

The Great Migration

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The Great Migration (Image retrieved from Scholastic.com)

The Great Migration was a massive movement of African Americans from the rural southern areas of the United States to the northern urban areas. According to the United States Census Bureau, more than 6 million African Americans migrated between 1910 and 1970. This boom is related to the impacts of World War I, as the factories, especially in Chicago, needed workers to keep active. Also, the desire to escape prejudice and racism, and the curiosity of new economic opportunities, was a key factor for this movement. Phillip Bonner, an urban history professor, explained this event as, “It was the outbreak of the First World War, cutting off European immigration flow, that opened up the labor market in the northern cities to southern blacks.”

Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun* attempts to explain the feelings of an ordinary African American male in the 1940s. This character, portrayed as Walter, experienced depression and despair. To understand the source of this dissatisfaction, one must relate to the Great Migration, its promised dreams, and the reasons why many African Americans sought to migrate north. The immense desire to

be free from racial injustice and poverty was a significant factor that prompted Black people to abandon the south. However, these dreams were quickly shattered because African Americans noticed that northern whites still maintained unequal segregation. Another example of a character that participated in this phenomenon was Lena, Walter's mother. She holds out hope for that dream of freedom and unification of her family, but the play shows just how complicated it was to achieve all that.

Sources

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