphia—Family and/or Neighborhood

Experiences in Philadelphia—Education and/or Jobs

Experiences in Philadelphia—Race

Any other interesting details:

The Great Migration to Philadelphia Reunion

-Name -Age and year of Migration	Notable experiences in the South; reasons for departure	Notable experiences in Philadelphia: Family and/or Neighborhood	Notable experiences in Philadelphia: Education and/or Jobs	Notable experiences in Philadelphia: Race

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-Name -Age and year of Migration	Notable experiences in the South; reasons for departure	Notable experiences in Philadelphia: Family and/or Neighborhood	Notable experiences in Philadelphia: Education and/or Jobs	Notable experiences in Philadelphia: Race

Final Assessment

Using evidence and information gathered in the Oral History Activity, students participate in a debate, engage in a Socratic seminar, or write an essay assessing the following quotations. The first two are from the African American playwright, August Wilson who argues that moving North was a mistake. Expressing an opposing point of view, the second two quotations are from Isabel Wilkerson's *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*.

"We were land-based agrarian people from Africa. We were uprooted from Africa, and we spent 200 years developing our culture as black Americans. And then we left the South. We uprooted ourselves and attempted to transplant this culture to the pavements of the industrialized North. And it was a transplant that did not take. I think if we had stayed in the South, we would have been a stronger people. And because the connection between the South of the 20's, 30's and 40's has been broken, it's very difficult to understand who we are."

"We came to the North, and we're still victims of discrimination and oppression in the North. The real reason that the people left was a search for jobs because the agriculture, cotton agriculture in particular, could no longer support us. But the move to the cities has not been a good move. Today...we still don't have jobs...."

"All told, perhaps the most significant measure of the Great Migration was the act of leaving itself, regardless of the individual outcome. Despite the private disappointments and triumphs of any individual migrant, the Migration, in some ways, was its own point. The achievement was in making the decision to be free and acting on that decision, wherever that journey led them."

"Over the decades, perhaps the wrong questions have been asked about the Great Migration. Perhaps it is not a question of whether the migrants brought good or ill to the cities they fled to or were pushed or pulled to their destinations, but a question of how they summoned the courage to leave in the first place or how they found the will to press beyond the forces against them and the faith in a country that had rejected them for so long. By their actions, they did not dream the American Dream, they willed it into being by a definition of their own choosing. They did not ask to be accepted but declared themselves the Americans that perhaps few others recognized but that they had always been."



Current Connections

Clearly there are numerous parallels that can be drawn between participants in the Great Migration and the people moving to Philadelphia today and in the recent past. Oral history is a means through which students can build interpersonal skills, increase understanding of their communities, and appreciate the diversity of our city.

Consider assigning students the task of:

- Interviewing a family member, friend, or neighbor who migrated to Philadelphia from another state or country

- Interviewing people who have migrated to Philadelphia from a particular region of the world such as Central America or Southeast Asia

There are abundant on-line sources to guide teachers in preparing students for oral history interviews. Students can use the *Digging Deeper into the Great Migration to Philadelphia: Oral History Note Sheet* as the basis for developing their interview questions.

Students can share their findings through short videos or in written form. They should compare the experiences of the participants in the Great Migration to those of the more recent migrants who they have collectively interviewed. Finally, students should reflect on how the oral history and comparison experiences have helped them to answer the essential question, “How do migration and immigration transform the identity of a place or group?”

Outstanding Websites

greatmigrationphl.org

The Great Migration: A City Transformed, produced by Scribe Video in 2019, is rich with media artists’ interpretations of the Great Migration, short videos about significant institutions, and even a walking tour of relevant sites. It also contains a concise historical overview of the Great Migration to Philadelphia featuring vivid primary sources.

philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/african-american-migration/

African American Migration provides a summary of the Great Migration within the context of black migration to Philadelphia from the 1600s through the twentieth century.

[WRTI The Great Migration & Jazz](#)

In 2016 deejay Bob Perkins developed a series of programs to explore connections between the Great Migration, particularly to Philadelphia, and jazz music.

<https://tinamoore.atavist.com/oldphiladelphiansandsouthernnewcomers>

This remarkable site uses photos, video, oral history, and documents to tell the story of the Great Migration to Philadelphia with an emphasis on the often tense relationship between the migrants and the “OPs” or Old Philadelphians, members of the already existing black community who found their own social positions challenged by the influx of Southern migrants.