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Goin' North: Tales of the Great Migration - Newspaper in Education Special Supplement

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GOIN' NORTH:

Tales of The Great Migration

PHILADELPHIA DAILY NEWS

Newspaper in Education Special Supplement; Monday, Feb. 4, 1985

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Join Us On the Journey

By reading and listening, you'll learn why black Americans left the South — and what they found in Philadelphia.

Going' North: Tales of the Great Migration is a series of five radio programs in which the men and women who made the trip north tell of their own experiences: of their lives in the South, their reasons for leaving, the trip north, their expectations and initial impressions of the city.

They speak of problems faced in adjusting to urban life, of their work, housing, social lives, disappointments and accomplishments, and their current feelings about the decision to leave their homes for "The City of Brotherly Love."

The five programs interweave recollections of people who made the trip north with rare recordings from the period — gospel music, skits by black comedians, speeches by such men as Booker T. Washington and James Weldon Johnson — all evoking the period and bringing their stories to life.

As you listen and read along, you will learn about black life in the city of Philadelphia during the 1920s, a time when segregation was the rule in the city's restaurants, hotels, theaters, public schools and workplaces. When over 86 percent of all black women in the work force were employed as domestics (and you got off Thursday afternoons and every other Sunday) and over 90 percent of all black men in industry were laborers. When Philadelphia sported not one, but four black banks, and West Philadelphia housed the "Cream of the Colored Race" in a land of "sun porches, potted palms and second mortgages."

The five programs that comprise **Goin' North** will air on WHYY 91-FM on consecutive Mondays at 4:25 p.m. beginning Feb. 11. Each program will be repeated the following Sunday at 6 p.m.

Daily News File Photo

Booker T. Washington: "Cast down your buckets"

Life in The South

The legacy of slavery did not die with Emancipation. Around the turn of the century, Southern blacks were "free" in name only. Jim Crow and "Separate but Equal" kept blacks in a state of servitude and fear.

Poppa raised everything we ate, even to cows, hogs, chickens, and he, ah, raised corn that we could make cornmeal out of ... bread, and everything else. We didn't have to go to the store to buy too many ... He raised potatoes two kinds, greens, beans, cabbage, everything. And also strawberries. We had that. And when I was a kid we used to ... what they call blueberries. They used to grow wild, and we used to go through the woods and pick them.

In the summertime you had to be careful. Otherwise a snake would drop down on your head [laughter]. And ah, my life with my parents, it wasn't too hard. You see, my father was a good sharecropper. The white man would say, "Come and work for me and I'll give you this and I'll give you that." But my father always kept hogs and kept a cow for milk. And they had horses to truck the farm. (Minnie Whitney)

Life in the rural South revolved around the seasons. It was a subsistence existence for most. The little money realized from the cash crop, usually cotton or tobacco in the Eastern states, was supplemented by family members hiring out either to the white planter on whose land they worked or to other local landowners. In slack times the men cut wood, hired out to the local sawmills or joined the floating labor gangs that traveled across the South. Mothers worked in the "big house" for a dollar a week. During planting and harvesting seasons, the whole family worked in the fields. Up at the break of dawn and not finished till the sun went down.

Sunday was the best day of the week, Everybody would put on their best clothes (store boughts) and walk or ride the few miles to church where you'd spend the whole day. There were prayer groups and Sunday school in the morning, followed by two, sometimes three services a day. For many, Sundays provided the only opportunity to catch up on the latest news, swap stories and pass the time. The young boys and girls attended BYPU, eyed each other across the aisles and perhaps would ask for permission to walk each other home. Most people liked life on the farm and preferred to stay pretty much to themselves.

Yeah, they treated you all right in Virginia. Treated you all right. They tell you, "I'm on this side of the fence, and you on that side of the fence. You stay on this side of the fence, and we stay on our side." That's the way we worked it and we done all right. (James Plunkett)

Economic self-help and separation of the races encoded in a doctrine of "Separate but Equal" was the order of the day, and the great Negro leader, Booker T. Washington, the founder of Tuskegee, its offical spokesman.

Mr. President and director of the board of directors and citizens:

One-third of the population of the South is of the Negro race. No enterprise seeking the material, civil or moral welfare of this section can disregard this element of our population and reach the highest success ...

For those of my race who depend upon bettering their conditions in a foreign land or who underestimate the importance of preserving friendly relations with the Southern white man who is their next-door neighbor, I would say, "Cast down your buckets where you are." Cast it down making friends in every manly way of the people of all races by whom you are surrounded.

For those of the white race who look for the incoming of those of foreign birth and habits to bring prosperity to the South, were I per-

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For a More Active Experience

1. **Journal-Writing:** For the entire radio series, have the students keep a "Responding Journal" while reading along with the radio program. "Journal Entry" suggestions are offered for each of the five programs. See the "In the Classroom" section for each program. The purpose of this writing is to have the students express their feelings about the recollections of the different "veterans" of the Great Migration. Teachers should respond to each of the student entries. This activity emphasizes the learning of content through a free writing exercise.

2. **Data-Gathering:**

a. During the series, have the students collect relevant information about the history of Southern black migration to Philadelphia in the 1920s from the oral histories and outside research, entering the data onto a five-column table with the following headings:

i) Information Source
ii) Reasons for Leaving
iii) Expectations
iv) First Impressions
v) Work

b. As a summary to the series, have the students *discuss* the information they collected from listening to and reading the oral histories and additional information they collected from outside sources. Have the students draw some generalizations about the Southern blacks' *migration experience.* Then have them write a couple of paragraphs on how these generalizations may apply to the migration experience of other groups: European immigrants in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Mexican and Latin American migrants in the 20th century, and Asian immigrants who have come in the last decade.

3. **Historical Pen Pals:** Before the series begins, have the students read the short biographical sketches of the different "veterans" of the Great Migration that appear at the end of this supplement. Have each student select a "veteran" who most interests them. Tell the students that at the end of the radio series, they will write a letter to the "veteran" of their choice. Suggest to the students that, as they listen to and read through the radio series, they should develop a list of comments and questions to include in their letters.

When a final version of the letter is complete, have the students send their letters to the following address:

__________ (Name of the "Veteran")
"Tales of the Great Migration Project"
Atwater Kent Museum
15 South 7th Street
Philadelphia, Pa. 19106

South

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mitted, I would repeat what I have said to my own race, "Cast down your buckets where you are." Cast it down among the 8 millions of Negroes whose habits you know, whose fidelity and love you accepted in days when you have proven treacherous, meant the ruin of your fireside. Cast down your bucket among these people who have, without strife and labor wars, tilled your fields, cleared your forests, builded your railroads and cities, brought forth treasures from the bowels of the earth, helped make possible this magnificent representation of the progress of the South. (Booker T. Washington, Atlanta Exposition Address of 1896. Recorded in 1908. Columbia, private pressing)

Though Dr. Washington might desire for the races, realizing their mutual self-interest and interdependence, to live in harmony and accord, during the early decades of the 20th century the white South was in no mood to improve relations between the races. Separate was just fine. But equal? Surrounding the peaceful world of life on the farm hung a world of segregation and economic exploitation. The South was in the grip of a rising tide of white racism. White supremacy and Jim Crow were in ascendancy, as the basic human rights and economic independence of the Southern black were systematically undermined and destroyed.

A debt-based crop system in the form of sharecropping and tenant farming bound the rural black as firmly to the soil as slavery ever had. In these arrangements, the white landowner would rent a section of his land either for a percentage of the crop or hard cash. The way the system was supposed to work, the crop was sold at market. Then the white landowner tallied up the debt, took his share, and then paid the black farmer the remainder. But in such a system based on trust, fear and a legacy of slavery, it was all too often the black farmer never got his fair share of the crop. White farmers and storekeepers regularly cheated the often illiterate or semi-literate black sharecroppers with little fear of reprisal.

You see, my father, his father and mother both was slaves, and my mother's father and mother both was slaves. And you know, was a rule they say that whatever the white man would tell them, they believed him. And if he says that you didn't earn but five dollars this year, they believed him. Some of them was still living under the bondage of slavery. (Minnie Whitney)

And what might happen should the sharecropper get wise?

There was a man who had been working sharecrop for a gentleman, and naturally he couldn't read or either write. And every year he would, regardless of how much cotton he made, he would bring him out just so he had a little bit left. So he got kind of wise, and what he did at harvest time, he made six bales of cotton that year. And he took four to town on the wagon, and his white landlord that he was sharecropping with met him. And there was cotton buyers on the street. When the four bales of cotton were sold they went to the bank, and naturally the man that you sharecrop with, he pays for half and you pay for half. So when everything was over he told him, "You know, you did marvelous this year. You cleared $350."

So the colored fellow didn't say anything at all. But in a couple of weeks he took two more bales of cotton to town. [The landlord found out.] So he called him up and told him he wanted to meet him in town. So when he met him he said, "I had an idea that you been cheating me, but I didn't have no way of knowing."

He said, "Now you say I don't owe you anything."

He says, "No, you paid off and you cleared $350."

He said, "Now, when we sell that I got two more bales of cotton."

So he says, "Now why didn't you tell me that at first? Now I got to go over all these figures and you might clear just a little something."

So, anyway, from that they started an argument, you know, and this white man, well, he jumped on him and hitched the horses to him like he was a wagon and drove him and drug him through the street of Abbeville, S.C., and took him down in the park and hung him. Now that's just as true as I'm looking at you. But you wasn't allowed to say anything about it. (Hughsey Childs)

Photo Courtesy of Charles Hardy

Black farmers in a cotton field near Dallas, Texas, around 1910

The common and widespread cheating of tenants and sharecroppers was matched in local government by a system of convict leasing instituted by many Southern states, which made money on hiring out their chain gangs. A black man could be picked up for practically anything. Vagrancy became a catch-all for everything from lounging on street corners to walking down the street in broad daylight without a job. In 1903 Mississippi imposed a law making chicken stealing a crime punishable by five years' imprisonment and/or a fine of $200.

Soon after marrying, Hughsey Childs moved with his bride from the family farm into Abbeville, S.C., and began to look for work.

You couldn't walk the streets unless you had a job. I had to stay in the house until I got a job, because if I walked in the street, like in the middle of the day, and if the office seen me, and I couldn't prove that I had a job, they would lock me up. So what she [his wife] would have to do, you would have to pack a lunch kettle, you know, and carry it like you was goin' to work; pretend like you had a job. (Hughsey Childs)

Here limited protection against the state could be afforded by the white landlord who wanted to protect his "niggers."

Those boys in the city caught hell. Them farmers done all right. They workin' on the farm, and if you got in trouble down there on the farm, the white fella would get you out. You got a couple of those colored fellows working on your farm. Well, them fellows get in trouble, you get them out. You go over to the courthouse, you say, "I want him. Best nigger I got. I want him. I need him on my farm." Well, they let him go. Well, you go and say, "Good nigger. And you don't get in no more trouble. You go back." And he come back home. 'Cause all them colored fellas, they worked with them white fellas on the farm. And they take care of their colored fellas. (James Plunkett)

Traps were set on every side, both to forcibly bond the black farmer to the white landowners, to keep blacks "in their place," and to squeeze every last drop of money out of black labor.

Mr. Robinson grew up in rural Georgia:

I was born Dec. 11, 18 and 80. And therefore the Lord has brought me safe this far and no bad . . . no marks against me. Nothin' like that. Everything I did . . . I tried to do and if I saw it, you done somethin', and if I knowed it was wrong, I'd run and get away from you 'cause them white folks was strict.

