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Migrating Away from Jim Crow: Using the C3 Framework to Teach the Great Migration

Jeremiah Clabough

The University of Alabama at Birmingham, jclabou2@uab.edu

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Americans have always been on the move. There are many reasons for this movement. For example, many Puritans fled Europe to the American colonies due to religious persecution. One consistent theme for many migrations throughout U.S. history has been opportunity. Frederick Jackson Turner (2014) explained that opportunity for self-improvement inspired many Americans to take part in the Westward Expansion throughout the 19th century. Students need to examine how political, economic, geographic, and historical factors work in concert with each other to help explain human migration (Lintner, 2013). One ideal historical example for this analysis of human movement is the Great Migration. Middle school social studies teachers can draw on economic, civic, geographical, and historical indicators from the *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework* by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) to research how racial discrimination was a catalyst that helped lead to the Great Migration (NCSS, 2013). Below are four middle school indicators from the C3 Framework that can be used to discuss the causes for the Great Migration that will drive the series of activities discussed in this article.

History Indicator 2.6-8: Classify series of historical events and developments as examples of change and/or continuity.

Economic Indicator 1.6-8: Explain how economic decisions affect the well-being of individuals, businesses, and society.

Geography Indicator 4.6-8: Explain how cultural patterns and economic decisions influence environments and the daily lives of people in both nearby and distant places.

Civic Indicator 10.6-8: Explain the relevance of personal interests and perspectives, civic virtues, and democratic principles when people address issues and problems in government and civil society.

In this article, I discuss how to teach about the causes for the Great Migration using the Inquiry Arc from the C3 Framework. First, a brief overview of the Great Migration is given. Then, a series of activities is provided with primary and secondary sources to explore the causes for the Great Migration. Finally, a writing activity is given that allows students to summarize the

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reasons that millions of African Americans took part in the Great Migration. The steps and resources to implement the series of activities are provided.

Brief Overview of the Great Migration

The Great Migration was an exodus of over six million African Americans from the rural South to different parts of the United States. A large portion of these migrants settled in the industrial North or Midwest (Davis, 1991). The technological advancements in the latter part of the 19th century and early part of the 20th century created the need for more industrial workers in Northern and Midwestern factories, especially in Chicago and New York (Cooper, 1995).

The impetus for the three major waves of movement during the Great Migration was the Jim Crow segregation laws created after the U.S. Civil War (Lemann, 1991). Jim Crow segregation laws prevented African Americans from using and sharing the same restaurants, schools, stores, and other public facilities as Southern whites. Additionally, threats, violence, and poll taxes were tactics used to keep the majority of African Americans disenfranchised throughout the South (Caro, 2002; Ezra, 2013; Woodward, 1951). The main goal of these tactics and laws was to keep African Americans from making cultural, political, and economic gains and preserve the status quo in Southern society. Many African Americans were willing to risk everything by relocating to another part of the country for the chance to actualize the American dream (Wilkerson, 2010).

In the next sections, a series of activities is given to explore the reasons that millions of African Americans took part in the Great Migration. These activities utilize the four dimensions of the Inquiry Arc in the C3 Framework. The steps and resources needed for the series of activities are provided.

Framing the Question

“Developing questions and planning inquiries” with students (Dimension 1 of the Inquiry Arc) provide motivation and focus for student research while reading primary and secondary sources. There are many interconnected issues at the beginning of the 20th century for students to explore about the causes of the Great Migration. These issues include sharecropping, Jim Crow segregation laws, and the economic opportunities through industrialism in the North, which I focus on in my series of activities. The analysis prompts for each source examined serve as supporting questions to explore the larger compelling question of how racial discrimination that African Americans faced helped lead to the Great Migration. One compelling question to drive a unit about the Great Migration might be “How can racial discrimination impact all aspects of African Americans’ lives and lead them to take civic action to address injustices?” This question allows students to research how Jim Crow segregation laws pierced every aspect of African Americans’ daily lives in the South. These discriminatory laws served as push factors for millions of African Americans to leave the South. Through this compelling question, students are able by reading primary and secondary sources to empathize with historical figures’ perspectives, beliefs, and reasons for taking civic action (Endacott & Brooks, 2013).

Researching the Reasons for the Great Migration

The teacher may start by having students discuss reasons that their families have moved to a different city or state or to another part of a city. This helps students apply previous life experiences to the content material that will be explored. To set up an examination for the causes of the Great Migration, the social studies teacher needs to have students research connected topics. This allows students to “Apply Disciplinary Concepts and Tools” thus meeting Dimension 2 of the Inquiry Arc. Students may begin by exploring the impact that Jim Crow segregation laws had on African Americans. There were different segregation laws throughout

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the South, but the following link contains some examples from Tennessee that were reflective of similar laws found in other Southern states, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/jim-crow-laws-tennessee-1866-1955/>. Students in pairs read these example segregation laws from Tennessee and answer the following analysis prompts.

1. What are goals of these laws? Use evidence from the laws to support your arguments.
2. How are these laws a continuation of the discrimination that African Americans faced prior to the U.S. Civil War? Use evidence from the laws to support your arguments.

