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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2007 Volume III: Maps and Mapmaking

Mapping the Great Migration 1916-1930: African American Movement from the South to the North

Guide for Curriculum Unit 07.03.09, published September 2007
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Why study the Great Migration of 1916-1930? Philadelphia is a city that is more than fifty-percent African American. Many of the people that live in the city today have origins in other parts of the country and the world. Historically, as a city located in a border state during slavery, Philadelphia has a long history of being a home for free African Americans. Throughout history, people have migrated to and emigrated from places. Migration is nothing new but the time period of 1916-1930 brought about a movement of African Americans from the South that has not been duplicated since. As a mandated part of the Philadelphia High School curriculum, African American history is a vital part of the education that my students receive. Students today do not seem to inquire about the social, economic and political aspects of society. This curriculum unit will give them an historical perspective about one group of people in American society. I hope that students learn to be inquisitive about their own past and well as that of others. In doing so, I want my students to gain the analysis and inquiry skills needed to be successful in today's educational climate and society as a whole. In this curriculum unit I will utilize the geographic themes of location, place, human- environment interactions, movement and regions. I will also turn to the social studies themes of culture; time, continuity and change; people, places and environments; individual development and identity; individuals, groups and institutions; power, governance and authority; production, distribution and consumption; science, technology and society; and global interactions. I will use these themes to examine and explore migration. My purpose in using the themes of geography is to help students understand the absolute and relative position of a place on Earth's surface, how physical and human characteristics define and distinguish a place, how humans modify and adapt to natural settings, how people, ideas and material move between and among locations, and how an area displays unity in terms of physical and human characteristics. These social studies themes will provide the framework for the standards that will be addressed in this unit. Having studied maps and map making from an artistic, historical and practical perspective, I endeavor to have students gain not only a historical perspective of "The Great Migration" and also a practical understanding of maps and map making. I plan to do this through giving students the opportunity to study about geography, which is sorely lacking in the high school curriculum, but also to drive the study of geography by analyzing and examining a historical event that is relevant to our coursework, our local community and many of their cultures.

The unit will span the course of a semester as students study various topics in an African American History course designed for high school students. The grade level is primarily eleventh. The unit will consist of six lessons of history and geography.

(Developed for African American History, grade 11; recommended for American History, African American

History, and American Literature, grades 9-12)

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