

Where the fruit grows, we'll start over:
Rethinking the Great Migration's Limitless Impact

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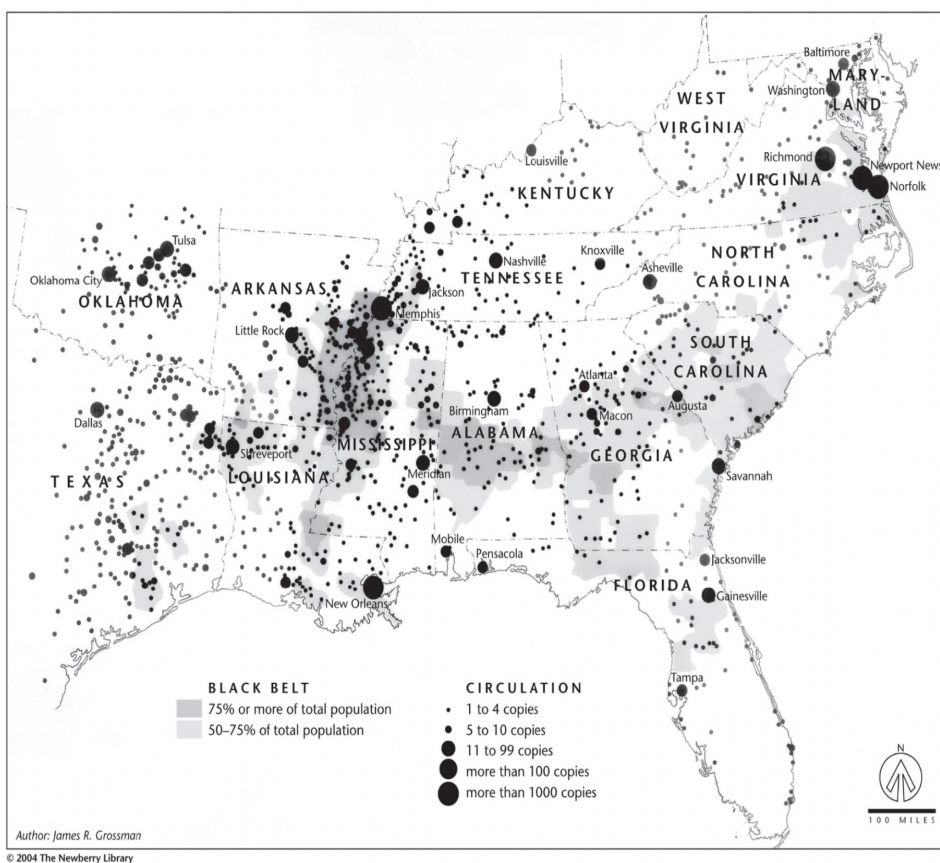
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Primary Sources:

“Southern Distribution of the Chicago Defender”

The Chicago Defender is a Chicago based Black-American run newspaper founded in 1905. The Newspaper was founded by lawyer and publisher, Robert S. Abbott. Abbot's goal in creating this newspaper was to provide Black Americans with an accessible news source that could inform them on issues pertaining to Black Americans as well as inspire avenues for change. During the early 20th Century, when Black Americans began leaving the South and heading to the North, the Chicago Defender played a supporting role in this migration by promoting Northern job opportunities and advising Black Southerners on making it North. For many Southern Black-Americans, the Chicago Defender introduced them to the prospects of the North and the increasing community of Black Southerners migrating to Chicago. The map below depicts the distribution of the Chicago Defender to the South by 1919.

Southern Distribution of the Chicago Defender



Newberry Library. “Southern Distribution of the Chicago Defender.” 1919.

<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/3714.ht>

The image below was taken in the late 20th Century. In this image a woman who works for the Chicago Defender is showing a copy of the newspaper to students at a school in Chicago on Career Day. The newspaper reads “Blacks to move up”. At this point in time, Chicago had become home to a large community of Southern Black migrants. The Newspaper was a large reason many Southern Black Americans found themselves in the Northern city. In addition to drawing Black Americans north, once in Chicago, the newspaper provided Southern migrants with a sense of place and community, as well as insight into Black American life, politics and culture in Chicago and how this changed as the migration continued.