The examination of these segregation laws and answering the two analysis prompts allow students to analyze how Southern whites tried to use the levers of government on the local and state level to preserve the political, economic, and cultural status quo in Southern society that marginalized African Americans. This activity enables students to grasp the connections among historical events, in this case with racial discriminatory practices that African Americans faced in the South prior to and after the U.S. Civil War (History Indicator 2.6-8) (Metro, 2017). Students apply disciplinary thinking skills of an historian by examining the racial discrimination that African Americans faced over different historical eras (Nokes, 2013).

With this background knowledge of Jim Crow segregation laws, students are ready to focus on economic policies that hurt African Americans in Southern society after the U.S. Civil War. African Americans in the rural South, for the most part, worked as sharecroppers on the former slave owners' lands (Clabough & Wooten, 2019). Sharecroppers worked the land and received a portion of the profits from the harvest determined by the landowner. The teacher provides students with a summary about the sharecropping system from the following PBS link <http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/themes/sharecropping/>. Students in pairs read this brief summary about sharecropping and answer the following economic analysis prompt.

1. How did sharecropping lead to the economic exploitation of African Americans? Use evidence from the PBS website to support your arguments.

As pairs share their answers, the teacher emphasizes that students use evidence from the PBS website to support their arguments. This activity allows students to see how sharecropping prevents African Americans from making economic gains in Southern society through the landowner charging exorbitant rates through local stores for supplies and the use of his equipment and tools to work the harvest (Economic Indicator 1.6-8) (Blackmon, 2008). Students apply disciplinary thinking skills of an economist to explore how the manipulation of African Americans' wages as sharecroppers prevented them from making economic gains (Clabough & Wooten, 2019).

Sharecropping did not allow African Americans to improve their overall quality of life. In contrast, the industrialized North and Midwest served as lures for economic advancement. The latter part of the 19th century and early 20th century saw great technological advancements in manufacturing, which created the need for a large labor force in the emerging industrialized North and Midwest (Cooper, 1995). After examining how sharecropping in the South served as a push factor, students are ready to research how industrialization acted as a pull factor that influenced millions of African Americans to migrate to other parts of the United States. Students may examine the two following photographs to get at the idea of the industrial North and Midwest as pull factors for African Americans and answer the two following analysis prompts. The first photograph (Figure 1) shows an image with the vastness of the Great Union Stock Yard in Chicago that could leave a viewer feeling that many workers would be needed to manage this company. The second photograph (Figure 2) depicts African Americans moving freely about in Harlem New York, which is the opposite amount of freedom in public spaces African Americans had in the South due to Jim Crow segregation laws.

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Figure 1. "In the Heart of the Great Union Stock Yards," Chicago, USA, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA. Retrieved from <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print>



Figure 2. New York, New York. Street scene in Harlem from the Library of Congress. Retrieved from <https://www.loc.gov/resource/fsa.8d19892/>

1. Why would the image of the Great Union Stock Yard in Chicago serve as an economic pull factor for African Americans? Use evidence from Figure 1 to support your arguments.
2. How does the image in Harlem act as a pull factor for African Americans to relocate in New York? Use evidence from Figure 2 to support your arguments.

The examination and discussion of these two photographs help students to see how public spaces in the North and Midwest were viewed by many African Americans as destinations to start a new life. Many saw the potential of industrialized jobs as a way to make economic gains and the absence of Jim Crow segregation laws as creating the potential for more personal freedoms (Geography Indicator 4.6-8). Photographs like these two were circulated in African American newspapers to help motivate and cause migration from the rural South to the industrial North and

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Midwest. Students apply disciplinary thinking skills of a geographer by examining how concepts of space in the industrialized North and Midwest served as pull factors for African Americans during the Great Migration (Kenna & Russell, 2019).

The examination of Jim Crow segregation laws that violated African Americans' rights along with economic inequalities of sharecropping and the economic possibilities of industrialization in other parts of the United States helped lead to the Great Migration. The teacher may play the following short two videos to build students' background knowledge about the Great Migration: <https://www.pbs.org/video/african-americans-many-rivers-cross-great-migration/> and <https://www.pbs.org/video/american-experience-great-migration-mississippi-chicago/>. These two short videos summarize reasons that African Americans left the South during the Great Migration. After watching these two short videos, students read and discuss an example letter from an African American that took part in the Great Migration at the following link, <https://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/260GMigration.html>. This letter contains many reasons that African Americans felt compelled to move. Students in pairs answer the two following analysis prompts after reading this sample letter. The teacher may also direct students to the website for Hanover Historical Texts Project website containing "Letters of Negro Migrants of 1916-1918" at <https://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/260GMigration.html> for additional letters from African Americans that took part in the Great Migration.

1. What reasons does the writer give for wanting to leave the South? Use evidence from the sample letter to support your arguments.
2. How can African Americans moving during the Great Migration be seen as taking civic action? Use evidence from the sample letter to support your arguments.