I had done something one time and that was this. I didn't go in the orchard, but I received three peaches. Well, the man said, "The receiver is just as bad as the rogue." See, that's why . . . I didn't go in the orchard, and I listened right in the man's face when he said if I'se just older — I wasn't but 8 years old — that resented it just a little bigger. "I'd put him in jail, put him on the chain gang." I listened right at him. And I'se scared of that because I hear'd 'em workin on it. I never was on it. But I hear'd 'em workin, hear'd singin on that and workin' on the roads.

My father had to pay $21 for three peaches. He had to pay it because I received the peaches there. The white fellow whose plantation we were on paid it. (William Robinson, age 102)

In the 1880s, $21 could be well over a year's wages. The white landlord paid the bill — or said he did — and the debt of the Robinson family mounted, binding them to the soil.

I was very careful in what I did because I didn't want my parents to get hurt. I swallowed many things when I was goin' back and forth

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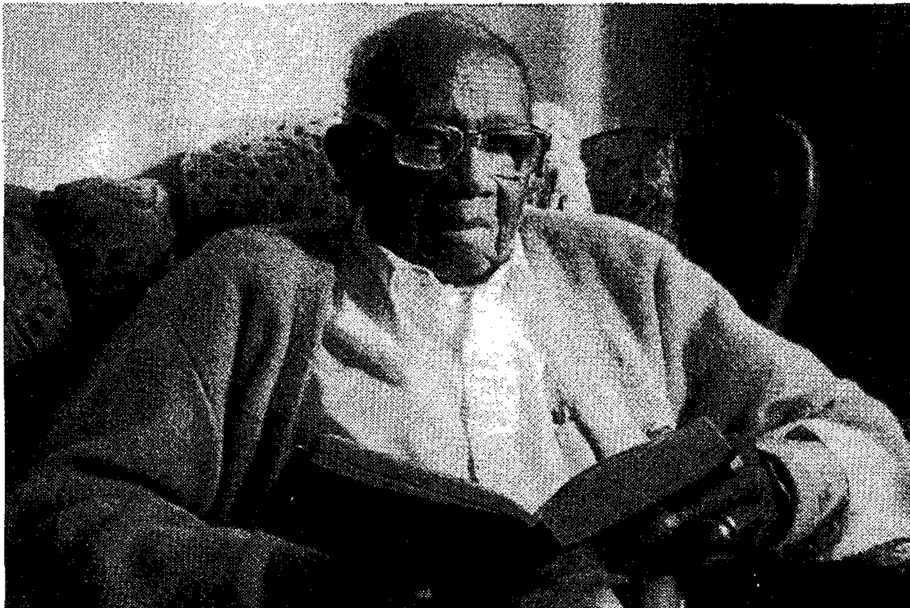

Special to the Daily News by Donnie Roberts

William Robinson: the chain gang was a constant threat

South

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there on account that I didn't want my parents to get hurt. Because they would hurt them. I'm tellin' you them Southern white people where I came from, they was rough. And if you meet them on the road and you had to go by and it was a small ... If you was there first, you better wait there until they go by. It was just, just something that now I begin to understand, and how I felt about it. And I always said, if I know'd then what I know now, I guess I wouldn't be here, because you know you speak out, and you get hurt. (Minnie Whitney)

And what could you do about it? The courts, of course, offered little redress; indeed, they were an integral part of the system to "keep the Negro in his place."

Dr. Marion Ballard, former pastor of Tindley Temple, grew up on an island off the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

They could accuse you of anything. And the system that we had there in the county, your word would not be accepted if a white person said differently.

I remember a man, a young man he was, who worked on the boat with a white man. He was the captain and owned the boat. Well, somehow this young black fellow had his arm broken on the boat. And he, thinking to get compensation, went to court. And the white man said he didn't work on the boat. And that was it. Regardless of what others who had seen him work ... it didn't make any difference. White captain said he didn't work on it, so he didn't work on it. That was the kind of system you had to live with. You had absolutely no chance of winning anything if you were contesting anything that a white person said. You had no chance. (Marion Ballard)

First case, Sadie Anderson. Yes sir, dat's me. Thirty days in jail. That's me. Lock her up, Dan. ("Virginian Judge Southern Court Scene" recording)

Today the one practice of the turn-of-the-century South that horrifies us perhaps more than any other is lynching, and back then, lynching was synonymous with the rape of a white woman by a black man.

During this period the great fear white Southerners had of black assaults on their women reached the point of a psychosis. No actual assault need take place. All that was necessary was for a black man to be seen "where he shouldn't a been" for a strong rope and a tall tree to seal his fate.

And a double standard, of course, prevailed. White men could and did rape, seduce and force black women, married and single, into having sexual relations. But God protect the poor black man who dared object.

But lynchings, though numbering in the hundreds, were only the tip of the iceberg, for they were the symbolic events used to teach a generation of black children about the intricacies of racial relations and the price of crossing the line.

You didn't have to do much lynching in Virginia because the old people taught their kids from kid on up. 'Cause I know when I was a kid we lived on a white people's place and I was a kid, no more than 6, 7 years old. We all played together. White kids, colored kids. We all played together.

Special to the Daily News by Donnie Roberts

Marion Ballard: "They could accuse you of anything"

My mother used to teach me that. "You playing with those white kids now, they have you hangin' from a tree when you get 18 years old."

"Yeah," I said, "For what?"

"For botherin' those kids."

I said, "When I get big I won't play. I'll be workin'."

"Well," she says, "You know, you been playing with them, you might get fresh and say somethin' out of the way to them. And there it is."

See, she schooled me and I knowed what's up. I never got fresh with them. I worked out in the field with them white gals and I never got fresh with them or nothin', cause I know'd what was comin' up. I'd be a darned fool to get killed and get lynched over nothin' that ain't worth it. Ain't worth it at all. (James Plunkett)

Economic exploitation, dehumanization, violence, Jim Crow, black codes: They were all weapons in the Southern racial arsenal. They all played their role. But few were more effective than ignorance.

See, our schooling was only four months. And out of those four months, I guess I went maybe half of them. I guess maybe I went for two months because I had to stay home and work, you see. You didn't have to go to school like you do here. Oh, no, no, no. I had to stay home and work. So I went to school whenever she [Miss Brown] let me go. I remember children would pass by and say, "Willa, are you going to school?" I said, "No I'm not going to school." And I would run around the house and cry. I better not let her see me cry because I would get a beating. And I would run around the house and cry. I wanted to go to school. (Willa Allen)

No state had a compulsory education law, and it was estimated that under 40 percent of all school-aged children attended regularly. The schools they did have were plagued by run-down buildings, old and insufficient materials and books, and underqualified teachers — irksome problems for a community that, as a whole, placed greater emphasis on education than their white counterparts.

In South Carolina the school year was only half as long as for white children, only 78 days a year. And even that time wasn't assured, as children could be pulled from school to work on the farms either of their parents or local whites. James Plunkett grew up in rural Virginia:

Yeah, I was 8 years old, 9 years old when I started farming. I didn't get much [schooling]. Down South they didn't allow you to send your kids to school. Not in them days. 'Cause if you were a Southerner and a colored fella workin' on your farm and he got a boy around 10, 12 years old, you tell his dad, hey you need that boy to help, you take him out of school. You need him. And they take you out. Now if he got his own farm, and those colored people had their own farms, you know, they send their children to a good school; send them to college. But when you're on somebody else's farm they won't let you do it. (James Plunkett)

At the time when we were denied access to high school, whites were having it. They had high school. And they didn't have to go anywhere for it. It was right there for them. And every time I think about the doctrine of "separate but equal," I ask myself, "How silly can you get?" How could people put this on a race of people and call it equal? But that was what they were doing. (Marion Ballard)

In the face of the South's increasingly intractable system of racism, most people kept their noses to the grindstone, stayed on their own side of the fence and went to church on Sundays. For the older generation, many of them illiterate, impoverished and born during slavery, all that could be done was to bear up as best one could under the prevailing conditions.

But there was another change taking place in the South, in which children, who had some modicum of education, however poor it might be, and who were one more generation removed from slavery, were more rebellious about staying in their place.

Marie Mathis grew up outside of Greenwood, S.C.:

My father's name was William Mathis. He was a farmer. He worked on a farm. Worked on a big farm, just him and his family. Each family had a different farm, different people they would work for. And they would make cotton, and we would have to go out in the field and pick cotton. And they would take it to the gin and gin it up, and they would make bales out of it. And they would leave it there. They couldn't take it home. And the white people would take the cotton and sell the stuff and wouldn't give them nothing but what they could eat.

And they used to come out there to the country and ride through the fields and it would be hot. They had their little old kids with black patent leather shoes on and white socks and things, and we would be out there in the mud and stuff all between your toes and everything. And they would look at you like they thought you was something they was scared of ... I can't tell you how I felt. I really can't tell you how I felt. I used to tell my mother in the field, "If I ever get grown they ain't going to go riding over me like this."

And she used to tell me, "You better go to work before I give you a whuppin'." I had no idea I would get out from under them that far. (Marie Mathis)

Not all blacks sat quietly by. There were outspoken journalists, ministers, farmers, educators and others, many of whom ended up fleeing north, often only a step or two in front of a lynch mob. And a number of them came to Philadelphia. There was A.L. Manly, editor of the only Negro daily newspaper in the United States, who fled Wilmington, N.C., during the race riot of 1898. And Max Barber, editor of The Voice of the Negro, forced to flee Atlanta in the wake of its race riot in 1906. And Rev. Hughes, who for the impertinence of telling the women in his congregation to stop sleeping with their white employers, was run out of Birmingham, Ala., by a lynch mob in 1907.

W.E.B. DuBois would bemoan the flight of these black professionals north, believing that their loss deprived the South of much of its colored leadership. But for those who did speak out, there often was no choice. The South was not ready to accommodate critics of its system, especially if they were from the ranks of the oppressed, and it dealt with them in swift and often deadly fashion.

People came north for a wide variety of reasons: better wages and steady work, better education, flight from persecution and from the farm. They came driven by curiosity and wanderlust, or just following others of their family. But that is a story for next time, as we continue **Going North: Tales of the Great Migration.**

In the Classroom

1. Journal Entry: Have the students choose any one of the comments made by the "veterans" of the Great Migration that they have read and/or listened to which left a special impression on them. Have the students write their feelings about the experiences of the "veterans," or have them write about some of the questions that the comments may have raised for them.

2. Define the following words used in the program:

cash crop	subsistence
monolith	peonage
exploitation	segregation
endemic	racism
demographic	illiterate

3. For Research and Discussion:

a. Have the students read Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Compromise" speech of 1895. Then have them discuss the type of advice that Dr. Washington offered to Southern blacks, and whether or not his speech would be considered radical or conservative in the 1980s. Ask the students to discuss how Dr. Washington's ideas are different and/or similar to the ideas of black leaders today.

b. Before the students read or listen to this program, have them discuss what they think life was like for blacks in the South at the turn of the century. List the students' comments on the blackboard.

Then have the students read Minnie Whitney's and James Plunkett's recollections. Asks the students for their reactions to such peaceful descriptions of these veterans' childhood experiences in the South. Then have the students read William Robinson's and Hughsey Childes' recollections and ask them to hypothesize as to why there is a discrepancy. Ask them if only one version is correct and the other incorrect, and have them write one or two explanations for this difference.

Then have the students read the entire section on "Life in the South." Ask them: Which view of Southern black life do they think was more representative?

THE GREAT MIGRATION

Goin' North

When World War I slowed immigration from Europe, Northern industries looked elsewhere for a source of cheap labor. Southern blacks soon began coming north by the trainload.

