The Great Migration and Its Effects on the African American Population of Mississippi

Objectives: Through analysis of primary and secondary sources such as images and short stories, students will learn about the time period, causes and effects as well as lasting consequences of the Great Migration.

The Great Migration and Its Effects on the African American Population of Mississippi lesson plan is adaptable for grades 8-12.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curricular Connections</th>
<th>Grade 8</th>
<th>RL1; RL2; RL3; RL4; SL1; SL2; SL3; SL4; SL5; SL6; L1; L2; L3; L4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grades 9-10</td>
<td>RL1; RL2; RL3; RL4; RL5; SL1; SL2; SL3; SL4; SL5; SL6; L1; L2; L3; L4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grades 11-12</td>
<td>RL1; RL2; RL3; RL4; RL5; RL6; SL1; SL2; SL3; SL4; SL5; SL6; L1; L2; L3; L4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>U.S. History from Exploration through Reconstruction</td>
<td>2a; 2b; 2d; 5; 6c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mississippi Studies</td>
<td>1f; 4a; 4b; 4c; 5a; 5c; 5d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U.S. History from Post-Reconstruction to the Present</td>
<td>2a; 2b; 4a; 5; 7a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minority Studies</td>
<td>1; 2e; 3b; 4a; 4b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African American Studies</td>
<td>1b; 1c; 2b; 6b; 6d</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“I have learned effective strategies for educating my students on how events from the past shape our present and future using primary, secondary, and tertiary sources.”

LaTonia Bilbro teaches Mississippi Studies, Introduction to World Geography, and World History at Lanier High School in Jackson where she has been awarded “Nicest Teacher.” She was extremely proud of the award because it showed that her students acknowledged her efforts in making each class a happy and productive one. She was a participant in MDAH’s first annual Summer Teachers School in 2015.
Materials: Brainstorming Activity; Causes and Effects of the Great Migration on Mississippi; images; “The Black Immigrants” by Ben Bagdikian; The Black Immigrant: Life in the New Lands; Black Exodus Table; graph paper; colored pencils.

Procedures:

Activity One: Brainstorming
1. Distribute to the students the handout entitled Brainstorming Activity.
2. Have students imagine they were moving to a new city or state and answer the questions on the worksheet individually or with a partner.
3. Once students have completed the worksheet have them share their answers with the class and construct a cause and effect chart on the board.
   - Causes may include: better jobs, less crime, better schools, and housing.
   - Effects may include (new city): increased population and more competition for jobs, higher crime rate, increased cost of living, sense of nostalgia or homesickness.
   - Effects may include (old city): abandoned homes, less population, fewer businesses, increased taxes, increased cost of living.

Activity Two: Creating a Visual
1. Lead a class discussion on the causes and effects of the Great Migration using the guide Causes and Effects of the Great Migration on Mississippi.
2. Distribute or project images of the boll weevil, cotton fields, and the aftermath of the Great Flood in Greenville, Mississippi. Note: More images of the 1927 Great Flood can be found online in the MDAH 1927 Great Flood Photograph Collection Digital Archive at http://www.mdah.ms.gov/arrec/digital_archives/series/1927flood.

Activity Three: Analyzing a Short Story
1. Distribute to students a copy of “The Black Immigrants” by Ben H. Bagdikian.
2. Instruct students to read story III. This may be done silently, in small groups, or as a class.
3. After the reading is completed, students should complete the accompanying worksheet analysis entitled Black Immigrants: Life in the New Lands. Discuss with students the fact that many migrants realized that life was not always better in the North.

Extension Activities:

Constructing a Line Graph
1. Distribute to students the Black Exodus Table.
2. Using the data in the table, students should construct two line graphs:
   - Label the first graph GRAPH A: Cotton South. On the x-axis (horizontal) they should put the decade and on the y-axis (vertical) they should put the states. Plot the coordinates using a scale (students can create their own) that will accommodate the smallest and largest population number. Use a different colored pencil to denote a different state. For example: South Carolina’s data will be blue for each decade, Georgia’s data will be red and so forth. Connect the dots of each one to depict the population change.
   - Follow the same directions for GRAPH B: Industrial North. Students should create a color key for
each graph. Supply students with graph paper and colored pencils.

**More on the Great Migration**
Brainstorming Activity

Directions: Imagine you were moving to a new city or state and answer the following questions.

1. Name five events that would cause you and your family to relocate to another area or region.

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2. Based on the answers from Question 1, name five effects that may be experienced by your relocation.

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Causes and Effects of the Great Migration on Mississippi

**Directions:** Use the information below to give a brief description of the Great Migration, analyze the following images, and explain how it is one of many factors that have shaped our country as a whole.

**Description**

Between 1915 and 1970, more than six million African Americans moved out of the South to cities across the Northeast, Midwest, and West. This relocation, called the Great Migration, resulted in massive demographic shifts across the United States. Between 1910 and 1930, cities such as New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland saw their African American population grow by about forty percent and the number of African Americans employed in northern industrial jobs nearly double.

When discussing the Great Migration it is important to consider some of its causes and effects. This includes the Great Migration push factors, or negative aspects or conditions that motivates people to leave their country, religion, etc. as well as its pull factors, positive aspects or conditions that encourages a population to leave its home. Some of the causes that affected the African American population of Mississippi were both naturally occurring and man-made.