Source: *The Abbott Sengstacke Family Papers/Robert Abbott Sengstacke via Getty Images*
[Remembering the Chicago Defender, Print Edition \(1905 - 2019\).](#)

“Food Had Doubled in Prices Because of the War”

Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000) was a Black-American artist widely recognized for his depiction of the Great Migration in his 60 panel series titled “The Migration Series”. Lawrence’s parents migrated from the South to Jersey, where Jacob himself was born. When he was only 23 years old he created his “Migration series”. The series consists of 60 panels portraying the migration of Black Southerners to the North. The painting below is the 11th panel and is titled “Food had doubled in prices because of the war”. In the image one can see a woman slicing pork shoulder. Pork shoulder was commonly used in Southern cuisine as a flavor additive. However, in this image Lawrence shows this affordable and flavorful meat being used as the main entree rather than simply for its flavor. Why do you think this was? What does this say about life in the North? What else can you notice in this painting?



Source: 1940–41, Casein tempera on hardboard, 12 x 18 in. The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC, Acquired 1942

11 Food had doubled in price because of the war.

In response to increased Black Southern migration, in 1941, the federal government along with the Detroit Housing Commission decided to fund and construct a 200 unit Housing Project to house the hundreds of Black Southerners who worked in defense during World War II. In response, white tenants nearby protested this housing project and demanded the area to remain white only. Black workers demanded their right to move into Sojourner Truth. However, white violence continued, arrests skyrocketed and the first Black family that moved into the housing project had to be escorted by the Michigan National Guard.

This photo below on the left was taken by Arthur Siegel in 1942 in Detroit, Michigan.

The flier on the right was created by white residents asking for help from individuals outside the neighborhood to keep Black Americans from moving into the Sojourner Truth Housing Project.



source://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8d13572

//hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8d13572

Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

[New Guide – Great Migration: Finding Pictures](#)

The Great Migration is said to have begun in 1915. However, in February of 1880, over 900 Black American families from Mississippi migrated to St. Louis. Many times these families found “conductors” who helped make travel arrangements for them. However, these conductors often insisted on being paid beforehand and then would not show up at time of departure. These families would be left stranded at train stations and docks.



Source: [Refugees on Levee, 1897](#). Carroll's Art Gallery. Photomural from gelatin-silver print. [Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress](#) (105).

Robert Leroy Johnson was born in 1911 in Hazlehurst, Mississippi. From a young age, Johnson had a love and innate talent for music and songwriting. During his life, he traveled and performed but did not receive much recognition for his blues music and songwriting until after his death. During his musical career he traveled often and did not have a single city in which he called home. Below are lyrics from his song titled "Sweet Home Chicago", he repeats the line "back to the land of California to my sweet home Chicago". For years, many writers and musicians found this line to be strange and more than anything geographically inaccurate. However, today many individuals note that this geographical inaccuracy was more than likely intentional. Why would cities outside of the South be interchangeable in Johnson's songwriting? What does this say about the South?

Oh, baby, don't you want to go?
 Oh, baby, don't you want to go?
 Back to the land of California
 To my sweet home Chicago

Oh, baby, don't you want to go?
 Oh, baby, don't you want to go?
 Back to the land of California
 To my sweet home Chicago

Now one and one is two
 Two and two is four
 I'm heavy loaded, baby
 I'm booked, I gotta go

Crying baby
 Honey, don't you want to go?
 Back to the land of California
 To my sweet home Chicago

And two and two is four
 Four and two is six
 You gonna keep monkeyin' 'round here friend, boy
 You're gonna get you business all in a trick

Crying baby
 Honey, don't you want to go?
 Back to the land of California
 To my sweet home, Chicago

Now six and two is eight
 Eight and two is ten

Friend-boy she trick you one time
She sure gonna do it again
But don't cry, hey hey!
Baby, don't you want to go?
Back to the land of California
To my sweet home Chicago

I'm going to California
From there to Des Moines Iowa
Somebody will tell me that you
Need my help someday

Crying, baby
Baby, don't you want to go?
Back to the land of California
To my sweet home Chicago

Source:

Johnson, Robert. "Sweet Home Chicago." Lyrics.com. Accessed May 19, 2023.
<https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/76231/Robert+Johnson/Sweet+Home+Chicago>.