Photo Courtesy of Schomberg Collection, New York Public Library

A Southern family, newly arrived in the city, around 1925

I was born in 1893 and went to the country school till I was around 12. And then I was working on the farm. We worked as sharecroppers, and that meant that we didn't make much money. My father had given me a field of tobacco, a couple of acres, and when it was sold and I got my share in 1910 I had $10, no, $12 for a whole year's work.

And I told my father, we were out in the cotton field picking cotton, that day I left home. And I told my father that he had promised me a trip to Philadelphia. And I asked him when I could go when we was talkin' about how little money I had made. And he told me I could go anytime. So I remember I had finished that row of cotton. Left that bag of cotton sittin' at the end of the row. And as far as I know, it's sitting there still. (David Amey)

When the First World War broke out, the United States was receiving immigrants from Europe at the rate of well over a million a year. From this massive influx of Europeans, American industry had gathered a large proportion of its work force.

But immigration dropped off precipitously after the outbreak of hostilities, falling from 1,200,000 in 1914 to only 326,000 the next year, and down to 111,000 in 1918. At the same time, American industries were working at full capacity producing armaments and war material for the belligerents abroad, and its labor needs were growing apace.

Philadelphia's industries were participating heavily in the war boom. The Midvale Steel Works in Nicetown, Baldwin Locomotive, Cramp's Shipyard, Penncoyd Steel Works and other heavy industries in the area all depended upon large numbers of unskilled workers. At the same time, the railroads were in growing need of upgrading and repair, and the once-plentiful supply of cheap European labor was nowhere to be found.

Prior to the war, Northern industries had not employed blacks in any numbers, except as strikebreakers, but with the outbreak of the war, eyes turned south. At board room conferences held in New York, Philadelphia, Detroit and elsewhere, the character of the Negro worker was discussed and fretted over, his fitness for industrial work debated. And then, in the spring of 1916, a number of companies made the decision to try out the Southern Negro.

I come on the free transportation. At that particular time they had it out that they wanted to get on out all the colored people from down there that they possibly could, so they sent a train. They wouldn't let us board at the union sheds. So we had to board the train, get it at what they called Four Mile Hill, out from Savannah, going out from Charleston. So we had to go out there to get the train coming north, a train about 13 coaches long. Everybody was going, all us coming.

They didn't want nobody that didn't have a seat. You all got to have a seat. But a whole gang of them didn't have any seat. But they hid when the man come through and check, you see, you hide under the seat like that. And that's the way we got away from there. (Ernest Grey)

As the story goes, William Atterbury, vice president in charge of operations for the Pennsylvania Railroad, conceived the idea of sending to the Deep South for Negro workers. He commissioned Rev. James Duckrey, a Baptist minister and messenger in his office, as his recruiter and labor agent. In the spring of 1916, Duckrey went down to Jacksonville, Fla., and quickly returned with several trainloads of Negro laborers.

Soon the trickle that had been coming north for decades became a rush, and by the late summer of 1916, the beginnings of an exodus that would change the shape of the nation.

In all, some 1.5 million blacks would leave the South between 1916 and 1929; 500,000 in the late 1910s alone. Philadelphia, with its many industries and close proximity to the South, from the start was one of the major destination points. Between 1916 and 1918, some 40,000 people would pour into the city at a rate of 150 a week until the spring of 1918, when between 8,000 and 12,000 arrived between April and June. The city's black population would leap from 84,000 in 1910 to 134,000 in 1920, and 219,000 a decade later.

Within weeks after the first trainload left Jacksonville, the exodus had begun in earnest.

The railroads weren't the only organizations sending south for workers. The Armstrong Association of Philadelphia, founded in 1907 by Quakers primarily as an employment bureau for Negroes with skills, throughout the period was one of the most active organizations in finding jobs and providing services for the incoming Southerners. When, after the outbreak of the war, the need for workers became critical, the Armstrong Association sent their industrial secretary, A.L. Manly, on a swing down south. His son, Milo Manly remembers:

He had contacts, of course, from his days as the head of a newspaper in the South. And so he made a tour. And then, on top of that, my father looked like a white man. Nobody would expect... and he was accepted wherever he went. So he ambled on around and talked to the people and explained what they were doing, that they should come to the Armstrong Association ... He would go and explain to the community leaders — like it's the local minister or undertaker that's quite a top person among the Negro groups in the communities down there — explained to them what could be.

And they in turn would reach out and talk to people — most likely somebody who hasn't been working — and chase him up. And little by little the word spread. And when one comes up and gets a job, then zip, word goes back down south, and here comes up more of the family.

Well, it was a word-of-mouth thing that spread around that there were jobs that could be obtained up here that were far better than what was going on down there. That's how the thing got started. (Milo Manly)

As the migration grew, Southern authorities became alarmed by the flight. Due to the previous lack of Northern interest in Negro labor, they had never before had to worry about a massive flight of their "niggers." But as wharfs emptied of their longshoremen, and the cotton fields and mines were left abandoned, their dependence upon what had been a mistreated and malcontented labor force became all too apparent.

Atlanta's mayor traveled to the city's black Methodist churches trying to convince the people that they were constitutionally unfit for the rough Northern climate, that the cold weather would cause them to come down with pneumonia and tuberculosis.

The Jacksonville City Council passed a bill requiring labor agents to pay $1,000 to sign labor for the Northern fields and shops, and began arresting labor agents who, upon posting bail, would be right back on the steets signing up more men. In desperation, the police were ordered to prevent the boarding of trains. Many persons were arrested or sent away, their tickets confiscated.

Two of them would always be together. They say, "Look. Don't he look like that guy that raped that white woman the other day?" The guy would...

"Yeah, he does look like him. Did you rape..."

I say, "No, I didn't do anything like ..."

They said, "Come on. Let's go in down to the station and see what we can find out about you."

Take you right on away if you had a ticket going somewhere. By the time they let you go, that ticket wouldn't be any good. You had to get the money all over. So that's the way they did us down there. (William Brown)

We went to the railroad station on West Broad Street in Savannah. Some of the authorities were resentful because so many of the blacks were leaving and they objected to it. And I'll never forget it as a little boy, they decided they were going to pick up all these people that was at the station, and they say they were lounging around. And they took ... they had a hearing in the court as I remember. And the judge was named Judge Schwartz. And the officer and the authorities ... and the judge said, "What did you bring these people here for?"

He said, "Well, they were all piled up at the station waiting to go north."

I remember it as if it were yesterday. Judge Schwartz said, "They can't come to my house and catch a train. And they can't come to your house. Isn't that what the station is there for?"

"Yes."

"Discharged!"

Everybody went back to the station and most people got on their trains and came north. (Edgar Campbell)

The agent made an address to the members of the race on Monday, August 7, the day that crowds left the city for the Four Mile Hill on the Louisville road. Farmhands and workers from rural districts are coming in from all parts of the country because they have been promised $1.80 a day with chance for advancement. They have their suitcases, some are only in jumpers and overalls, but declare that if once in the state of Pennsylvania they will never

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North

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set foot in Georgia again.

They are determined not to live where taxation without representation is in vogue. (Chicago Defender, Aug. 19, 1916)

My father . . . they knowed he was a carpenter and they knowed they needed those kind of men up north. You know how he had to get away? They went to church and this man, this recruiter, gave them a long list of things they had to do. They was going to take away . . . They interviewed carpenters. There were plumbers. There were painters. So he got all those men together and said, "I'm going to take all you men together at one time." . . .

What they had to do at a certain time, in the dark of night — they had to do it at a certain time in the dark of night — they had to go to the outskirts of the city on a railroad spur and they had put an old raggedy car on that railroad spur. He said at a certain time he was going to be on that car. When everything was ready he was going to light a cigarette on the deck of that old car, and the men that was hidden — my father was one — them men were hidden in the bushes alongside of that thing, laying in the bushes. Said, "Now don't you all smoke or talk or do nothing, just . . ."

When he lit that cigarette, all of them jumped right up and got in that car, and everybody was quiet and not a light or anything. What they call a little shifter or a little engine came, hitched onto that car, and the train, Broadway Limited, was going north. He stuck it on the back of that last car, and when that pulled out, it pulled on up, and the engineer knew that all of them was in this thing, before it got into New York City, uncoupled that little car and pushed it aside; that little shifter come and pushed that car aside, way over there. And the men had to stay in that car till just about daylight when a great big van came and they got out of that van and came to where they were going to be hired. And that's how my father got away. (William Brown)

Photo Courtesy of Mother Bethel Church

Rev. R.J. Williams was pastor of Mother Bethel Church

The desire to flee north spread like wildfire. The floodgates were open, and black men and women, having "cast down their buckets where they were" and finding the water undrinkable, like the Jews fleeing Egypt, packed up their belongings and headed for the Promised Land.

All we were told, "Why go up there?" and "You know what is down here. You don't know what you run into up there." And the more they said that, the more people wanted to go. I remember as if it was yesterday. There were thousands of them at the station waiting to get on that train to go north. Thousands. Like herds in the cattle. Some of them didn't even . . . Some of them walked out of their homes and didn't even take nothin'. (Edgar Campbell)

During the early years of the war the Northern demand for Southern workers was accompanied by a series of natural calamities in Dixie that fueled the desire to leave. The most important of these occurrences was a little green bug then making its way from Mexico up through Texas and into the Deep South. The boll weevil ate its way east, forcing thousands off the land and leaving ruin in its wake.

In the summer of 1916 severe floods ravaged Alabama and Mississippi. Unable to stay on the farms, unwanted in the towns and cities, many had no choice but to move on.

So there you have it. All the ingredients were present: the push and the pull.

Hughsey Childs, one of nine children, grew up on a cotton farm outside of Abbeville, S.C.:

In 1916 I made 16 bales of cotton; 1917 that was cut in half. The next year still cut in half. And the next year was nothing! People that used to have 18 and 19 bales of cotton were lucky to get 3. So you see, what you going to do? Because in the South at that particular time, the only thing we had to make money was with the cotton. That was the only commodity we had. That's where we got our money from.

But the boll weevil came in, and that's what started people comin' here, because the farmer he didn't have no other place to go. And I often said the reason why the boll weevil came, that was God's work. He did that for a purpose because the people was cheating the people so badly that he got tired of them cheating them, so he just said, "Now I'm going to send myself down there as a something and tear it up." (Hughsey Childs)

In Philadelphia, representatives of the Armstrong Association surveyed newcomers. They asked about their reasons for coming north, about their past and current lives.

The reason given most often was that they had come for better wages. A man or woman could make in a day what they had made in the South in a week. But, of course, there was more to it than that.

Southerner J. Max Barber was president of the Philadelphia branch of the NAACP when the Great Migration began:

Let one who was born and raised in the South and who is throroughly in touch with the situation explain the underlying cause of this immense migration. The basic cause of the Negro exodus is not economic. True, wages are higher in this section, and that is undoubtedly a contributing cause. But the real, the fundamental cause animating this movement is the awful injustice, the inhumanity of the South toward her black population . . .

The Negroes are tired of being lynched with impunity. They are tired of the mean, dirty Jim Crow conditions that are forced on them everywhere they turn. They are tired of disenfranchisement at the polls. They are tired about the fool talk about "social equality" whenever they ask for decent accommodations in places set aside for the public. They are tired of paying taxes to support institutions like public libraries which they cannot enter. They are tired of reptilian hate, which condemns them and their children to the slime pits of civilization. And the immense jaws of this bigotry seem remorseless in their clutch — unrelenting in their stranglehold.

