

Essay on the great migration

[Business](#), [Industries](#)



In the history of the United States, the Great Migration refers to the period in the 20th century when African Americans moved in large numbers- nearly six million - from the Southern rural communities to the large urban cities of the North. During the early decades of this century (between 1916 and 1970), the African Americans had hopes of leaving behind a life that was symbolized by racism, disenfranchisement, Jim Crow Law, and violence based on skin color. They had hoped for new opportunities for political participation and recognition, economic self-independence, freedom from social violence, and integration. However, according to the northern whites and middle class blacks, these immigrants represented a black mass that would change the face of the northern urban landscape forever (Lawrence, pp. 34-42).

While the African Americans lived in the South, they faced harsh conditions from the whites who treated them with racism, paid them low wages while they worked for longer hours under unfavorable conditions, and lynched them as well. However, during that time, there was an increased growth of industries in the northern cities. This growth in industries led to increased demand for labor that interested the leaders of the African Americans in the South. Therefore, considering the assumed appealing life in the North, parents sought for better education for their children in the cities and better employment opportunities with better pay for themselves. The migration of the African Americans to different cities greatly depended on the number of industries in these cities. For instance, Detroit had 611 percent of the immigrants, Philadelphia 500 percent, Chicago 148 percent, and New York 66 percent correlating to the number of industries and intensity of labor required in these industries. Some of the African Americans migrating to the

North went by train, others by boats, and others went by bus however, a few had automobiles and horse driven carts, which they used to ferry their families to the North. According to the Testimony of Benjamin Singleton, the people moving to the South had their means through which they could start living before they could get sustainable jobs (Windom, 2001). This could be the reason that made the migration to take a long time, coupled with the rejection by the northerners.

This migration to the Northern cities of the United States left a great impact in the life in the destinations of the immigrants. The earliest conflicts between the immigrants and the northern natives began when they started competing over job opportunities and living space. Most of the new arrivals were employed in slaughterhouses, factories, and foundries. However, the women had very little opportunities in these jobs, and most of them stayed at home as homemakers. Soon racism also began in the north thereby leading to several interracial strife and interracial wars such as the July 1919 Chicago riots that lasted for thirteen days and left about thirty-eight people dead, 537 injured and more than 1, 000 African Americans homeless (Lawrence, pp. 51-9). These riots worsened the white-black relations in the North.

During to the Great Depression that reduced investment in the United Sates, the African American Migration decreased in the 1930s. However, with the advent of the Second World War, the Great Migration of the African Americans resumed and later ended by 1970, which greatly affected the demography of the people living in the Southern cities of the United States. As the African American population greatly increased in the North, they left

very few of them in the South leaving most of the population being whites. Before the Great Migration, nine out of every African Americans lived in the Southern states. Additionally, three quarters of this population lived in farms. Nevertheless, this statistics changed after 1970, and less than half of the African Americans in the United States still lived in the South, and only 25 percent of the African Americans living in the rural areas.

Despite several reasons and consequences associated to the Great Migration that saw many African Americans move to the northern cities of the United States, the most important consequence is the fact that it led to cultural integration. After a series of conflicts between the whites and blacks in the North, the two cultures integrated in to different social units resulting in balanced cultural association and freedom, which are the basis for democracy in the society.

Works Cited:

Jacob Lawrence. *The Great Migration: An American Story*. Charlotte, North Carolina: Baker & Taylor, CATS, 2009. Print.