The following excerpt are the words of an anonymous Black American woman from Alabama in 1902. She discusses the options of leaving the South versus staying. Take note of where these conversations occurred. What were they contemplating? What does she mean by the “security which other people feel?” Furthermore, what does this date tell us about the start of the Great Migration ?

*In our homes, in our churches,
wherever two or three gathered,
there is a discussion of what is best to do.
Must we remain in the South
or go elsewhere? Where can we go
to feel that security which other people feel ?
Is it best to go in great numbers or only in several families?
These and many other things are discussed over and over*

-Black American woman in Alabama, 1902

Source: “The Negro Problem,” *Independent* 54:2221.

The following quote was taken by an anonymous Black-American man who never left the South. He spoke of the conditions he heard of from people who did travel North.

Many Black migrants were met with similar or at times worse conditions of those they fled. Because of restrictive covenants and redlining, Black Americans were confined to specific neighborhoods, often pushed into poorly constructed buildings and denied basic rights. They were often paid less than their white counterparts, denied access into institutions and given little opportunities for economic advancement.

*It was a hoax if you ask me
They're packed tight
into the buildings,
and can't do anything,
not even dream of going North,
the way I do
when it gets rough*

-Black-American man who never left Alabama, quoted in
The New York Times in 1967.

Emmet J. Scott was a journalist, newspaper editor, educator and author among other occupations. During his career he collected letters from Black American southerners who dreamed of migrating North. In the letter below, a seventeen year old girl is pleading for help to find her way north. She found out about northern opportunities through the Chicago Defender which her father collected. The Chicago Defender received hundreds of letters from young girls like the one below. They wanted more for themselves but also for their parents who they say work too hard for too little reward. What do you notice about her tone and urgency?

ALEXANDRIA, LA., June 6, 1917.

Dear Sirs: I am writeing 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 I now feel like I aught to go to work. And I would like very very well for you all to please forward me to a good job. but there isnt a thing here for me to do, the wages here is from a dollar and a half a week. What could I earn Noth- ing. 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 wouldnt 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 havent any money to come onplease 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 dont know why. I am tired of down hear in this / I am afraid to say. Father seem to care and then again dont seem to but Mother and I am tired 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.

Source: [More Letters of Negro Migrants of 1916-1918](#)

Emmet J. Scott, "Additional Letters of Negro Migrants, 1916-1918," *Journal of Negro History* 4, no. 4 (October 1919): 413.

Richard Wright (1908-1960) was a Black American writer and poet known for his works that speak to Black American struggles and experiences. He was born in Mississippi in the midst of Jim Crow. Wright's family, like countless Black Southerners, decided to move to Chicago in the 1920s. Moving out of the South afforded Wright with new opportunities and avenues to explore his love for writing. His works often speak to the experiences of Black Americans who migrated and even those who chose to stay. He became influential to the intellectual, artistic and musical movement that rose in the 1920s and 1930s called the Harlem Renaissance.

In 1945 he published his memoir titled "Black Boy". Through his narrative, Wright shines light on experiences that millions of Black Americans could relate to at this time. He writes about his early childhood in the segregated South, his experience migrating North and the hope as well as pain he endured in building a life in Chicago.

Below are three poems from Wright from his memoir Black Boy that speak to some of these themes. The three poems should be read in the order that they appear. In the first poem, Wright is seemingly writing either before or right as he began the migration North. The second poem, similarly speaks to his reasons for leaving the South and the hope he had of life in the North. The last poem was written once he arrived in the North and his feelings once in Chicago. What These poems speak to the experiences of Black migrants who were often still constrained by Northern racism. These individuals dreamt of freedom, abandoned the South and often were only offered a mere glimpse of the opportunities they dreamt of.

What do the words of Wright tell us about the experience of Black migrants and life in the North? Was it how it appeared in newspapers and advertisements?

"I was not leaving the south to forget the south, but so that some day I might understand it"

— Richard Wright, Black Boy

"I was leaving the South

to fling myself into the unknown . . .

I was taking a part of the South

to transplant in alien soil,

to see if it could grow differently,

if it could drink of new and cool rains,

bend in strange winds,

respond to the warmth of other suns

and, perhaps, to bloom"

- Richard Wright, Black Boy

“I was seized by doubt. Should I have come here? But going back was impossible.