If you talk to the people of the South, they will tell you the Negro is an awful burden, but he is a burden which they will not allow you to relieve them of. They want him, but they do not want to treat him halfway decently. Let the South give her colored population better schools, abolish Jim Crowism, allow the Negro, like any other human being, to have a voice in government and get out of her head that the Negro craves half as much of "social equality" as the Southerner has shown by his own actions that he enjoys, and the Negro will cease.

Until then, this exodus, like a gigantic strike against intolerable conditions, will continue. (Opportunity, 1923)

I imagine that if my father hadn't had an incident with the man he was working with before, I don't think we would have been up here, because I think the country stayed in a lot of us. My mother and father raised 11 children. And at that time, I imagine they had the children to help them on the farm, because you needed them, especially if you were sharecropping. So my father was always a good farmer, and with the children helping him, he always managed.

And then my father, he would go work in the sawmills. And that was cash money then. And while he was working in the sawmill he said his boss would not pay him cash money. He said, told him that all his — and I'm going to use the word that this

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SHOULD NEGROES COME NORTH?

Doubtless you have been told that colored people make a mistake when they leave the South to seek employment in the Eastern, Northern or Western sections of our country. There are those, black and white, who attempt to make the colored people in the Southern States believe that it is impossible for them to live any where north of the Mason and Dixon Line. The best answer to such claims is to state facts as they are.

All honest people are agreed that the opportunities for employment are better in the North today for colored people than they have ever been. The wages paid are higher than what they get in the South. The average wage paid to colored men in the South is not over $1.00 per day for ten hours work. The average wage in the North is over $2.00 per day for eight hours, more than double what it is in the South. The cost of food and clothing are about the same. House rent is higher in some places, but not double what it is in the South. These three items are the principal expenses of living. If the earnings are more than double and only one of the three principal expenses are higher, you can easily determine for yourself whether or not you will make a mistake to come North.

In the South the average school term for colored children is about three months; in the **North** the average school term is ten months, compulsory up to 16 years.

In the **South** colored men are more and more being crowded out of the best employments. In the **North** the best employments are just beginning to be opened to colored men.

In the **South** colored men are denied the right to vote in the large majority of the States. In the **North** every man is guaranteed the right to vote.

In the **South** justice is administered by the color of the skin. In the **North** justice is administered according to law.

There is prejudice in the North, to be sure, but that prejudice has not to this time broken down the law of justice.

NO EASY MONEY NORTH

The Men and Women who don't want to work had better stay in the South. Men and women who want to work steadily can find employment in the North, and will be paid what their labor is worth.

YOUR RIGHT TO COME

There is no law that can keep you from coming North. You can come if you want to come. The colored people of the South certainly have a stronger claim on the employment of the Northern section of our country than the foreigners of Europe.

THE CHURCH THE HAVEN

Civilization is founded on Christianity. The Church is the organized agency of Christianity. When you go into a strange community, the first thing you should do is to find the church. To be satisfied, you should find the church of your choice, and when you find the church of your choice, **join**—connect yourself with the church.

The church is the haven of safety. The tents of wickedness are on every hand. Satan is busy. His forces are organized. To keep out of his clutches you must keep in the ranks of God's army.

Mother Bethel sends you these greetings, and if you come to Philadelphia we invite you to come within her fold. The members of the Mother Church of the African Methodist Connection, will do everything in their power to help you, and make you welcome to their church and their homes.

Yours in His name,

MOTHER BETHEL INFORMATION BUREAU,

D. A. HART, Chairman
M. G. JOHNSON, Secretary.

C. H. Potts — Robert T. Allen — Wm. Smith
S. D. Wooding — D. Jas. Mason — Geo. T. Corson

Rev. R. J. Williams, Pastor
Col. P. H. Edwards, President Corporation

Document Courtesy of Mother Bethel Church

This letter was circulated by Mother Bethel Church in Philadelphia to combat the arguments of white Southerners who were trying to stop the Migration

Special to the Daily News by Donnie Roberts

Beulah Collins came north so her child could be educated

Special to the Daily News by Donnie Roberts

Edgar Campbell recalls some migrated north with no possessions

"I've heard my parents state that even at that age, they realized that if I stayed in the South I would get killed (that I was so determined in certain fields, civil rights fields and that sort of thing, that it was dangerous, that I would've been killed). And I think this is the background which motivated them more than the boll weevil of deciding to leave."

Walter Gay

North

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man used — he said all his niggers he has, was going to be paid in his store. I imagine that's one little town where everybody owned everything, so that's why he had the groceries and everything.

So my father said he told him, "I don't need your food because I have plenty of my own and I need this money to buy my children shoes and clothes and things like that." And the man would not give it to him.

So he came home — my mother told me this — my father came home and he was very sad and downhearted, and then he got angry and he told my mother, he said, "He's going to give me my money." And he went back to the mill where the man was and asked him and he said he pleaded with him. He said, "Please give me my money." He said the man put his hands into his pocket and took it out and threw the money on the ground and told him he would never live to spend it.

Well, in those days they used the expression, "The white man ruled." So when they used those kinds of terms you know what they mean. So my father came home and packed some clothes and my mother packed him some lunch, and he left the family. And after my father came to Philadelphia, he got a job and he worked and saved his money, and then he sent for all of us and we all came up together. (Annabelle White)

Walter Gay grew up in Dawson, Ga.:

We had had trouble with the Caucasian majority. My sister had been beat. I had been beaten over trifles. My sister had been beat because she refused to walk on the side of the street reserved for blacks. My beating was over my father getting me a bicycle which was the eyecatcher for the town. And those who were jealous of it took it out on me.

I've heard my parents state that even at that age, they realized that if I stayed in the South I would get killed (that I was so determined in certain fields, civil rights fields and that sort of thing, that it was dangerous, that I would've been killed). And I think this is the background which motivated them more than the boll weevil of deciding to leave. (Walter Gay)

Single women, too, came in great numbers: widows and wives abandoned by or leaving husbands, daughters intent on sending money back home. Like the men, they were fleeing the farm, looking for better wages, better lives for their children.

Beulah Collins was born and raised on the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

Well, I was married in 1917. I lived down there until after I married and had my baby. I lost my husband real early. He died before the baby was born, and of course, my health got bad. I had older brothers and sisters, and they said, "Beulah, why don't you come to Philadelphia? You could go to the hospitals and get treatment, and maybe that would help you."

Well, that was encouraging to me, and that was why I come up here. My boy was young. And then after I come up here, I saw the people had a better chance for education up here than what we did down there, and I wanted my boy to have an education. Then I decided to come up here where he would have a better education. That was one of my reasons. I had my child in view. (Beulah Collins)

Negroes still going north. A crowd left from Greenwood Saturday night. A farm boy of Greenwood County went north last October to work for $25 a week. He came home last week to assist his people on the farm and brought more that $100 and plenty of nice clothes. He gave his mother $50, put $50 in the Greenwood bank and had some pocket change left. (Ray Stannard Baker, "The Negro Goes North," Southern Workman, April 1917)

As reports came back home, more and more people headed north. Old friends and family members would return home, money jingling in their pockets, wearing fancy new clothes, and telling tales of the great lives they led up in Philadelphia.

One of the things. You know you get rumors. Somebody has been up north and came back to visit. They tell you how great it is, so many privileges that they enjoy in the North that we were denied in the South. And people coming back tellin' you what a wonderful place. They were talking about jobs were plentiful, homes were plentiful. It's just where you should be. And it's just by word of mouth they started to migrate. (Edgar Campbell)

Yes, It was a wonderful thing. At long last God had made a way for His children to escape from the bondage of the South. And the reports that came back were so exciting. Good wages, good education for the kids. No more "Yes sirring," "no ma'aming," or being called "nigger." Sure, it might be cold, but that was a small price to pay for the rest. It just sounded so good. Almost too good to be true. But was Philadelphia and the rest of the North the Canaan land?

In the Classroom

1. **Journal Entry:** Have the students pretend that they lived in the South during the period of the Great Migration. Ask them to write down whether they would have gone north or stayed in the South, and the reasons for their decision.

2. **Define** the following words used in this program:

migrants	immigrants
hostilities	belligerents
deleterious	expeditions
exodus	poverty
contagion	

3. **For Research and Discussion:**

a. Using a map of the United States, have the students trace the journey of Southern blacks from Savannah, Ga., and Jacksonville, Fla., to Philadelphia and from Atlanta, Ga., to New York City.

On the back of the map, have the students write a couple of paragraphs on the following questions:

i) What **arrangements** would the black migrants have to make in order to make the trip north?

ii) What **belongings** would they choose to take with them, and what would they leave behind?

iii) What **problems** would the migrants encounter in making the trip to the North?

b. Have the students prepare a TV talk show program with the guests being the following "veterans": Mr. Brown, Edgar Campbell, Beulah Collins and Ernest Grey.

Have each student prepare two or three questions that they would like to ask the guests. Conduct the program by having students volunteer to be the host and the guests, with the rest of the class as the audience. Have the host introduce each of the guests, using the information in the biographical profiles at the end of this supplement, and then have the host direct the audience's questions to each guest.

The Newcomers

Most of the blacks who came to Philadelphia in the Great Migration had come from the farms of the South. The city was an alien experience for them. Worse, they found themselves the victims of bias here, too — sometimes even from other blacks.

Hold your horses. Here comes the elephant!

Get away from that cage there, Steve. That monkey'll grab you in a minute. Oh. You ain't scared of monkeys, is you?

Yeah, I'm scared of monkeys.

You don't have to be scared of monkeys. Monkeys is the nearest things to human folk.

I wouldn't care.

You learns that in revolution. I suppose you know what revolution is?

Yeah. Revolution is a war.

Hey, you talkin' about the old-style revolution. I'm talkin' about the new style. Revolution means that a man comes from a monkey.

You don't mean to tell me you believe that foolishness?

I didn't believe it at first, but the more I see of you, the 'spishusser I get.

Now here, don't you call me no monkey.

I didn't call you a monkey.

Well, don't you done it.

I wouldn't call you a monkey.

Well, all right then.

I wouldn't insult...

Well, that's all right.

... the monkeys. I don't know what you is. Therefore, I don't know what you come from. You is too little for a man and too big for a monkey. Lookee here. Where did you come from anyhow?

I come from Georgia.

I ain't talkin' about that. I'm talkin' about your generators. What did you spring from?

Right out of the cotton fields of Georgia. (Miller & Lyles, "Evolution." Regal 8435, 1927)

By 1930, Philadelphia's black population had climbed to 220,000 people, of whom only 30 percent were born in the state of Pennsylvania. Nineteen percent were born in Virginia, the traditional leader, 13 percent in South Carolina, and 11 percent in Georgia. The city's black population had increased almost 64 percent in a single decade, and grown from 5 percent of the city's population in 1910 to about 11 percent in 1930.

Oh my God. You could go to Broad Street Station, and I'm telling you the truth, I never seen nothin' like it. People would be in there like that. Just like that, comin' from the South. People there meetin' them and people comin' in. Oooohhh. It was awful. I never saw nothin' like it. And that was every day and especially, especially on weekends. Yeah, comin' in in droves, and they certainly was.

It was pathetic, I'm tellin' you, to see them. But they came and they stayed. That's the way they came up, by the hundreds. And that wasn't just one day but years in and out.

Sure was. (Crosby Brittenum)

Heading north, you transferred trains in Washington, D.C., and for the first time sat in the same cars as the whites. Finally you were in the North. How exciting it all must have been. Heading for a new life in the big city: visions of good jobs and easy money. There were the bright lights, and they treated you like a human being, all mixed up with warnings of the lurking dangers and temptations of the big city and, last but not least, fear of that cold weather.