**Push Factors**

*The Boll Weevil Infestation:* Boll weevils are small grey-brown beetles (about one-quarter inch or six millimeters) that feed off of the cotton fibers in cotton seed pods (bolls). Female boll weevils lay their eggs inside cotton plant buds; once their larva hatch, worm-like grubs are produced. The offspring consume the boll fibers, causing the bolls to fall off the plants which essentially kills the plant. The boll weevil came into the United States to Texas from Mexico in 1894. During the following decade they moved eastward and devastated cotton fields, which were still the cash crop of the South. By 1908, cotton harvests in Mississippi were reduced by 75% in several areas and up to nearly 90% in Pike County. Therefore many African American sharecroppers who had no cushion (i.e. money saved or good credit) to ride out the infestation problem were forced to make the decision of stay in Mississippi and die or move to the North where promises of a better life had already lured many out of the South.

*The Great Flood of 1927:* The Great Flood of 1927 is known as the most destructive river flood in the history of the United States. It began with extremely heavy rains in the central basin of the Mississippi river in the summer of 1926. The flood affected Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas. More than 23,000 square miles of land was submerged, hundreds of thousands of people were displaced, and around 250 people died. Refugee camps were established in the town of Greenville, Mississippi, for African Americans that were not able to evacuate the flood area. However, many were forced into labor in order to receive rations of food and other supplies. The National Guard was called in to patrol the camps but word soon traveled out of the camps of guardsmen robbing, assaulting, raping, and even murdering African Americans. By late summer of 1927, thousands of African Americans packed up their belongings and left Washington County. Most headed north and within a year, fifty percent of the Delta's African American population had migrated from the region. Once called “The Queen of the South,” Greenville never returned to its former glory of wealth and prosperity.
**Jim Crow:** Jim Crow Laws were statutes and ordinances established in the late 1800s to separate the white and African American races in the American South. In theory, it was to create “separate but equal” treatment, but in practice Jim Crow Laws condemned African American citizens to inferior treatment and facilities.

W.T. Andrews, a lawyer and the editor of the *Sumter Defender* gave an address on the Great Migration. According to Andrews, the chief cause of Negro unrest and disturbance of mind were: the destruction of political privileges and curtailment of his civil rights; no protection of life, liberty, and property under the law; insufficient wages to the laboring class needed to buy the necessities of life; and no educational facilities worthy of educating Negro children in most Southern states. These were also factors that played into the Great Migration of African Americans during the early and middle part of the twentieth century.

**Pull Factors**

1. The promise of more equal opportunities in regard to employment, living conditions, and education.
2. To escape from the brutal racism of the South, as demonstrated by groups such as the Ku Klux Klan.
3. Positive media coverage from the North by newspapers such as *The Chicago Defender* and *The Pittsburgh Courier*.
4. Family members or friends who had already moved North.
5. Respect as people and citizens of the United States.

**Effects**

1. Increased population in northern cities.
2. African Americans had to find work in factories, slaughterhouses, and foundries where conditions were arduous and dangerous.
3. Increased competition for employment and living spaces.
4. Whites in northern cities took advantage of African Americans fleeing the South.
5. Racism was widespread in the North due to prejudices.
7. Increase of crime rate and drug and alcohol abuse.

Some of these effects can be clearly seen in the short story “The Black Immigrants.”
Top: “Y M. V. R. R. Station, Estill, Miss. 4-30-27” Station at Estill and surrounding structures partially submerged by flood waters. [Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Railroad]. Estill, Mississippi.

Bottom: “Street, Greenville 4-30-27.” Young male standing at flooded intersection. Boats and buildings in background. Greenville, Mississippi. MDAH Archives and Records Services.
Top: "Greenville, Miss. 4-30-27" Large warehouse structure surrounded by flood water. Greenville, Mississippi.

Bottom: "Greenville, Miss. South from R. R. Water Tank 4-30-27". Flood water covers streets and surrounds buildings in Greenville, Mississippi. MDAH Archives and Records Services.
“Yazoo City 5-13-27.” Refugee camp for flood victims showing group of black refugees near tents. Yazoo City, Mississippi. MDAH Archives and Records Services.
The Black Immigrants: Life in the New Lands

“The Black Immigrants” is a collection of three short stories by Ben H. Bagdikian originally published in The Saturday Evening Post in 1967 that chronicles the experiences of African Americans that had migrated from Mississippi to cities up North. These stories are narratives of individuals who experienced firsthand the journey and life of a migrant during the Great Migration. Teacher should make copies for each student. As a class the students will read story “III” where Elijah gives his account of his life in the Chicago ghetto. Method of reading can be at the discretion of the teacher. Through this reading students should realize, as many migrants did, that life was not necessarily better for them in the North. After reading, students should complete the worksheet that analyzes the short story.
The Negroes of the northern ghettos are not simply colored people or poor people. They are also the new immigrants—foreigners within their own country. Here is the story of Walter Austin of Merigold, Mississippi, and the millions like him: why they leave the South, how they go to the alien land, and what they find.

By Ben H. Bagdikian
Photographs by Matt Herron

At 6:40 on the evening of March 4, 1967, Walter Austin, who had lived for almost half a century within 60 miles of the Mississippi, actually saw the river for the first time. Still wearing his four-dollar overalls, he was sitting in the back seat of an automobile, jammed in with four other members of his family, crossing a high bridge. His eyes were red with the fatigue of the last 38 sleepless hours. But he stared down through the dusk at the aluminum reflection of the greatest body of water he had ever seen, and he said the same thing that rose out of him earlier when someone told him that in New York City there is a building 102 stories high: a low, slow, "Good gracious!" The car moved across the bridge, its occupants turning to keep in sight the massive river that had been the source of life and of suffering for five generations of Austin families. And then the river was gone, and they turned forward again to look uncertainly into the darkness ahead.