The examination of the example letter and discussion of the analysis prompts help students grasp how many African Americans took civic action by moving from the South to address the

inequalities of Jim Crow segregation laws. Many African Americans saw this move as an opportunity to gain new personal freedoms only dreamed of and to set up the potential to improve their children's futures (Civic Indicator 10.6-8). Students realize that people's decisions are impacted by a variety of economic, geographical, political, and historical factors (Engle & Ochoa, 1988).

This series of activities allows students to analyze and discuss factors that led millions of African Americans to take part in the Great Migration. The analysis prompts with the sources examined serve as supporting questions to help students realize factors that caused millions of African Americans to migrate from the South to other parts of the United States to address racial discrimination. The teacher's focus during these class discussions should be on getting students to support their arguments with evidence, which meets the expectations of Dimension 3 of the Inquiry Arc, "evaluating sources and using evidence." By capturing and using evidence to answer the analysis prompts, students formulate and articulate arguments for the reasons why millions of African Americans took part in the Great Migration (Wineburg, Martin, & Monte-Sano, 2013). The ability to make evidence-based arguments allows students to accurately articulate an historical figure's perspective while also capturing the context of an historical era in which those views originated (Monte-Sano, 2012).

Articulating Civic Action through a Goodbye Letter

Invite students to use all of the evidence from the class discussions and analysis prompts to write a goodbye letter from the perspective of an African American moving from the South during the Great Migration. The goodbye letter should be addressed to the South and include economic, geographical, political, and historical factors that caused you to move. The length of this goodbye letter can be adjusted based on the students' writing abilities but might be about a

page in length. To help students organize their thoughts, the teacher may have them complete the following graphic organizer before writing the goodbye letter. Students should fill in each box of the graphic organizer based on their responses to the analysis prompts with the sources examined in this series of activities.

Graphic Organizer for the Goodbye Letter

Historical Factor/s

--

Geographical Factor/s

--

Economic Factor/s

--

Political Factors

--

This graphic organizer allows students to organize their thoughts prior to this writing activity and articulate economic, historical, geographical, and political factors that influenced many African Americans' reasons for moving, which they can utilize in their goodbye letter.

Through this writing activity, students practice the role of a citizen by articulating how their actions are designed to address social injustices that African Americans faced in the early 20th century. They consider the values, beliefs, hopes, and dreams of an African American that

dealt with Jim Crow segregation laws on a daily basis (Clabough & Wooten, 2019; Endacott & Brooks, 2013). Perspective-writing activities like the goodbye letter enable students to engage in higher levels of thinking by capturing a person's perspective and values as well as examining factors that go into influencing his or her decisions (Lo, 2018). After all, most people's decisions are influenced by a host of factors that lead them to take certain actions (Engle & Ochoa, 1988). The goodbye letter addresses Dimension 4 of the Inquiry Arc, "communicating conclusions and taking informed action" by capturing the reasons that many African Americans saw their migration from the South as the best way to address racial prejudices by leaving the region. After students revise their goodbye letter, they can share it with the class.

This sets the teacher up to discuss how migration can be a powerful tool used by citizens to improve their quality of life and remove themselves from negative factors like racial discrimination. After migrating to other parts of the United States, African Americans still faced more subtle forms of racial discrimination. The teacher may focus on the forms of de facto segregation like segregated neighborhoods that African Americans faced after moving from the South to other parts of the United States in a follow-up unit. Dr. Ossian Sweet's case may be one example of de facto segregation that the social studies teacher may use (Boyle, 2004; Vine, 2004) to discuss racial discrimination African Americans faced in other parts of the United States.

Conclusion

The sources and activities in the article position middle school students to examine the economic, political, historical, and geographical factors that influenced millions of African Americans' decisions to move from the South during the Great Migration. The decisions by millions to relocate during the Great Migration forever altered the history for large pockets of the

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African American community. Some of the challenges with racial discrimination faced in the African American community during the 20th century are still relevant in the 21st century. For example, food deserts in the U.S., where a large portion of the population do not have close access to affordable and healthy foods, are especially felt in urban African American communities across the United States (Brooks, 2014). Food deserts demonstrate that lack of equality of opportunities for the African American community in the 20th century are still unfortunately a reality in the 21st century. It is important for students to examine how civic action taken by previous generations was designed to address issues of racial discrimination in the United States. Students can then explore in follow-up units their roles as activists to address lingering and unresolved issues from the past. These contemporary issues still impacting the African American community are considered by some as controversial but cannot be ignored.

If these issues are ignored and not resolved, they will persist and be issues for future generations of Americans. The teacher needs to be mindful of the sensitivity that these issues bring for some students because of the relevance that current social justice issues have on their daily lives. Classroom strategies need to be utilized to analyze challenges to local communities and discuss potential solutions to address these issues (Hess, 2018; Journell, 2016; King, Vickery, & Caffrey, 2018). Our social studies classrooms are some of the few safe spaces for students to analyze controversial topics that impact their communities (Kawashima-Ginsberg & Junco, 2018). Class discussions of current events connected to racial injustices help to equip students with the knowledge and skills as future democratic citizens to address these issues.

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