My mother told me when I came here, don't walk close to the walls because they have trap doors and you would fall in or someone would pull you in, and we would never see you again [laughter]. You were afraid to go into people's houses to work after that. They say like the doctors, the doctors would get you. Because they wanted to experiment on you. So you got to be very careful when you go to Philadelphia. I was scared. (Hattie Alexander)

My parents, when I was 16, a young girl, they said make sure you goin' up North and it's cold up there. Make sure you always wear your long underwear because they were afraid you would catch tuberculosis. People were leaving the South goin' north, and they were coming back with tuberculosis. So, of course, when I left home, they made sure I had my long underwear. So when I went to my aunt's home and I asked about it and put the long underwear in the drawer, and I haven't had the long underwear on since. (Arrow Vaughan)

So what was it like for these hordes of newcomers to arrive in the third-largest metropolis in the nation, that fabled corner of the Promised Land? Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love?

If I tell you the truth, lady, you won't believe it. When I first got to Philadelphia ... if I could have taken my three children and turned right around and gone back to Jacksonville, I would have. In the first place, I wasn't used to living in houses all built together. It seemed to me when I came here and looked at the way people were living, it seemed like everybody was living in one house. I wasn't used to that. I wasn't used to that! Everybody living in one house. People's houses that you have all around you ... your yards and your gardens and everything.

And I was used to, when you meet someone, to say, "Good morning, Mr. So and So ... Well, good morning there, So and So, and Brother So and So." And it seemed like when you met people, I don't know what you was lookin' at. And I told my aunt, I said "Well, Good Lord of Mercy, is this what you call living?" And I still really haven't gotten used to living in Philadelphia. Still, it's no big hen to me so far as I'm concerned. (Ella Lee)

Customs and habits in Philadelphia were so different from the South. Here strangers didn't greet each other like they did down home. All the houses were stuck together. The jobs weren't all they were cut out to be. The stories coming back home had contained such glowing reports. Hopes and expectations were so high.

And many stories that have been told to me by some of the boys that had left Durham and had come back to visit ... They told me the beautiful parts. But when I came to Philadelphia, I found that much of it was not the truth. Some of them told me they had nice jobs and were doing jobs that when I came, I found they didn't have at all. Where they told me they were bartenders, they were janitors. And that was a disappointment. (David Amey)

People came with wildly varying degrees of knowledge about the city. Many of them straight off the farms, with limited education, rural ways and little or no preparation for urban life, arrived totally ignorant of even the basics of how people lived, ate, dressed or acted, while others, who had spent time in the cities of the South, felt quite at home.

With her brothers away in the service, Minnie was forced to work her parents' farm. And with little hope of relief she ran away at the tender age of 16 and made her way to relatives in Philadelphia.

Well, all the people that knew would look at you and say, "Look at her. She's from the South." "She's a dummy," or say something like that. And the white people would look at you and tell you in a minute, "You're from down south," because, from your speech, your dialect. And then from the way you act.

... I had to get used to knowing how people ate up here. In my home, where I come from, it was like ... dinner was at 12 o'clock. Our break-

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Photo Courtesy of Donnie Roberts

Rev. Charles Albert Tindley was one of Philadelphia's most influential pastors when the Great Migration began

Photo Courtesy of James MacIntyre

This hydrant party on Melon Street around 1930 was a strange sight to those just up from the farm

Newcomers

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fast, including eggs, bacon ... eggs and what we call it side meat, or sometimes my mother would have fish ... mackerel or fried fish. And then dinner was beans, cornbread, and they didn't have two or three ... and big meat. Beans were not your side dish. That was your regular meal. Then night time maybe she would make some pancakes, waffles or something. So I was used to that way of eating.

So when I come up here they talk about dinner at night. That was dinner? That is in the middle of the day, when we eat our dinner. So I had to get adjusted to what they had for lunch and what they called dinner at night. And many things were hard for me to get adjusted to ... I didn't do much talking. I listened, because my speech, which is none too good now ... I was afraid to talk because I didn't know where to put the words. (Minnie Whitney)

Learning how to take public transportation, how to use a telephone, how to dress and deport oneself in public, to adjust to work routines determined by the clock — to learn even how to address people — posed real challenges for many folks up from the South.

Yes. I remember them coming up. They come up in coveralls and overalls, and you could tell they were from the country. They would gravitate to the black neighborhoods, which was South Street, from what I guess about 8th or 9th to Broad Street, and Bainbridge and Pine and Lombard and Naudain and Rodman. You'd find them all there. (Ralph Jones)

Photo Courtesy of Urban Archives, Temple University

Officers of the Armstrong Association (around 1925): the group later became the Philadelphia chapter of the Urban League

The South Street corridor had been the heart of black Philadelphia for a hundred years. Broad and South was like 125th Street and Seventh Avenue in Harlem, or Druid Hill Avenue in Baltimore. It was the one spot, no matter where you came from, that everyone knew. And it was to this section of town that newcomers headed. But though jobs might be falling from the trees, places to live were not, as Ralph Jones remembers:

Dr. Duckrey would sign them up down South. So when they came here, they would have jobs. But even coming here with jobs, they had no place to stay. And that's where Tindley, my pastor, and other pastors prevailed upon the members of their congregations to rent out extra rooms in their homes. At that time, black families had a whole house. No apartments ... a whole house ... and usually they had extra rooms and they rented them out and charged nominal fees for it.

But these men would come here and make more money than they ever made in the South, in the wartime. And they paid pretty good. And some of them even paid lodging and boarding too. And so the people that they lived with prospered because they prospered too, ya see. Many of them had a lucrative income on renting these rooms and subsequently were able to buy these rowhouses. (Ralph Jones)

Newly arrived Southerners would lease or buy a large house and then rent rooms — often to family members or friends from back home, the income from which they used to pay for the house. Remember, at this time Philadelphia was a Jim Crow city, and the hotels and white boarding houses would not put up a black man or woman, and though housing needs were met initially by folks putting up their country cousins, there were just too many people, and they soon began to spread out into other sections of the city. With the growing use of automobiles, the whites were moving farther out of the city, into new developments in the Northeast and on the Main Line, opening the miles upon miles of rowhouses in West and North Philadelphia to the black newcomers.

It's a funny thing, but in the South to own your own home was a very important thing. In Philadelphia it wasn't. When I was a young man and went around to visit people, I would go around and visit some homes — very nice people who lived in South Philadelphia; families had been there for years. I thought they owned the house, but they had been renting for 20, 30, 40 years. And they would hand the lease down from father to son. That is an actual fact ... But many, they tried to discourage the newcomers from buying. But they bought anyway. They wanted to say, "This is mine." Nobody can say your rent is being raised or you have to move out. (Isadore Martin)

Many Southerners, unlike Philadelphia blacks, did not like to rent. Philadelphia was the city of homes, and there were numerous black savings and loan associations, which made home ownership possible for many. So the city held that special attraction.

And then in New York you couldn't buy properties. We wanted to be in a place where we could buy a home. We had been accustomed to our own homes, and we wanted it to be in the city where we could buy a home. And that's why we came to Philadelphia. (Utensie Hillian)

West Philadelphia became the land of "sun porches, potted palms and second mortgages." Here "the Cream of the Colored Race" settled west of 52nd Street and north of Market, starting in the early 1910s.

Young men and women doing housework often preferred and found it easier to rent rooms in the more heavily black areas in South and in North Philadelphia, the latter then fast becoming the third-largest black community in the nation. Diamond Street in North, Christian Street in South, and 57th Street in West Philadelphia all contained their residences of prominent families.

There was resistance to black encroachment in white neighborhoods. Philadelphia did have its own riot in the summer of 1918 when Mrs. Bond moved into a house on the 2900 block of Ellsworth Street.

But on the whole there wasn't much trouble. People tended to get along better then than they do now. Though you might pay a bit more for houses than your white counterparts, it was still affordable. People settled on in pretty well.

Look here sister. Did you have any trouble gettin' here?

Trouble? Ummm hmmm. I come here by the rail and then I got in the 'lectrified car, and there was two little white boys settin' in one corner of the car. And one of dem little boys says, "Get on with the big fat thing." The other boy said, "That old gal looks like she is full of eats." I said, "Lookee here, Mr. White Boy. If your mother had a eat a yeast cake before you was born, you'd a been better bread." (Billy Golden, "Sisseretta's Visit to the North." D&R, 1917)

Some of the newcomers were loud and boisterous in public. Dressed in their overalls and homespun clothes, many were altogether ignorant of the ways of the city. And many too, freed from the oppression of the South and full of illusions about the North being a land of freedom and promise, did things and behaved in ways that were considered inappropriate both by Philadelphia's native black population and by the white majority.

So what were they like in the eyes of the Philadelphians? Mrs E. was industrial secretary for the Armstrong Association during the 1920s:

Well, the most of them were black in color. Some of them were belligerent, some of them were mean. But the majority of them was "Yes, ma'am. No, ma'am." They didn't know anything else but that, see. "Yes ma'am. No ma'am." And I would laugh because some of them were older than myself, calling me "Yes, ma'am" and "No ma'am." And they were nice sort of Negroes. But they were desperate for a job. (Mrs. E.)

... Well, they did stand out. My grandmother, God rest her soul, she was a slave and unlettered. But she had her stiff-necked qualities, her Puritan qualities, and she saw some of these people come here.

At that time there was an aristocracy among blacks and middle class and what not that came way before then. You see, there was a well-established black population in Philadelphia. They looked the skids at these other people that came up. And my grandmother used to wince every time she would say it. "These new niggers." ... "New niggers," and with contempt. If you could see the look on her face, you would say, "This be it."

And we kids would look at her and say, "What she mean?" You know, we didn't know the full intent of that "new nigger." (Ralph Jones)

Philadelphia's native black population was noted for its culture and educational attainments. When the Great Migration began, the nation was being swept by a rising tide of racial segregation and Jim Crow. And quite naturally the "OP's," as the old black Philadelphia families were known as, feared the loss of the small advantages they did enjoy and the further deterioration of their already-tenuous relations with the white world. And much of the blame for the growing discrimination took shape in their minds in the form of the rural "Joe Boe."

In 1921, Sadie Tanner Mossell, born into one of Philadelphia's prominent Negro families, became the first black woman in America to earn a doctorate, for her survey of the living standards of 100 migrant families.

They found suddenly thrown in their midst about 40,000 migrants, whose presence in such large numbers crushed and stagnated the prog-

See **NEWCOMERS** After Centerfold

Speaking Our History

Interviewing someone for an oral history project can be a fascinating and rewarding experience.

By **CHARLES HARDY**

Oral history is a method of gathering and preserving historical information in spoken form (the recording of people's recollections for future use). It can be a richly rewarding experience for both the interviewer and the person interviewed.

It is an excellent means to get young people interested in history. Through interviewing relatives or neighbors, they can come to see, in a compelling and personal fashion, the historical dimension of all people's lives.

To make the most out of your oral history project, here is a brief outline and a few rules of thumb:

1. Project Design: The first step is to decide the scope and content of your oral history project. What is the project's purpose? Where will the oral history interviews be deposited after the project is finished? What will be the product or outcome of this project? A class report? A community or family history ? A newspaper article? Whatever the product, remember to inform the people you interview. After all, you couldn't have done it without them.