It was the most momentous crossing of their lives. From that time on their experiences would be like nothing they or their
THE BLACK IMMIGRANTS

ancestors had ever known. That morning they had been just another impoverished Negro family working the fields on a remote Mississippi plantation. But at noon, with hardly a backward glance, they had slammed the doors of the two cars driven by a relative and a friend and headed north for a new life in the city. They carried all they could from the last hog they would ever butcher—the salted jaw, a slab of salt pork. Two hams, 100 pounds of lard—stashed in the car like sacred objects. Riding with them as well was a new and confusing collection of hopes and fears.

That day the AUSTINs—father, mother, five children aged 17 to 6, and one grandchild—added their eight lives to a flow of Americans that is one of the greatest unacknowledged sagas of human history. It is an uprooting of more people in a shorter period of time than almost any peacetime migration known to man, a vast transfer that is changing America.

In a wicked moment Franklin Roosevelt once put a chill on a convention of the Daughters of the American Revolution by greeting them, “My fellow immigrants,” and it is true enough that one thing all Americans share is a background of migration. The American Indians were immigrants, probably from Asia; the forebears of most white Americans came from Europe in the largest intercontinental human movement in history; the ancestors of most American Negroes were the 400,000 Africans brought into the South as slaves between 1619 and 1868. Now the descendants of these Negro immigrants are making another mass move, this time within the United States.

In this generation, some four million Negroes have left the South, most of them for six states: California, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania. Where 50 years ago three quarters of Negro Americans were in rural areas, today three quarters are in cities. And the tide still runs strong. In 1960 there were four American cities that were 40 percent Negro; by 1970 there will be 14, and practically every city of any size will have a core of migrant Negroes, piling up, desperate. Like previous migrants, they are truly aliens, used to different customs, a different climate, essentially a different language, different everything. Their ghettos are countries within countries, in which nearly every inhabitant feels foreign to what surrounds him. But what surrounds the city Negroes is more hostile than anything any white alien has ever encountered. For them the ghetto perimeters are closed as tightly as foreign borders.

This exodus of southern Negroes is one of the most dramatic demographic events of the mid-century, yet it is a clandestine operation. When the Negro goes, he goes suddenly and secretly, because he is afraid of the white man. Generally, the Negro is a sharecropper, living in a feudal, non-cash economy—his plantation owner provides him land and credit. When the harvest is over, the plantation owner announces that, after deducting the cost of food, fuel, seed, fertiliser and other things the sharecropper has obtained on credit, the sharecropper’s profit is such and such. Or, much more likely, the owner tells him he owes the plantation as much as $100 or $500.

To the Negro this kind of debt is so astronomical that not one, laborer or landlord, expects it will ever be paid in cash. Only by working off the debt can the Negro family be clear. As manual farm work gives way to huge machines, the means of paying back the debt disappears. When that happens, most plantation owners are resigned to seeing their tenants leave.

Even so, there is often a question of who gets the paid-for television or kitchen range, in light of the debt, the landlord or the departing family’s friends and relatives? And the rural Negro has been taught the harshest way never to make an important decision without the approval of his landlord. So when he moves North, the Negro usually goes unannounced, a final gesture of rebellion and fear.

The families themselves seldom know when they will go until the moment comes. Moving vans are unknown to the dirt roads of the rural South, and departure frequently depends on the car of a visiting relative. Thus the times of greatest population loss in the South are the holidays—Christmas, New Year’s, Memorial Day, July 4, Labor Day, any long weekend when city relatives can make the long trip down from the North. And at funerals. The South loses more than the dead at funerals. A brother from Chicago who comes down for the ceremony, having driven the 12 hours since work let out on Friday, arrives Saturday morning before dawn, and suddenly some of the youngsters, or the whole family, decide to go back with him.

Sometimes the mail arrives with the awaited passport: bus tickets sent by older children in the city. The next day the younger children drop out of school, and after dark that night the family heads for the train, carrying in their hands everything with which they will start their new life.

Or a mother takes the youngest children to “visit my sick aunty in the city,” where she gets a job and sends the tickets back for her husband and the older children, and the next Saturday night the husband pays a neighbor $1.50 to drive him and his children and their suitcases to the station. Morning on the plantation finds the shack abandoned, and another rural family has entered the central mass of an American metropolis.

The decision to abandon a way of life, even one you love, can seem very simple.

“Christmas morning, last Christmas morning,” Walter Austin said in his deep and vibrant voice, “I got up and I cried.” Weeping did not seem to go with the dark, weather-beaten face. Austin is 48, has black hair without gray and a black moustache, and wears rugged-looking overalls and rubber boots clothe with mud. “I cried, and then I thanked the Lord to be living, because I could
Suddenly the painful decision is made, and the Austin family flees North.

He lifted his leather cap and scratched his nose.

"I know in the city you're supposed to have an education. If you get me a job in the morning and I was supposed to separate the salt from the sugar, I couldn't do it, not if they was in the same kind of bag. I couldn't do it. Can't, because I can't read"

His wife, with a soft face drawn with worry, and a blurry eye blinded by a stroke seven years ago, told about a visit she made once to Chicago.

"I stayed with my husband's brother. I didn't even walk on the outside. That's all I know, what I saw from his place. I just couldn't stand that noise.

"I'd be satisfied working right here. If we had work. If I had enough to live on and be comfortable, oh, I'd stay. I'd stay."

What did she mean, "comfortable"?

"Nothing extra. You come into this world with nothing, and when you leave you can't carry anything away. I need some covers—quilts, you know—comfortable mattresses, some beds don't need to be propped up. I would like some clothes.

She thought for a moment and then worried that I might misunderstand her desire for clothes. She didn't mean for herself (she bought her last dress in 1866, her husband had never bought a suit and limited his new clothes to a four-dollar pair of overalls each year).

