

# The pull and push theory of migration history essay



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The pull and push theory of migration was first coined by Ravenstein of England in the 19th century. It stated that people migrate because of factors that push them out of their existing nation and factors that pull them in to another (Marquez). This is as a result of the desire of human beings to be better off than they currently are. Even though deteriorating living conditions forced both the Highland Scots and the black Americans into leaving their homes and settling in Canada, the migration experience of the both these groups differed in several ways as the blacks were attempting to attain freedom for the first time and did anything necessary to survive whereas the Scottish were just trying to preserve their lifestyle, holding traditional values on high regard.

A government implements laws to maintain peace and order in a society. Laws, however, may often have a negative connotation as a government can abuse their authority, as some in the past have done, and pass certain bills that will only benefit a select group of people rather than serve the greater good of the country. This is what unfortunately occurred in the US during the early 19th century. Even though slavery was struck down in 1802, newer laws called ' Black laws' were enacted with the aim of deterring blacks from settling down in the country and also encouraging existing people to leave. After 1807, blacks entering the state had to provide a \$500 bond signed by 2 white men as a guarantee of their good behaviour. Those who did not obey would be banished from the state. (Linda) Oppressive rules like these clearly stated the intentions of the government and the people they represented. White mobs stormed black neighbourhoods, beating residents and burning their homes, emphasising that the removal of slavery had just led the way

for increased tensions between the two groups. As a result of the racism, most black people disliked whites, evident from the account of John Little, a runaway slave who proudly stated ' There's no white blood in me, my mother's father imported from Africa, and both my grandparents of my father were also imported" (Linda, pg. - 7). He then tells of his horrific history of being a part of the slave trade, wishing if he ' could die, but could not' (Linda, pg. - 9). Hence, there is evidence to suggest that the black Americans were moved out of the US, not because they wanted to, but because they had to.

At the start of the industrial revolution in the late 18th century, the Highland Scots lived in a rather comfortable lifestyle. Economy was based on agriculture and cattle. They used how much soil was necessary to support themselves and made their own clothes. Justice was local and personal, and agriculture operated at a subsistence level. At the head of each community was a clan chief, who controlled economic affairs and justice. In all, they were self-sustaining. While men held different amounts of land or fulfilled different functions, they saw themselves as members of a single community. However, this all changed when the Western industrialists thought it important to improve and civilize the highlands. Due to military defeat and subject to cultural assimilation, the highlanders were seen as victims of an alien political and economic order from Britain, who were trying to intensify the process of integrating the highlands into their own society and even committed government resources and authorities to the task. As population grew, the land was not able to cope up with the expanded needs, large estates were divided into farms. While tenants' incomes rose slowly, rents

increased rapidly. Example. In 1972, farm rents rose by up to 170% (McClean, pg. - 12). As a result, many highlanders choose to leave their homes due to the rapid transformation of traditional society under the impact of the industrial revolution.

The black Americans looking to escape the slave trade arrived in Canada in the 1820's and settled in a place they named the ' Colbornesburg Settlement', in honor of Lieutenant Governor John Colborne; an active member in the anti-slavery movement. This was fertile land, suitable for growing crops and a good supply of water. Having such favourable conditions, in 1832 they were able to build the first black church in the area, which would also function as a school (Linda). They were so happy with their new found freedom, that they sent out an open invitation for other blacks to join them and have a share in their happiness. The next year in 1833, several families moved from the Colbornesburg Settlement to place called ' Queen's Bush', 18 miles north of Waterloo. They settled illegally on this unclaimed government land which had excellent conditions for agriculture, hoping that when this land was for sale, they would be able to afford it. Previously mentioned runaway slave John Little and his wife Eliza arrived in Queen's bush on a cold winter day, running away from their past experiences just like many of the people living in the community had done before. Despite the constant dangers, they continued on, preferring death to enslavement, never thinking of giving up. When they arrived in Queen's Bush, the snow was two feet deep and the nearest neighbour was 2 miles away. Despite all this, for the first time in their lives, they had a home that they could call their own. They were finally their own masters. It was difficult

place to get to, but every year, more families arrived, fatigued and without food. They depended on each other to survive. Newcomers were given gifts of beans, potatoes, equipment, seed and livestock by their neighbours. Families also lived together till individual houses could be built. Since currency was scarce, a barter system developed. All these factors led to a unified community, where the even effects of racism seemed to diminish. John Little, a man who once had hatred for the whites now had a change of thought and declared in one of his accounts - " I felt that it was not the white man I should dislike, but the mean spirit which is in some men, whether white or black"(Linda). Furthermore, white settlers were being welcomed to Queen's Bush. They were helped by the blacks for the same challenges they had to face. In conclusion, people did what they had to in order to survive, potentially forgoing traditional values in the process.

The Highland Scots had begun settling in upper Canadian county between 1784 and 1815. They were not forced out of their nation the same way the black Americans were, rather they came to Canada by choice. They left together with their neighbours in extended family groups, which included a large number of children. Even individual emigrations left chiefly from the same geographic area. Immigration was generally organized by the clansmen, and they departed from the highland port nearest their home, in relative luxury, considering that runaway slaves from the US had to cross streams and forests on foot. Evidence strongly suggests that most emigrants to Glengarry County were bound by family ties to several other emigrant or settler families who had already arrived in Canada (Mclean, pg. - 9), thus exhibiting the pull factors of immigration. Economic pressures alone were

not sufficient to bring such a conservative group of people suddenly to abandon their much live land. But the adoption of large - scale farming damaged their financial well-being and also broke apart traditional highland communities. So they decided to move to Canada where they could satisfy their desire for land and re-establish neighbourhood groups. They were so closely attached that they refused to take free land offered to them at other places within Canada, rather, they stayed with friends, rented and ultimately bought land in the vicinity of their relatives, an act that shows us their commitment to traditional values.

In conclusion, although they were both forced into leaving their homes, the migration experience of the Highland Scots and those of black Americans who settled in Upper Canada differed in several ways for two main reasons. First, the black Americans wanted to escape from their previous life, doing anything necessary to survive. On the other hand, the Highland Scots choose to leave in order to maintain traditional values and be able to live the same way they have been for years. Both these groups , however, moved in search for opportunity.