2. Research: The greater the preparation, the better the interview. The more you know about the period and subject you will be asking questions about, the more you will get from the interview. So do your homework in advance. A knowledgeable interviewer helps the interviewee to recall and to focus their answers, and enables you to ask the right questions. Prepare a questionnaire, blocking out the types of questions you are going to ask, and become familiar with it. Then leave it at home. Nothing can ruin an interview faster than reading questions off a piece of paper.

3. Equipment: Use the best equipment and tapes you can afford. The better the quality of these, the more valuable and useful the recorded interview will be. Do not use tapes longer than 45 minutes a side. The longer ones have a greater tendency to jam or break, and they don't last as long. It is better to use a microphone than the built-in mike on the recorder. If you must use the built-in mike, make sure it is positioned close to the interviewee. Nothing is more frustrating than to record a terrific interview and then be unable to hear what has been recorded.

4. Setting up the Interview: After you have decided whom you are going to interview, contact and explain to them the project: who you are, the purpose of the interview, the types of questions you will be asking them, and how you will use the interview. Remember, it is their lives they are sharing with you, so treat them with all the respect and consideration that is their due. It is a good policy to visit the person once before the actual interview in order to: a) run over the procedure; b) allow them to see who you are; and c) get a better idea of what is expected. This is the time to ask about photographs, diaries, scrapbooks or other materials that might also be useful. Remember to keep this first visit short. You don't want them to tell the stories you want to get on tape, because usually the first telling is the best.

5. The Interview: An oral history is an interview, not a conversation. The objective is to draw the person out with questions that are short, open-ended and to the point. There are a number of things to keep in mind.

a) Length: Don't go over an hour and a half. Oral history interviewing can be very tiring, especially for an older person. If you want to ask more questions, make arrangements to come back.

b) Technical considerations: First, check your equipment and make sure it is working before you go. So many interviews have been lost because this was overlooked! Once there, do what you can to make the room you are recording in as quiet as possible. Turn off the television and radios; close the windows.

c) Rapport: The best interviews come when the interviewee is comfortable and at ease. A good trick is to start the recorder while you are still talking informally so they don't feel they're being put "on the spot" when the actual questioning begins. Take your time and be informal.

d) Interviewing techniques: Much has been written on interviewing techniques. Here are some quick pointers: Start with questions about personal background, to help establish rapport and get their memories flowing; ask one question at a time; do not ask questions that can be answered by a yes or no; do not interrupt, but save questions that come to mind for later in the interview; don't be flustered by silence, for often the person is merely gathering their thoughts; avoid turning off the recorder for "off the record" information; and don't challenge accounts you believe inaccurate.

e) The release form: After the interview is complete, have the interviewee sign a release form. This gives you and others the right to use the contents of the interview and to place it on deposit. Forms can be very simple. Samples can be found in "Interviewing the People of Pennsylvania" or obtained from the Atwater Kent Museum.

6. Review: Completing the interview is only half the work. The next step is to listen back to the tape, within a day or two after the interview is done. This is the time to make an index of its contents so that you and others will know and be able to find what is in the interview; to fill out an interview form with basic information about the interviewer and interviewee, and some brief observations about what took place during the interview; to take notes on questions you would like to ask if you go back; and to grade yourself on your own interviewing techniques.

Charles Hardy is producer of the radio series, "Goin' North: Tales of the Great Migration."

Photo Courtesy of **Isadore Martin**

Faculty of the Joseph K. Brick Normal and Industrial School, Enfield, N.C., 1910

A black Elks lodge ready to march; lodg

Picturi

Old photographs can ma history of society — com you'll find they tell you m

By **MORRIS J. VOGEL**

All of us have family pictures. Most often, we stuff them into a drawer or a closet and only rediscover them when we're looking for something else. Ordinarily, we don't give these old photographs much attention, but occasionally we look at them to relive fond moments, to recall friends and relatives no longer with us, to remember how we looked in times gone by, to revisit — if only in our minds — family homes and special places.

We know that our family pictures can make the past come alive for us, but do we know that they can tell an important historic story?

History books are full of pictures from the American past. Civil War battles and civil rights marches sweep across their pages; generals and Indian chiefs stare solemnly out of their formal portraits; presidents are inaugurated and great leaders are buried. The pictures in our books depict important events and people. They help us understand the dignity of a Martin Luther King, the tragedy of war, the workings of our democratic system.

That's part of America, but there's more to history. It's the story of all of us, of our families as well as our leaders, of everyday life as well as great events. Our own pictures can help us tell a different part of the same story: how a grandfather went to war, how a family moved from one part of the country to another, what it was like to live on a farm, how a city neighborhood looked.

This is also history. The eyes that meet ours when we look into an old photograph have a

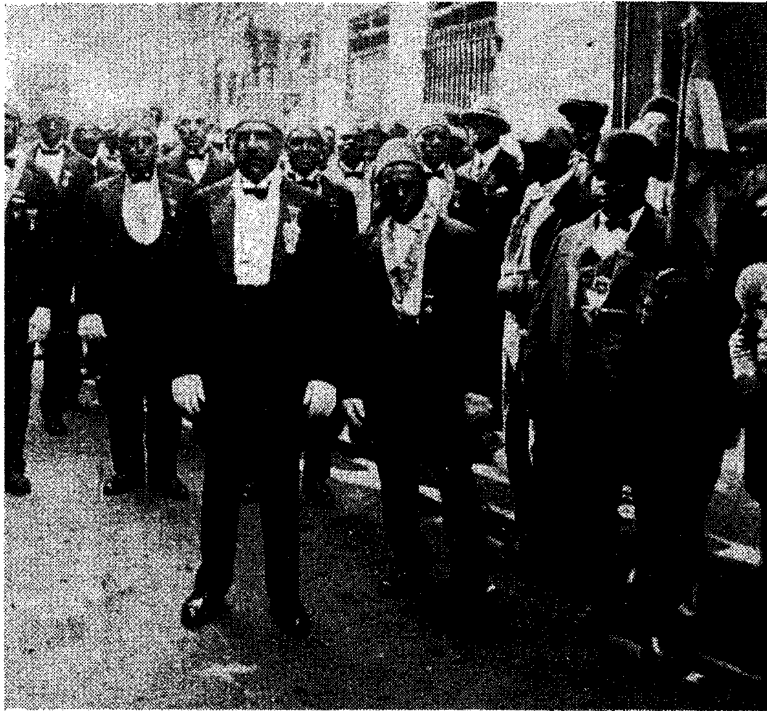

Photo Courtesy of Octavius Catto Lodge

were of great importance to black men in the 1920s

ıg Our History

e history — both the history of individuals and the ׀ alive. And if you study the pictures carefully, ːh more than what you just see on the surface.

ıtory they want to tell us, but we have to learn ıow to read pictures the way we read words.

Generally, the first thing we notice is how lifferently people dressed. Men might wear ıats when they posed for the photographer; hey almost always wore them on city streets — ınd even when they worked outdoors. Women vore dresses and skirts, rarely slacks. Children vere sometimes dressed as little adults. These ›ictures can lead us to think about how separate vere the roles reserved for women and men, to ›peculate how much childhood children were ıllowed.

Adults ordinarily struck earnest poses — stiff ınd unsmiling — in their formal photographs. Iaving a picture taken was serious business, an ılmost solemn occasion, a chance to be seen at ⁄our best. Formal photographs were more likely :o be taken at some moments than at others. Reunions, lodge conventions and group trips ›ffered opportunities to record special times, ›pecial places and special friendships.

The fellowship of the lodge itself was — and :emains — special. Membership conferred sta-:us. The lodge insignia or uniform a man wore — and lodges were male, not female activities — nade clear his pride in belonging to the group. Excluded by racism from many trades, occupa-:ions and achievements, blacks created their ›wn fraternal societies, clubs and teams. The ›xpressions we see on the faces of lodge mem-bers in these old group portraits show us how valued the fellowship of these groups was. At the same time, these old photos remind us of this nation's history of segregation and racial exclusion.

Individual portraits were also popular. Often a person posed with an object important to him. For blacks and whites alike, a new car has often been the occasion for picture-taking. Along the same lines is the personal photograph that includes the tools of the individual's trade. A Renaissance astronomer might stand behind his telescope, a 20th-century jazz musician behind his saxophone. A musician's photograph might be used for business purposes, to advertise an act or to distribute to fans. So too might the picture of an musical group. Inscriptions let us see who a band's fans were.

Government agencies also took photographs for a variety of reasons. Licenses might carry a photograph for security or identification purposes; public works projects might be documented; the uses to which streets were being put or the need for repairs might be recorded.

We can read such photos in ways that their original creators might not have intended. We can see what kinds of jobs people held, the street on which they lived, the way they played. We can find blacks restricted to jobs as unskilled or service workers, or the dirtiest and most dangerous work sites. We find them in segregated neighborhoods.

Sometimes these official photographs were meant to document adversity, but in them — as in the pictures that recorded blacks as incidental facts at construction projects or in street scenes — we can see faces that want to tell us more. They want to tell us of personal pride even when surrounded by adversity, of a spirit that was often able to transcend poverty. When we look into these visual documents of the past, we can understand that, for black Americans, to survive was to triumph.

WHERE TO FIND OLD PHOTOGRAPHS

The pictures that can mean the most to us individually can often be found at home. Ask older family members which relatives might have the best collections. If your family has roots in a community in the South, you might want to extend your search to family members who still live there. Small-town newspapers — often saved at local historical societies or at the state university or state archives — might also have pictures for you to read.

For life in Philadelphia, the City Archives (City Hall Annex, fifth floor) is a treasure trove of street scenes and photos of public construction projects. The Atwater Kent Museum (15 S. 7th St.) has pictures taken by some city departments, and across the street at the Balch Institute you can find some family albums. The Free Library at Logan Square has an enormous collection of Philadelphia photographs, and is particularly strong in holdings from the mid-19th century. Temple University's Urban Archives has a large number of photographs taken by reformers to document urban problems. And a book by Temple University Press, "Still Philadelphia: A Photographic History, 1980-1940," uses photographs from these and other sources. It can give you a good idea of what kind of picture you are likely to find at each repository.