"I mean for the children. And nothing fancy, just not all sewed up. Not half-priced or leftovers but good common clothes, you know? Not eight-dollar dresses, just good three-dollar dresses. What I need most is extra underclothes and socks. We have enough outerclothes so the kids can wear clean things to school, but the children have to wear their underwear and socks every night so they'll clean in the morning. If they had extra sets they wouldn't have to wash them every night."

Walter Austin looked in mock severity at the apple of his eye, his 10-year-old daughter, Beassie.

"I get up at four o'clock every morning. At four o'clock I'm up, Sunday, Saturday, rain, sleet or snow. I put on my clothes, wash my face, go out and feed my hog, feed my chickens, and then I come back. And as soon as the kids has washed their clothes before they want to bed, and if they didn't, then I get them up early so they can do it before schooltime and give their underclothes and socks a chance to dry in town.

Bessie obviously was the most transparent, and she smiled sheepishly and said to her father, "Suh?" By "early," Austin explained, he meant the back-breaking child rose at 5 A.M. instead of the usual 6.

"To Mrs. Austin the prospect of the city held out the deadly danger that the children would learn to drink. Walter Austin would miss his farming and would no longer experience the pride of running and repairing a large combine. But the children had different thoughts. Frances, 17, whose formal bland expression masked a quick and taunting wit, was fatalistic—"I think things would be just the same whether I go or stay"—but she looked vexed when she described how well-dressed her out friends and relatives were when they returned from the city. David, 14, also wore an outer mask of solemnity, but his black-cloth over cap worn at a rakish angle hinted at the adolescent itch. "I just don't want to farm. No, suh. I just don't want to be a farmer." Hearing about the city, Beassie simply glowed wordlessly. Her younger sister, Zettie Mae, 8, and brother, Wendell, 6, looked bewildered and polite.

But their parents kept reminding themselves how much better off they are now than they were in their youth. Neither of them had ever lived in so good a house as this one. It had a high roof, the five rooms were lined with wallpaper. There was a cold-water faucet in the kitchen and a privy out back (some plantation shacks lack even a privy). Three open gas grates heated the place in winter, and they had some chairs, bedsheets, and from a few good years in the early 1960's a television set and a freezer, all paid for.

"My mother, she's back in Holmes County," Walter Austin said, "you could see the chickens through the floor and the blue sky through the roof. And when I was a kid, what I had to eat for the whole day was one slice of hog jaw and corn bread with flour gravy, sometimes not even that."

"Now here's David here. Fourteen years old and he's in—what grade is he? Eighth—yes, the eighth grade. When I was seven years old I was trying to

"The Black Immigrants" by Ben H. Bagdikian. Published in The Saturday Evening Post, July 15, 1967. MDAH Archives and Records Services.
During the singing, the three youngest children played school with the most magnificent Christmas gift any Austin ever got, a plastic-and-chrome children's table and chair set from two years ago. As always, Bessie was the teacher, sitting at the table, facing Zettie Mae and Wendell in chairs. They said imperiously, "spell," and she said what sounded like, "gown." Wendell, puzzled: "Gown?"
Bessie, impatiently: "Yes, 'gown.'"
Wendell, finally: "Like, 'machine gown?'"
Bessie, outraged: "No, Wendell. No! Like, 'Yesterday they went. Now they is a gown.'"
Everyone laughed, though teachers knew that this kind of misunderstanding is significant in explaining the difficulties in reading and learning among children whose natural tongue is not standard English.

There were baths, in a galvanized washtub put in Frances's room, the most private one, with a heater. During the evenings the Austins constantly chanted over their view of the future. "I've got to go to work," Walter Austin said. "If I could just get the machine shop job or work in the boss man's pig farm where they work straight rain or shine. But how in the world am I going to feed eight kids on fifteen dollars a week?"
Periodically he'd resign himself to moving, "But after the snow is off up there, I'm nuked here, and up north I'm going to freeze."
Some of us were prepared for what happened. One Sunday, photographer Matt Herron and I decided to visit the Austins' small church in the fields.
Eight years ago 70 people would attend but now, with the migration, only 20. As we drove we were surprised to see Walter Austin and David out on the road, flagging us down. Walter Austin looked grave, his face gray with tension. "They don't want you to go the church because they're afraid it'll get burned down. The deacons, they ask, do you please not go."
He explained that the day before, the plantation agent announced that Austin would have to move, telling him angrily, "Those white men kept coming and coming and coming to your place, and that's more than I can take. I know what they're doing. They're down here organizing a union. The whites. Them. So you better leave." Austin could take some time, the agent said, but he had to go. Austin's face was justified: To fall out of favor, angrily and catastrophically, with the boss man, especially for unauthorized demands from outsiders, implied peril to life and limb.

The nearest public phone was six miles away, and Austin called a married daughter in Springfield, Ill. She was alarmed. She urged her father to come in person before something happened, please, Daddy. But Austin's voice was calm as he spoke on the phone. "No, baby, I need a week to sell my freezer and my hog and take care of things."
We drove Walter and David Austin back to their home and went to see the plantation agent, a round-faced man in his 60s. He and his wife, the plantation bookkeeper, were civil though they were often angry. They recited our movements in the state for the last week; it is not difficult for plantation operators in Mississippi to keep track of suspicious strangers. They told us they knew we were stirring up "our people" and forming a union. Furthermore, we were breaking the rules of courtesy. "You can drive down that road," he said, "and you can maybe stop at a house once. But to keep coming and coming and coming and staying after dark—too much."