I had fled a known terror, and perhaps I could cope with this unknown terror that lay ahead.”

– Richard Wright, *Black Boy*

“Huey Newton Symbolised the Rising Black Anger of a Generation”

Huey Newton (1942-1989) was a Black American revolutionary activist. Newton was born in Monroe, Louisiana to parents who were sharecroppers. In 1943, Newton's family migrated all the way West to Oakland, California. In 1966 he co-founded, with Bobby Seale, the Black Panther Party, one of the most influential and powerful Black power organizations in history. The Black Panthers were leaders in the Black power movement that followed the Civil Rights movement. The Black Power Movement was related to but fundamentally distinct from the Civil Rights movement. Black Americans became increasingly frustrated by white violence that killed their leaders such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, as well as their family members and friends. The Civil Rights movement was largely concentrated in the South, however as the Great Migration continued, and more and more Black Americans moved to Northern and Western cities they brought with them their politics and methods of organizing. This new generation of Black Americans were disillusioned by the Civil Rights movement's emphasis on non-violence. With this new movement new strategies were employed to respond to an relentless force of anti-Blackness that existed across America. Newton was a leader of this movement. Below is a newspaper from 1989, after the Great Migration had ended. The heading reads “Huey Newton Symbolised the Rising Black Anger of a Generation”. How did the migration of Hueys parents change the course of history as we know it today? What would have happened if they stayed in Monroe, Louisiana? Furthermore, given that they were escaping violence in the South and the Newspaper shows how Newton was shot in Oakland, California, what does this say about the violence that persisted in the North and West?

Huey Newton Symbolized the Rising Black Anger of a Generation

By DENNIS HEVESTI
 The most vivid image of him a poster — the Black Panther defense minister pointed on a one-way street, a rifle in one hand, a rifle in the other — it would be easy to see Huey Newton living and dying by the gun.

A fuller picture is more complex. Huey Newton, the son of a Louisiana sharecropper who had also been a convict, was in his late 20s a Los Angeles kid with an education. And as hard as his street violence had been, he too had come his own way.

Streetwise to Black Street
 Literate when he graduated from high school, Dr. Newton sought literacy in a state of war with the streets. He studied, then wrote, after a decade as one of the nation's most charged Black students of Black anger, he earned a Ph.D. degree in social philosophy from the University of California at Santa Barbara. He studied the study of regression in America.

But somehow Dr. Newton never escaped the streets. And after years in which he had been a drug addict and a convict, after many encounters with the law, he was shot to death early yesterday at the age of 47 on a street in Oakland, Calif.

In a telephone interview from Philadelphia yesterday, Bobby Seale, who in 1966 helped Dr. Newton found the Black Panther Party, said: "I'm rather shocked at him dying this way. It's a profound piece of history and I regret it. He said I should have loved to be old militant senior citizens. We've never advanced violence to inflict upon us." Dr. Newton had said a few years ago in an interview that he would like to be a grandfather.

'It's a profound piece of history,' said ex-Panther Bobby Seale.

for ourselves and for black people." At the time, that stance, the raised fists and the guns were more than enough to create an establishment that still stalks from Vietnam to the present.

Dr. Newton was a member of the Communist Party of the United States of America and the Black Panther Party. He was a member of the Black Panther Party of the United States of America.

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Mr. Seale, and also was introduced to the Black Muslims. "Malcolm X was that I really identified with," Dr. Newton said. "He had had and not been purged. I probably would have joined the Black Muslims."

Dr. Newton continued, "As it is," Dr. Newton continued, "I was a member of the Black Panther Party."

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Huey Percy Newton, the former Black Panther defense minister, in 1967. He was shot to death yesterday on a street in Oakland, Calif.

Huey Newton Shot to Death in City Where He Started Black Panthers

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 investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

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Charles Garry, who was Dr. Newton's lawyer for many years and who defended him in the case of the slain Oakland officer, hailed Dr. Newton as the founder of "the renaissance of the black liberation movement."

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Dr. Newton in a photograph taken last March.

At Merritt College Dr. Newton met

with broken windows.