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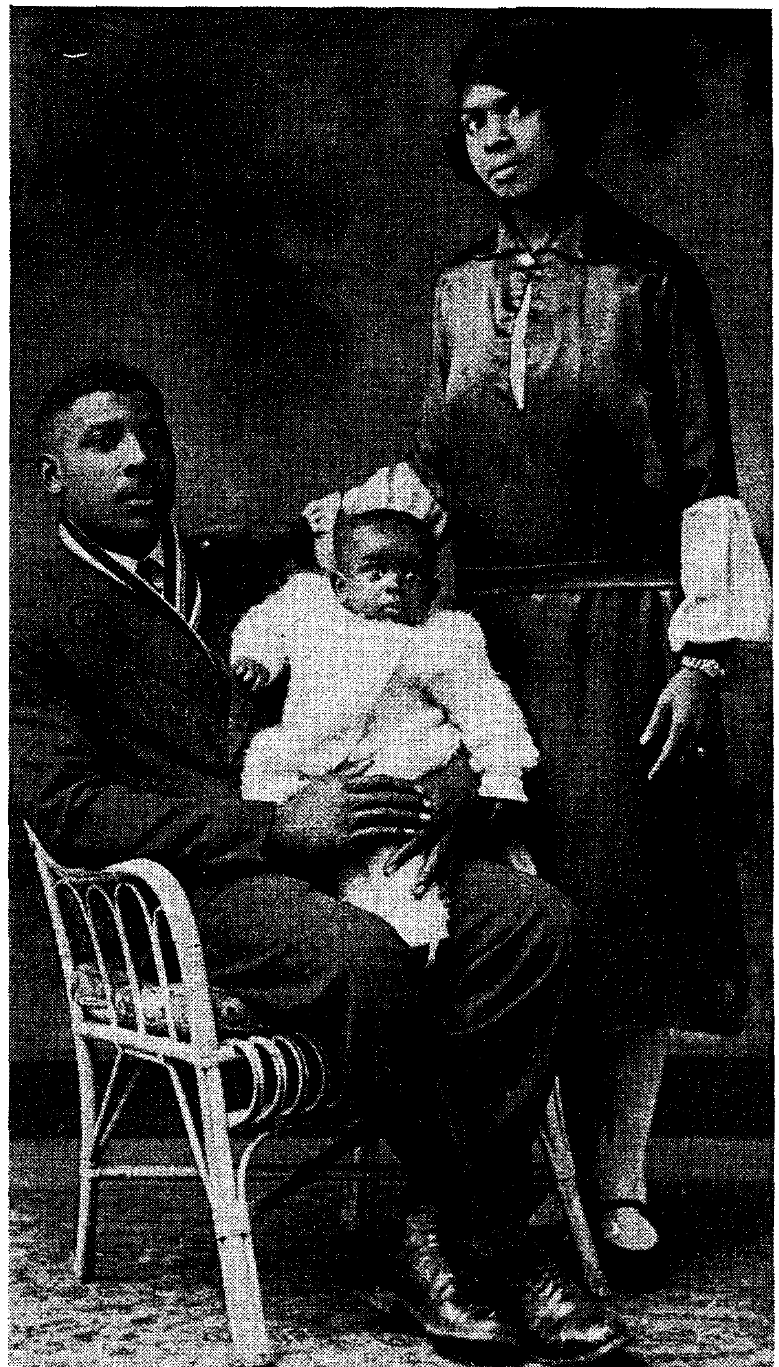

Photo Courtesy of James MacIntyre

Family of Richard MacIntyre, who came from Wilmington, N.C., to Philadelphia in 1917; he worked for Miller Storage Co. on North Broad Street as a furniture mover

Newcomers

Continued from Before Centerfold

ress of Negro life. The processes of assimilation which the colored citizens are carrying on cannot immediately bring back the pendulum which has swung to a position of depressed social, economic and moral life.

Only gradually, as the weights of ignorance, lack of culture and increased racial prejudice, aroused by the white people against the whole Negro citizenry as a result of the tremendous increase in the size of the Negro population, are removed, will the pendulum return to normal ...

Certainly none of us can deny that the migration retarded the steady march of progress of the colored people in Philadelphia. (Sadie Tanner Mossell)

But the old Philadelphia Negro, he was clannish as he could be, and they were reluctant to accept this other Negro ... They just kept them in their place. Philadelphia Negroes were the worst in the country as far as that's concerned. If your parents weren't born here, you were just out. (John Summers)

Disillusionment struck many when they found that much of Philadelphia, just like the South, was strictly Jim Crow. There had been a state equal rights bill passed in 1887 but that was never enforced.

As a young man, Charles Vance came to Philadelphia in 1921 in search of his father:

Well, my first impressions were pretty bad for a while. They always talkin' about what the South was doin', what the South was doin'. And I say now, what the South is doin', it's true. It's no good. In Philadelphia you have restaurants here you couldn't go in and eat. There were beer gardens here out there in Strawberry Mansion. You go in there and buy a glass of beer and soon as you drink it they throw the glass in the trash. You see the people don't realize that, but it's true. The only difference I noticed was that they didn't bother you. But they didn't care for you. (Charles Vance)

Downtown, no hotel would lodge or restaurant serve a black. Theaters were segregated by section. There were certain neighborhoods, like Grays Ferry, that if you had any sense at all, you just stayed clear of. Rents were consistently higher that they were for other groups. Trades open to black craftsmen in the South refused admittance here.

Down in the South, we were humiliated and persecuted. We weren't allowed to do anything. We weren't allowed to have an ambition in the South.

And, of course, when those people came up here, they had those some things in their minds that I had when we crossed the Mason-Dixon Line: that we would get "our justice." That's the way they said it. And when they didn't get that, they resented it.

... But you see, since they did not have scholastic training and since they did not have religious upbringing — some of them came right from the farms, you know — that's all they knew was that rugged, rustic life, and, of course, they thought they could be just embraced right in the city, just coming from the farm without refurbishing themselves at all. And when they didn't get that, they resented it. You see. And that's what gave the impression that they were this and they were that, and they wasn't desirable and so on.

But I thought that a person would stand on their own record, on their own personality. I didn't think that they had to be corraled and everybody put into one basket and pushed aside like the white people did. Because anybody that was black, they figured all of us were the same way. (William Brown)

As was noted at the time, blacks were the only group in the country judged by the lowest representatives of their race, and it was "Sisseretta" and George Washington Jefferson Madison Jones, "the rough, exuberant, shiftless, ignorant, gin-drinking, pool-playing Joe Boe," who represented the Southern black in the popular imagination.

In the coming decades, the thousands of Southerners pouring into the city would transform Philadelphia physically and socially. It was the newcomers who would buy homes in West Philadelphia amd make North Philadelphia the third-largest black community in the country. They would form the population base large enough to support new black businesses; they would fight the city's political establishment and help break the Republican machine that had run Philadelphia since the 1880s; and they would be among the leaders in the overthrow of Jim Crow in the city.

The great majority of people who made the trip north led quiet and private lives:

And all in all, most did prefer life in the city to the farm.

We just liked the city. We liked the city. Brother-in-law was tellin' me a joke. He was ridin' around in Philadelphia and passed a house there and a woman standing in the door we know'd. Come up from our home. And my sister said, "That's Aunt Maude standing in the door there."

It was on Christian Street. So he backed his car back and was talking to Maude and said, "How you like it here?"

And she said, "Oh, Francis, fine!"

Francis said, "Well, why don't you come out to see me sometime?"

"No, you live way out in the country."

She was born there on a tobacco farm, wheat farm. Yeah, she was born way, way, way out the city and she actually got growed, got married, had kids, and she come to Philadelphia and was tore all to pieces about Philadelphia.

"No, Frank. I can't come out to see you. You live far out in the country," she says. "It's too dark out there. Too dark." (James Plunkett)

Photo Courtesy of Isaac Royal

Even a telephone was new to people just up from the farms

Special to the Daily News by Donnie Roberts

James Plunkett: "We just liked the city"

The New Philadelphians

Population Growth by Blacks and Foreign-Born Immigrants, 1870-1920

Year	Total	Blacks	Germany	Ireland	Italy	Poland	Russia
1870	674,022	22,147	50,746	96,698	516	146	94
1880	847,170	31,699	55,169	101,808	1,656	577	276
1890	1,046,964	39,371	74,971	110,935	6,799	2,189	7,879
1900	1,293,697	62,613	71,319	98,427	17,830	15,108	28,951
1910	1,549,008	84,459	61,480	83,196	45,308	—	90,697
1920	1,823,779	134,229	39,766	64,590	63,723	31,112	95,744

In the Classroom

1. **Journal Entry:** Have the students write their impressions of what it would have been like if they had been "newcomers" to Philadelphia in the 1920s. Ask them to write their observations and comments about life in the "big city" in the form of a letter to their family and friends back home in the South.

2. **Define** the following words used in this program:

ignorant
brethren
metropolis
boisterous
resurgence

3. **For Research and Discussion:**

a. Using the statistics in the above chart on the growth of black and foreign-born groups for Philadelphia's population between 1870 and 1930, have the students make a bar graph (using different colors for each group) showing this particular population growth.

On the back of the graph, have the students write a paragraph comparing the growth of Philadelphia's black population to the growth of the different immigrant groups represented in the table. Then have them write a paragraph or two on how similar or **different** the Southern blacks' migration experience was to that of the European immigrants coming to Philadelphia in the early 20th century.

b. Using the information presented in the narrative text and the oral histories about what it was like for Southern blacks to be "newcomers" to Philadelphia in the 1920s, have the students write an open letter to the Philadelphia Tribune offering advice to Southern blacks who have recently migrated to the city.

Special to the Daily News by Donnie Roberts

Bessie Yancey came to Philadelphia from Virginia in 1918 . . .

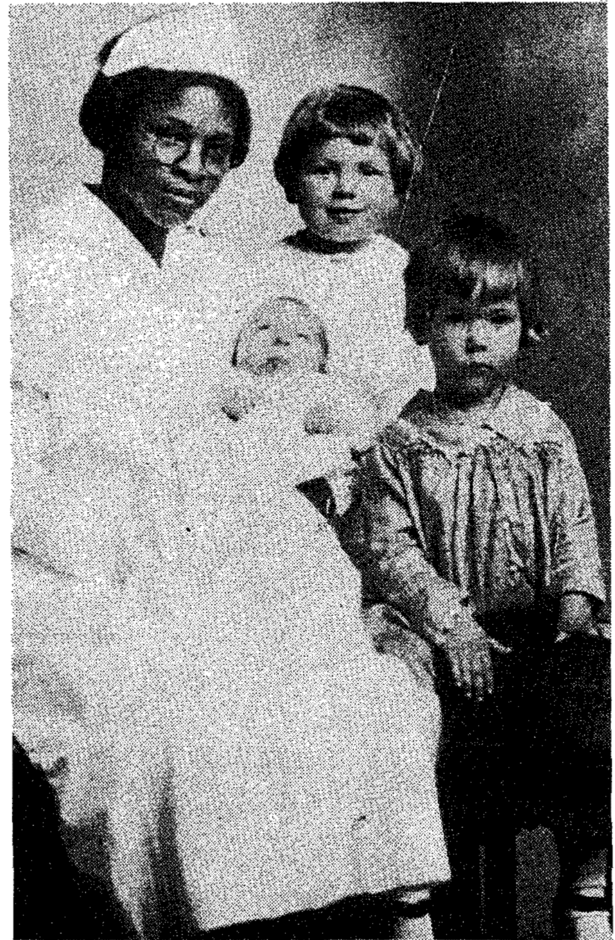

Photo Courtesy of Bessie Yancey

. . . **and took a job** as a nursemaid for a white family

Domestic Work

Domestic work was the backbone of Philadelphia's black economy. In 1920, over 86 percent of all black women were employed as maids.

Our family worked for one family of people in Columbia, S.C., for about 25 years. My mother was the first one to work there, and after I got old enough, I worked there. That same girl, my daughter there, I worked long enough till she got big enough to work.

And I heard so many people on my side goin' to Philadelphia. Goin' to Philadelphia. So I got a notion to go to Philadelphia, too. So I told her one day. I said, "Miss Nims, I'm goin' to Philadelphia."

"Oh, Lilly. Those Yankees don't want you up there."

I said, "I goin' to find out for myself."

And I did. 1925. 1925 I came to Philadelphia. And I been workin' all of my days up here. Raisin' my family — a mother of nine and raised them all. Now I got so many grands and great-grands I can't count them all. But you know when you put God in your program, He makes a way for you. You can't see that way, but He always have a ram in the bush. Somebody goin' to come and do something for you. Right? So I don't feel uneasy now. I don't care when my time comes and I go and meet the Lord because that's what I'm working for. (Lilly McKnight)

Thousands of women, married and single, with children and without, made the trip north during the Great Migration. They were widows, daughters, young women eager to help support their families back home. And for most of them, the only work available — and the work they were most familiar with, outside of farming — was housework.