After about an hour we persuaded him we were not organizers, and we paraded in a friendly way. In a sense, this was unusual, but what the agent did was even more so. The next day he went to Walter Austin and apolo- gized for falsifying accusations and said he could stay. Austin says he thanked the agent, but he had decided to move, and so he told the agent that he was going through with it. "Boo Man, you was dissatisfied with Walter, so Walter's going to move."
We'd told him he didn't have to sneak off like all the others. And Walter Austin didn't. The next day a car, Sunday morning the Austin place looked like the center of a carnival. A total of 23 neighbors and friends were in and out of the house, up on the roof darning the motorized television antenna bought for $18 four years ago and now sold for $5, carrying out the freezer (bought for $40) and now sold for $30). There was genuine alarm and almost no sentimentality.
Walter Austin, quietly, calmly, and with humor, left no doubt about the charge. At 7 he had gone to the agent's house, returned a ladder, a set of wrenches, and bought back the agent's last fall so David could have shoes for school. Neither one said anything, but both knew Walter Austin was leaving that day. Austin quietly directed his son-in-law and his oldest son, who had driven down in the night from Springfield. Wandering through the yard was a 29-year-old brother, who worked on the same plantation, and to the end he said almost to himself, "I'm the only one left." When the time came, Walter and his brother looked at each other briefly, and Walter said.

"Good-bye, son."
Frances and her boyfriend talked constantly, arms linked. An old parlor chair, the one with the torn leather-like seat covering, was a table of decay and they gave it to Frances's boyfriend, who carried it out. Walter said, "You get to keep the chair. Robert, but you got to keep Free's lamp and the half-paid-for machine, he said, "I'm not looking for trouble. I'm just looking for a little peace and a little love."

And then he left, and when the car engines were started, Walter Austin never looked back.

As the car moved rapidly northward, one could almost feel the arguments for staying sinking out of sight and the ones for going completely out of the top. Before the need for food and money had dominated conversation. Now, deeper things, more repressed, came to the surface. I asked if he had any fear of facing the strange life in the city at his age.

"Well, I guess so. But it had to come. I had to come. Back in Mississippi I was forty-eight years old. But I was still like a child. I needed the white man for protection. If the color man had had that he could keep out of lots of trouble. He could get credit. He could do lots of things, lots of things. But he just had to have that protection. If you didn't have that protection all kinds of things could happen, all kinds of things, just like could happen to a child without a daddy."

Heh eyes were red and tired, but he talked on.

"You'd get up every morning, and you'd ask the boss man what to do, and every morning he'd tell you what to do. You'd just like you was a child. When you got your pay, he'd take out of it what he wanted for what you owed. He didn't ask you. Now I had a good boss man for Mississippi, and if I had something special now and then, I could ask him to let me have all my pay, and he'd let me have it. But usual he'd take out what he wanted. He handled most of your bills."

"The Black Immigrants" by Ben H. Bagdikian. Published in The Saturday Evening Post, July 15, 1967. MDAH Archives and Records Services.
“Now I figure in the North one man pays you, and then you get to take care of your bills yourself. I know a man can get into a mess of trouble handling his own bills, but I reckon that ought to be up to him, to learn and decide himself. But not on a Mississippi plantation. They figured I was a child."

He described the tensions and treacheries on a plantation where all are struggling for approval and survival, and helped explain the too-eager acquiescence that morning. "You always had to watch those other boys on the plantation and be careful who you trusted and who you didn’t."

You knew Walter Austin had not been caught up in the civil-rights movement because he still referred to Negroes as the white supremacists’ term "boys," and called all white men "boss man" or "captain."

"If the boss man was always giving the men jobs to a boy, and he and The Man always had their heads together, then you better be careful with that boy. He’s probably telling the boss man everything he knows about you. So on the plantation you learn to be careful what you say, what you do, and who you speak to. And if the boss man tells you, or you see everybody else, and you don’t want to be telling him, you go, you got to tell him you just don’t know nothing."

The cars were still in Mississippi, but in Walter Austin’s mind already "was North."

"Here you can be with who you want and ride with who you want."

The Sunday before, while we rode to the phone booth, we had to stop for gas. It was what is known in Mississippi as an "integrated car," and the white gas-station proprietor had a common reaction: He fixed a menacing, unblinking stare at Walter Austin and kept it on him as he deliberately and slowly wiped every window of the car. To a Negro this stare, whether in an integrated car or behind a voting table, is a serious threat.

As the landscape streamed by, it caught different eyes at different times. Walter Austin would turn whenever we passed a small farm on its own plot of land. When we began to pass large-used-car lots, a small smile leaked onto David’s solemn face. Frances watched the increasingly large neighborhoods of ranch houses with their lawns, the largest number of middle-class houses she had ever seen, and the first not associated with the plantation hierarchy. "I’d like a house like that," she said once, "with one of those checkerboard tiles on the floor." Did she think she’d ever live in one? She thought about it seriously and then said, "Yes, I think I will."

Walter Austin and I joked a little over his calling me "Captain," which I had asked him not to do. At the time, two weeks earlier, he had said, "I know, but it’s hard to stop. Up north you say ‘yassuh,’ and they look at you like you was crazy. But when you’re brought up from the time you can talk and your mammy makes you got back and say it every time you forgets to say ‘yassuh,’ then it’s hard to stop all of a sudden."

Periodically, he would lapse into "captain" or "boss man" when he spoke. But after we crossed the Mississippi River, he never did it again.

