

IMMIGRATION AND URBANIZATION

Issues Connector: Migration and Urbanization

Throughout history, Americans have always been a highly mobile people. The ancestors of American Indian peoples may have migrated to North America across the Bering Strait. The early settlers traveled across oceans and began to build cities in the new land that would become the United States. Within the country, people often move to find work or a better climate, and today migration continues to the so-called Sunbelt, states such as Florida, Texas, Arizona, and California.

Homesteaders and Wagon Trains

After the secession of southern states, large areas of western public land were made available to private citizens. Many Americans traveled by wagon train, finding safety and comfort in numbers. The Homestead Act was signed into law by President Lincoln. It remained in effect for more than 100 years, and during that time, about 2 million people claimed public lands to make their homes. Under the act, 270 million acres were claimed and settled. To claim a 160-acre parcel of land, a homesteader had to be head of a household and at least 21 years old. The homesteader then had to live on the land, build a home, establish a farm, and make improvements on the land within five years. When the five-year period ended, the homesteader could file the necessary paperwork and receive a kind of deed, called a patent, for ownership of the land. Today, the Homestead National Monument honors well-known figures in American history who were homesteaders themselves or are the descendants of homesteaders. One person so honored is Laura Ingalls Wilder, a homesteader and the author of *Little House on the Prairie*. Rose Wilder Lane, who is describing a trip from South Dakota to the Ozark Mountains of Missouri, is her daughter.

The Great Migration

The failure of crops, severe financial struggles, and the shortcomings of Reconstruction led to a migration of African Americans from the South to cities in the North. In the spring of 1916, the Pennsylvania Railroad Company brought workers north to work on the rail lines. This event was the beginning of the Great Migration. Within two years, 400,000 African Americans made this move. World War I also provided an opportunity for African Americans to find work in the North. The United States military required supplies and ammunition, and those industries needed workers. African American workers coming north could accept less pay than their white counterparts and still bring home better paychecks than those they could have earned in the South. Henry Ford proved himself a pioneer in more than one way by hiring African American workers for his assembly line. In 1910, fewer than 600 African American workers were employed in the automobile industry; yet by 1929, the number had risen to 25,000, and half of those worked for Ford.

IMMIGRATION AND URBANIZATION**Issues Connector: Migration and Urbanization****Urban Migration**

When economic forces in the United States shifted and farming became less profitable, millions of Americans left their farms to head for the cities. Growing manufacturing centers offered work for large numbers of people. Many hoped that urban life would lead to a stronger financial future for their families. But it was another side of urbanization—poverty, overcrowding, alienation, and crime—which interested Aldous Huxley, a British author who moved to California in the 1930s. Huxley is best known for his novel *Brave New World*, which examines extreme urbanization and out-of-control technologies in a nightmare future.

Suburban Flight

Following World War II, many people moved from the cities to the suburbs. Returning soldiers were eligible for government-sponsored loans, and developers began building inexpensive modern housing in places like Levittown, New York. The influx of African Americans moving north for employment was one of several factors that caused housing within northern cities become sparse. People with the necessary financial stability moved to the suburbs, hoping to avoid the increasing crime and racial tensions of the inner city. Many simply believed that the suburbs offered better housing, schools, and infrastructure. As affluent people left the cities, poorer populations were left behind, city property tax revenues fell, and inner-city neighborhoods suffered.

Population Shift and Brain Drain

Since the 1970s, the U.S. population has shifted south and west, with political and economic consequences, both on those areas that attract people and the areas they leave behind. By 1990, Los Angeles, San Diego, Phoenix, Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio were some of the largest cities in the United States. Aerospace and defense industries, military bases, oil fields and heavy tourism all provide a growing job market in the South and the West. In states and regions which once relied on heavy industry to provide employment, many college graduates and young professionals are leaving in search of better job opportunities and richer cultural landscapes, creating a so-called "brain-drain."

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"We joined long wagon trains moving south; we met hundreds of wagons going north; the roads east and west were crawling lines of families traveling under canvas, looking for work, for another foothold somewhere on the land. . . ."

—*Rose Wilder Lane, describing a journey in 1894*

"Migrants came north in thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands—from the docks of Norfolk, Savannah, Jacksonville, Tampa, Mobile, New Orleans, and Galveston; from the cotton fields of Mississippi, and the coal mines and steel-mills of Alabama and Tennessee; from workshops and wash-tubs and brickyards and kitchens they came, until the number, by conservative estimate, went well over the million and a half mark."

—*African American poet and writer James Weldon Johnson, 1930*

"All urbanization, pushed beyond a certain point, automatically becomes suburbanization. . . . Every great city is just a collection of suburbs. Its inhabitants . . . do not live in their city; they merely inhabit it."

—*Aldous Huxley, 1934*

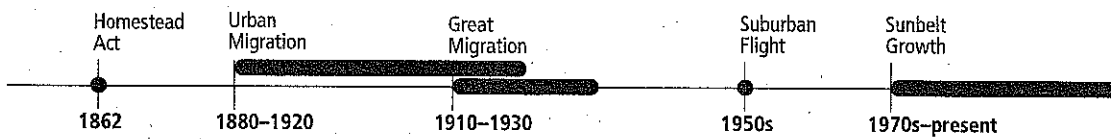
Migration and Urbanization

"The majority of young people who get an education in my congressional district, Black and White, leave because of the lack of opportunity. That outward migration and the continued brain drain [means] my district suffers, even in the new millennium."

—*Rep. Bennie G. Thompson of Mississippi, 2000*

"While serious external dangers remain, the graver threats today are internal: haphazard urbanization, racial discrimination, disfiguring of the environment, unprecedented interdependence, the dislocation of human identity and motivation created by an affluent society—all resulting in a rising tide of individual and group violence."

—*National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, 1960*



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Directions: Read the quotes on migration and urbanization. Then answer the questions below.

1. What event is James Weldon Johnson describing?

2. In the report of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, how is urbanization portrayed?

3. **Making Inferences** According to Bennie Thompson, why do most young people leave his district? Why does Thompson refer to the migration from his district as a "brain drain?"

4. **Making Inferences** What is Rose Wilder Lane describing? Which event on the timeline might her experience reflect?

5. **Making Connections** In what way are the last three quotes related?