The cars went into the foggy night toward Springfield, Ill., with a homing instinct that affects almost every migrant. It was common during the foreign migrations to have whole villages—from Sicily, Russia, Poland, Germany, Ireland—be transplanted to some particular American city. The same thing now happens within the country. There are counties in West Virginia from which most departing people go to Cincinnati, others from which they go to Cleveland. In Chicago there are two blocks made up largely of Holmes County Mississippians. The landscape of the migrating poor is set down by a county already arranged and waiting, by the presence of close relatives and friends.

In his youth, Walter Austin cut wood with a friend in Holmes County. During World War II the friend got a job on the Illinois Central Railroad and took a room in Springfield. Later he bought a couple of rooming houses there and retired. From time to time, the railroad man would return to Holmes County. Once he came to attend a wedding of his cousin with Whittaker’s help. When the cousins were evicted from their plantation, they moved to Springfield into a flat owned by the railroad man. In 1956 Austin’s sister was told by her plantation owner that her family had to move, so the sister went to Springfield where she stayed with her cousin and got a job in Kennedy’s Laundry. Four years later Austin’s oldest daughter, Etouye, decided there was no future in Mississippi, so when her aunt came from Springfield for a funeral, the daughter took her oldest children and rode back to Springfield. She also got a job in Kennedy’s Laundry and found a flat, saved some money, and sent her bus ticket to her husband. They both saved some more money and sent tickets for their remaining small children and a full-fare ticket for the next oldest daughter, Mae Jessie, to accompany them. So Mae Jessie did this, taking her own daughter, an infant (no fare), and leaving her other children behind with her mother. She, too, got a job in Kennedy’s Laundry, found a flat, and sent down tickets for her children and one for her mother to accompany them and visit.

Last winter Mae Jessie drove down for a New Year’s visit, and the oldest Austin son, Walter Jr., decided to ride back with her. Walter Jr., unmarried, got a job sorting hides. A month later, Etouye, the other married daughter in Springfield, drove down for a visit with her parents. Walter Austin’s second oldest son, Jimmy Lee, who was married and had three children, was telling his parents he just didn’t see how he could get enough work to support his family in Mississippi when the sister’s car unexpectedly drew up in front. Jimmy Lee rushed to the window, saw who it was, and said, "Daddy, I’m gone." He drove back to Springfield and got a job washing dishes, staying with his sister. A week later he drove down with his brother-in-law and fetched his wife and children. His wife got a job in Kennedy’s Laundry.

Like an endless chain, whole tribes go link by link to some city where a base has been established. When the crisis came to Walter Austin, there was never any doubt where he would go and when he got there, there were suddenly a total of 36 Austins within a scant half mile.

It was a scene of joy and relief at 2 block of a Sunday morning when the two cars finally arrived at their destination, and the Austins of Merigold, Miss., became the Austins of Springfield, Ill., sharecroppers no longer city dwellers now. Standing wearily on the sidewalk, they looked up with awe at Jimmy Lee’s house, a neat, white clapboard with five spacious rooms and its own bath and toilet. Waiting inside were the older daughters who had come North earlier and helped sort the newcomers and send them to nearby homes to sleep the remaining hours of the night.

That day Walter Austin’s family made the rounds of the relatives’ homes. At Walter’s sister’s there were guitars, singing and fishing. The older women put on their wigs and urged Frances to try one. Bashfully, she put one on and imitated the modeling she had seen on television. Suddenly she was changed. One moment she was the shy country girl, the next a poised young woman. She lifted off the wig and said quietly, "I’m going to get one."

"The Black Immigrants" by Ben H. Bagdikian. Published in The Saturday Evening Post, July 15, 1967. MDAH Archives and Records Services.
THE BLACK IMMIGRANTS

younger ones are normally barefoot and half-bare-bodied so that the three older children can be properly dressed for school. Yet Alice Perkins and her husband have no doubt about the decision she made in the middle of a cotton field, two years ago.

That day in August, 1905, she had, as usual, got up at 5:30 in their three-room shack, washed her face in a pail in the kitchen and, without breakfast, gone out to get on the back of a truck. In the field a mile away she dropped a bag nine feet long, putting in cotton bolls, the ones a machine left behind. Early in the day, the plantation agent started yelling that the cotton she and the others had picked was full of burns and sticks. At noon she walked a half mile to a store and ate 10 Saltines, five pieces of baloney and a soda pop. Back in the field, The Man kept after them.

"You-all are pullin' this goddamned cotton. I'm paying you to pick it, and you're just pullin' the goddamned stuff!"

"You pull it, I'll pick it," Alice Perkins said. She got back home that night at 6 o'clock. She had picked 84 pounds and made $2.10 minus lunch, for 11 hours. She cooked turnip greens and a pound of salt pork for her five children and her husband, who came home dark from driving a tractor at $6 a day. The children went to bed, the oldest one, Beatrice, then 7, in a cot in their front room, the infant in the double bed and she and his husband, also in the front room. Her husband and two niggers played a game of cards, pit-a-pat, also in the front room.

Without telling Harry about it, she found two pieces of lined paper and a short pencil, and she wrote a letter to her aunt in Chicago. "I can't stand it no more," she wrote. "Please, Auntie, send me a ticket." She walked in the dark across the dirt road to a neighbor's house where she got an envelope and put the letter and a nickel in her rural mailbox. This was a Wednesday. Tuesday the tickets arrived. Then she told her husband she wanted to take their three youngest children and go. If she found no job in two weeks she would return. He listened quietly and said, "OK, baby."

So Alice Perkins joined the silent tide that goes by car, by bus, and still by that old reliable cable car the Cotton Negro, the Illinois Central Railroad.

On the platforms of the South they are there every day. The toothless old Negro woman in men's trousers, rubbers over slippers, a ragged coat, scarf over her head, a cardboard box tied with a tenacious root of a family gone earlier.

The neatly dressed woman in her 30's comforting her weeping teen-age daughter, "Don't cry, baby. Take care of Daddy and the kids and I'll be back when I find a place."

The young woman in her 20's, so like Alice Perkins with three wide-eyed preschool children, hugging older people on the platform and then, as the locomotive sounds its mournful southern cry, mounting the steps with her children, her eyes moist.

The old Negro porter watches the flat countryside stream monotonously, as if he has for 32 years on this run.

"It started in 1947. This train went through the delta, and there was nothing but black faces, for years and years and years. I used to wonder, 'Where are they coming from? How can there be anybody left? My God, they must be coming right out of the ground.' They get to stop sometimes.

"Well, couple of years ago it seemed to slack off. You begin to see some whites now. Used to be twenty-three Negroes for every white on this train. Now it's more like three-to-one.

"But there are still Negroes. At Durant, the station stop nearest the heart of the delta, more country people get on with boxes and old suitcases. As the train pulls out, it leaves others behind. Through the rain-splitter window you see the lonely Negro shack with three small children frozen in place, one boy hanging clothes on a line, his hand stopped in the act as he stirs, another boy with a water spigot in his hand, and at the pump a skinny-legged girl, her arm high on the motionless pump handle as the water shrivels to a trickle—all watching the speeding perambulator-brown cars with the big picture windows bearing dry, warm people holding passports.

The passport is a yellow ticket one-and-a-half inches long that reads, "Illinois Central R.R. Co. coach ticket, Durant, Miss., to Chicago, Ill. Good in coaches only, for one passage."...

It costs $2.65 for adults, $1.85 for young children, and for the people who are given a tenant with a typical family, if they earned average Negro wages, it took every cent they earned for six weeks. To collect that much money, when food is scarce, and to decide to migrate is a decision that has torn millions of families in this generation.

Alice Perkins took that other mode of the Underground Railroad—the bus. On a Wednesday before the Christmas holidays, Harry Perkins got a letter from Alice in Chicago. He had to quit school in the fifth grade and can't read (Alice went through ninth grade). He paid the neighbor 30 cents to drive him the two miles to his mother-in-

lawn's house where she read the letter. Tickets for him and the two older children were inside. The next day the children turned in their school books.

On Saturday morning Harry went to work as usual. That night he got his week's pay, $36 minus $10 taken out toward his debts. By now it was dark. He walked home, pulled out a footlocker he had quietly bought in Clarksdale for $7.50 two weeks ago, sat in two beds, one quilt, two sheets, three pairs of pants, two shirts and three hats for the children. He paid the neighbor 50 cents again to drive him and the children to his mother-in-law's, where his son drove them to the 9:30 night bus from Clarksdale.

The children had never been to Clarksdale (population: 31,000), and when they saw it Harry Jr. said, "Daddy, is this Chicago?"

On the bus was a man named Wilie, brother of a friend, returning after a visit. Wilie lived in Chicago and worked in a barrel factory where he thought there was an opening. Three days later Harry Perkins was stacking steel rings for $1.55 an hour, and three days after that he was running an automatic welder. He now makes $2.00 an hour with six or seven hours' overtime for about $100 a week.

Harry Perkins is a boyish, handsome, open-faced man who can't read but knows letters and remembers street signs and bus routes. At Christmas time he used the holiday tape to make letters on the wall over the double bed where he and his wife and their new infant sleep: Alice.

Both of them insist on an unreleased list of advantages Chicago has over their old life: Now they eat together at the same table because they have enough dinner plates; they have milk and fresh fruits and meats they never ate before; instead of a cold-water tub and washboard she gets the week's laundry delivered for 8$, the school doctor and dentist examine their children regularly; instead of paying a neighbor $1 to take them shopping she can walk to a local market or take the rapid transit for 30 cents downtown.

“"The Black Immigrants” by Ben H. Bagdikian.” Published in The Saturday Evening Post, July 15, 1967. MDAH Archives and Records Services.
town, there the children often stayed out of school for lack of clothes but never hunger. Down there Christmas is a matter of the Christmas tree at the town hall and other decorations in the business district. 

"Click." Harry Perkins said as he sat in his tiny blue-and-pink kitchen. "Men's trousers." For the first time in my life I own an innspiring mattress, three of them, a gas oven, a dinette, a TV, a stereo set. They treat me like a grown man. Down there the police killed colored men, I know of the last couple of years they were there.

"Nice Perkins shook her head slowly. "There's nothing I miss down there."

"That goes for me." Tid that mean they would be happy to continue just as they are? Alice Perkins looked surprised and said, "No, of course not." When they go to school is there freedom. When the three Perkins school-children go, they run like rabbits released from cages. The fear is real, for outside there is the second prison: the neighborhood.

The range of movement of most slum dwellers is measured in yards and doors, often with the harshest discipline to quell their restlessness. Even when they go to school is there freedom. When the three Perkins school-children go, they run like rabbits released from cages.

In Chicago the ghetto is divided in two territories, the West Side, with more than 500,000 Negroes, and the South Side, with more than 600,000. Each is a vast black island surrounded by whites. But now the spaces between the islands have been abandoned by whites who moved to the suburbs. So the Negroes are 9 square miles in black territory, the South Side, 30 square miles. On the South Side there remain a few white ethnic neighborhoods, resentful and belligerent, and some middle- and even upper-income blocks. But the mass is black and poor, the former rows of white homes partitioned off and bringing only as much as $200 per cent of their old rents. In 1950 it was possible in any given ghetto to walk five blocks to a home occupied by whites.

Inside the ghetto the schools are wretched, the unemployment rate three times the outside rate, the municipal services minimal, the landscape de-moralizing. The uneducated parents get stalled in their climb up the work ladder, trapped in their ghetto. They produce new generations of the defeated.

So Alice Perkins, her large brown eyes longing, says, "I want a house of my own. Out in the suburbs. Like Maywood. A friend of mine drove me out there once and, oh, I want to move to a house in Maywood."

Maywood is about nine miles out on the expressway that goes by the Perkines' flat, an "industrial suburb" in the metropolitan sprawl. It has its own character, a pleasant place of 27,000 working-class people with small one-family houses with small lawns and backyards, with a few houses in the yard or on the street in the sidewalks. There are 5,000 Negroes in Maywood, and they average $1,500 a year more than Negroes in the central city.

What are the odds of the Perkines, or any other Negroes, making it out to Maywood? About 1-in-11. In 1960 Chicago had 815,000 Negroes in its central city, the ghetto, and only 9,000 in the suburbs. In 1950 the ratio was about one.

III

Elijah is a child of migrants, a child of the ghetto. He is Negro, thin, 126 pounds, five-foot-four, narrow-shouldered with black hair, and he walks slightly stooped. If you didn't look closely you wouldn't pay attention to him in a group of six. But he is now 18, and has shot a few people. He has been involved in more burglaries and robberies than is wise to recall, and has had two personal friends murdered and others badly wounded. He has recently emerged from jail, where he was sent for shooting another boy in the stomach.

Elijah isn't his real name, though he insisted that his real name be used.

"Isten, I want people to understand, I want people to believe that these things happen, really, not just to a few oddballs but every kid I knew, every kid I grew up with on the South Side of Chicago. I don't mean they all went to jail. Two kids I knew well got killed. But some never went to jail, even. But this is what they grew up with. I want to help my people, and I want other people to know what's going on."

But it would be unfair to him, to his family and to his pregnant girlfriend to use real names. They all struggling to repair their lives.

His parents came from Mississippi in 1932, but his mother came briefer to Chicago in 1949 for Elijah to be born. So since the age of three he has been in the ghetto. His training ground has been the tenement and the massive public-housing project.

The tenements are typified by one building in the ghetto, a grimy red-brick three-story place with three carved granite archways that tell you this was once a respectable neighborhood. Today there are 18 families to provide private trash collections, but few of them ever bother; if an intense campaign by tenants and the settlement houses puts pressure on them, some will bribe city trash crews to collect the accumulation. The tenement hallways are uninhabitable, the walls covered with the coarse graining of slum life, halfway between the chaos and the pleasant obsessions ("Thomas mather is a hoe"). In one corridor there

"The Black Immigrants" by Ben H. Bagdikian. Published in The Saturday Evening Post, July 15, 1967. MDAH Archives and Records Services.
Black Immigrants: Life in the New Lands

Directions: Read story III in “The Black Immigrants” by Ben H. Bagdikian and answer the following questions.

1. Who is the main character in the story? _______________________________________________________

2. Were there other characters included in the story? If so who were they? __________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

3. Did the author describe the characters by physical appearance, thoughts and feelings, or interaction (the way they act toward others)? Provide 2-3 examples.
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

4. Are the characters believable? Why or why not? ______________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

5. How was the setting created? Consider geography, weather, time of day, social conditions, etc. _________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
6. How does the setting play an important role in the story? _________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

7. What do you feel was the most important event to occur within the story? Explain. _________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

8. Is the story a believable? Why or why not? ____________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

9. How would you describe the main conflict? Was it internal (within the character), external (caused by
surroundings/environment) or both? Give an example of your reasoning. ____________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

10. After reading this story, do you have a clearer image of what life was like for African Americans and their
offspring who had traveled north during the Great Migration? Why or why not? ____________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

NAME _________________________________________________________ DATE _____________________
**Black Exodus Table**

**Directions:** Use the below table to create line graphs of the data.

**Black Population Changes in Selected Southern and Northern State, 1900 -1930**

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<th>Region</th>
<th>1900-1910</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cotton South</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
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<td>-74,500</td>
<td>-204,300</td>
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<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
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<td>-74,700</td>
<td>-260,000</td>
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<td><strong>Industrial North</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>35,800</td>
<td>63,100</td>
<td>172,800</td>
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<td>38,700</td>
<td>86,100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>23,500</td>
<td>69,800</td>
<td>119,300</td>
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MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY LESSON PLANS
TEACHER EVALUATION
COMPLETE BOTH SIDES AND PLEASE MAIL OR FAX TO THE ADDRESS ON THE NEXT PAGE. THANK YOU!

TEACHER NAME ____________________________________________

SCHOOL NAME & ADDRESS ____________________________________________

EMAIL (OPTIONAL) ____________________________________________

TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS___________ GRADE LEVEL _________________________________

LESSON TITLE The Great Migration and Its Effects on the African American Population of Mississippi

1. In your opinion, did this unit elicit better than average student response; if so, how?

2. Which segments of the unit exceeded your students’ attention span?

3. Will this unit be of assistance to you in developing future classroom activities; if so, how?

4. How did this unit add to your earlier teaching on the same subject?

5. Would this teaching unit be handier to use as a:
   ___ multi-day unit   ___ multi-week unit   ___ other

6. Were the activities and lessons appropriate for your students? How?
Please rate the following lesson materials and activities by circling the appropriate number.  
4=excellent, 3=good, 2=average, 1=inadequate

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<tr>
<td>Directions and Notes</td>
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<td>Overall Unit</td>
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We would appreciate any additional comments on this teaching unit and any suggestions for improvement. Comments may be entered in the space below.