Today it is difficult to imagine just how basic and important a part of life servants were before the modern age of electric ranges, dishwashers, laundry machines, mops and all the other household conveniences.

Finding work was never a problem. There was always a shortage of women willing to do housework, so jobs were plentiful. During the early decades of this century, white women were moving into jobs opening in sales, industry and clerical positions, leaving housework more and more to women of color.

In 1920 black women were 5 percent of all women over the age of 10, 13 percent of all women wage earners, 54 percent of all servants and 78 percent of all laundresses. The demand was great, requirements minimal. And women poured in from the South, many of them with little knowledge of the city, as Lilly McKnight remembers:

Nothin'. Didn't know a thing about Philadelphia. When I got here, I wished I had stayed in the South, because everything was so different. But I went to the unemployment office, and they sent me on a job. Twelve dollars a week. I didn't bring my children up. I left my children with my sisters in the South. But I worked and worked till I got every one of them up here.

And when I got here I didn't get but $12 a week. I could've stayed down there and made $2 a week and got by just as good. But you like to spread out and see what's going on in the other part of the world. (Lilly McKnight)

So what was it like to work as a domestic in the city of Philadelphia?

Basically there used to be a term called working "in service," where you would, what they call "sleep in," and you would probably have a half a day off, one day a week. Other than that you stayed on the job. You slept in, ate in . . . everything. If you were a man, maybe you would be a butler, houseman and chauffeur. The woman would cook and wash, iron and clean. You never had any time to yourself. (George Madison)

Domestic work was the backbone of the black economy. And in 1920, just to give an example of one year, over 86 percent of all black women employed in Philadelphia were doing it. Though day work was becoming more and more popular, live-in service was still the greatest demand. Most families had only one live-in maid. She did the housekeeping, cooked the meals, helped take care of the children . . . did everything but the laundry, which was usually sent out or saved for a washerwoman who came in on Thursdays.

Bessie Yancey came north to help support her family after her father hurt his back lifting railroad ties. She arrived in the city in 1914 and obtained work as a nurse.

I started work with a dollar and a half a week. And I was inexperienced and thought that was a lot of money for a greenhorn like me that was coming up from the country. And the experienced people didn't get too much more than that. If they got $10 a week they was doin' well. In those days you could live on it. Could dress yourself and you could pay your room rent, and ahhh, if they wanted to . . . were smart enough, could have a few pennies left over. (Bessie Yancey)

Coming from a large family, you learned housework while at home, often working with mothers in the "big house" as children. So by the time you arrived in the North you had experience. But Northern ways could be quite different.

Minnie Whitney ran away from home in 1917 to escape from working in the fields. Soon after arriving she took a private position, and on her first day on the job she was told to cook an eggplant. Never having seen one before, she began to boil it, when the mistress of the house discovered her mistake:

And some of these things was hard for me to get adjusted to. I didn't know how to cook. I knew how to cook the Southern way. So she said, "If you're willing to learn, I'll teach you."

So she learned me. But there were so many things that stood out, that they knew I was from the country. Because Mrs. Stroganoff, she told me like this: "I knew you were from the South, but don't worry about it."

She said, "I like to get little greenhorns," she said. "Then I can learn them my way and they're easy to train."

I said, "Well, I don't know how to eat the Jewish foods." But I found out. There were lots of times I was surprised at that food, and I had to become accustomed to it. So many things I had to get adjusted to. (Minnie Whitney)

Beulah Collins was born on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, where she in all likelihood would have remained had not her husband died in the influenza epidemic of 1918, leaving her with child. Like so many others like her, she took work as a live-in maid with a family in a large house on Lincoln Drive.

Well, I was young and I could get around. I hadn't considered it so hard because I had come from the country where it was hard, and I just felt like I had fallen in luck. And I got up there and I had my baby, and we'd work during the day. These friends of mine what worked for her sister, we had clubs that we went to. I was young and I enjoyed myself. Yeah. Life was pretty easy. (Beulah Collins)

See **DOMESTIC** Next Page

Domestic

Continued from Preceding Page

Compared to work on the farm, domestic work was not as a rule terribly difficult. Most housewives adjusted loads so as to keep servants not too unhappy. Housewives wanted to keep a good maid. It was expensive and time-consuming to train someone new, and the emotional trauma involved in accepting them into the family could be great. Even so, housework did not pay well, as Beulah remembers:

Oh boy, that's sayin' somethin' now. She paid me $13 a week. A week! Won't forget that. I think she raised me a little bit, but I . . . she started me at $13.

Well, I made myself satisfied because I had just come from the country where we weren't getting nothin'. And I had this child to take care of. (Beulah Collins)

Though wages were greater than in the South, the higher cost of living offset much of the gains. And on the average, black women made about one-half of their male counterparts. Still, many were able to save enough to send something home or to take care of their children living elsewhere in the city. What is amazing, in retrosepct, is that wages were not a greater point of contention.

But then, these women were from the South. Not only were they were used to a lower standard of living, but it was a life of isolation, in which you lived in the midst of a family.

Close attachments to the family were often developed — most of the women we talked to still retain affection for most of their employers — and though a bad placement put you at the mercy of every whim and demand of the "Mrs.," these Southern women were also generally inclined to accept their lot in life.

Well, I had it pretty good because I always, I always knew how to work. When you know how to work, you can get a job. And they like you and you like them. They like somebody to be humble, kind, a little bit of manners . . . not no fresh somebody. And I was never fresh. So I got along fine. Everybody treated me fine. I had no complaints. I was treated just fine by the people I worked for up here. Everywhere I ever worked. (Lilly McKnight)

But not all people were temperamentally fit for domestic work.

There is a certain type of personality that can take that type of housework. I couldn't. It was sort of demeaning. Because you are not actually a human being. You are a piece of furniture. They would say anything and do anything in front of you, and you were not supposed to notice it. (George Madison)

That's why I say things were very, very bad when I came to Philadelphia, because I was disappointed with Philadelphia. Because they say going up north, well, you feel you are going to something great. I'm going up north where the money falls from the trees.

But when you get to Philadelphia you find it different. It was very much different because when you do housework in Philadelphia you wash the windows, you wash the walls . . . you did everything. You didn't just go in there like people going in there and you work from 8 to 4 or from 9 to 5. You made those hours. And you was working all the time you was there. (Fannie Hutchinson)

Photo from Whittier Center Annual Report, 1916

Many women preferred taking in laundry to live-in domestic service; by working at home, they could stay with their children

I felt like this: I don't mind working, but I don't like to be droved. When you're driving me and you're going to tell me after I done worked and I'm tired now and I feel that's enough and you're going to come back and find the other half of the house for me to clean and another big tub of clothes to wash, so I felt that was just like my grandmother had told me. Because sometimes she said she would work and work and work and then she had figured that the day was ended, and she said the "Mrs." would go and find more and she would be working till late in the night.

So I felt depressed because I felt like she was driving me. She wouldn't say, "Will you do it?" . . . "You WILL do it." It was like a demand, and I didn't like it, because after I left home and got from under the rules of, like they say, slavery . . . because I'm a second generation in from slaves. I come here to Philadelphia. I felt it more when they . . . well, just the same as I felt it in the South. (Minnie Whitney)

In Philadelphia they worked you harder than in the South. Servants were more expensive, the pace of life faster, the demands on workers greater and the intimacy of people less. Day work could be especially grueling, as there was no personal bond built from living together, and housewives would attempt to exact every last ounce of work out of their underpaid servants.

And what were the options for women who were temperamentally or otherwise disinclined from housework?

We heard it was great opportunities for blacks, and we didn't find it like we had heard it when we came. Jobs were menial jobs. And yes, I could get a job in someone's kitchen, but I didn't want that. I wasn't educated for that. So I didn't accept that. I was a governess for a while. And that's as far down as I went. (Utensie Hillian)

It was not uncommon to find women with college degrees, who had taught school in the South, employed as maids or washerwomen. The only Philadelphia schools blacks could teach in were the all-black elementary schools, and these had long waiting lists. Black businesses were few and employment hard to obtain. Jobs in sales, in clerical positions and in many professions would not employ black women until the 1930s, and even then only in token form.

The principal alternative to domestic work was "public work," doing much the same chores as they did in people's homes, but in office buildings, laundries or stores. They might work as maids, cleaners, elevator operators and waitresses, with some as stock girls, wrappers, porters and sorters, really any sort of menial job in which they did not come in contact with the public. There was some factory work available, too, but for most, it was no option at all.

I went to a factory once to work and I stayed there for about three days. The crowd was too rough. Cursing and swearing in your face all day long, and I couldn't be bothered with those kind of people. I wasn't brought up like that. (Lilly McKnight)

Now, I don't know, because I'm a domestic worker. I can't stand crowds. When I came here, I had an aunt that was working in the tobacco factory.

No way in the world I would work in the tobacco factory. I visit her a couple of times, and the smell in that tobacco factory . . . just no way I would work in it. I would rather take my laundry home and do it or go into a white woman's house and clean basements or something other than do laundry than all that stink in the tobacco factory.

And in the factories, perhaps, the pay is better, I don't know. I can't tell because I'm not a, I'm just not a mixer. I never did any public work. I love to cook. I love to laundry. I just love . . . I just love to be at home. (Ella Lee)

It's what you get used to. I was better brought up. I couldn't work in a place like that. It just didn't suit me. You know what suits you and what don't suit you, don't you? You want to be satisfied with what you do, right? (Lilly McKnight)

To Ella, Beulah, Lilly and others like them, the trials of domestic work were still preferable to labor in the factories. They grew up on the farm, surrounded by family. Domestic work was more familiar to them. It wasn't as rough, noisy, hurried or regimented. Factory work, even with the possibility of better wages and more free time, was just too great a leap to make.

But there were women who preferred work in the factories. Especially during the war, when wages were high and opportunities greater, black women deserted the homes in favor of industrial employment.

But with few exceptions the wages were low — less than those paid to white women doing the same work. They were treated poorly and confined to the worst machines and least desirable occupations. Philadelphia's tobacco factories had employed black women for decades in the stripping and stemming of the tobacco leaves.

But in the tobacco factory, that was where it was hard. And they had all colored in there. And they had, you know, one dressing room for all those women to go in there and, you know, get washed up and get ready to

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Department of Public Safety—Bureau of Elevator Inspection
CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

Elevator Operator's License

Lillian Coburn

having been duly examined and having qualified in accordance with the Ordinance of Councils, dated April 19th, 1917, is hereby licensed to operate a Passenger Elevator for one year from date.

Saml B Brooks
CHIEF

9-7-1927

Photo Courtesy of Cottie DeCosta

'Public' Employment

Not all black women worked as domestics in the 1920s. There was a limited number of "public" jobs available, such as operating an elevator in an office building. Lillian Coburn came north with her husband from Tarboro, N.C., in 1923 to find better working conditions. She became a licensed elevator operator when her children were old enough to care for themselves.

Domestic

Continued from Preceding Page

go home.

And the one time they took us around touring the factory. And you should have saw how they had it for the whites, you know. They had big nice places for them to go and wash up. And the place was just as clean as a whistle, and I knowed they had somebody to clean for them.

But we had to clean our own when we got finished and had to stop in time and had to clean up our own place, you know. And it was awful in there.

... I knowed it wasn't fair. I know the way they treated us wasn't fair because you know they only paid when we was on piecework. They only paid 25 cents a bunch ... Sometimes those girls would be standing up at those machines and working both hands. And it wasn't fair at all, the way they treated you. But what could you do? You couldn't do anything. (Marie Mathis)

Attempts to integrate the work forces were usually met by strong opposition from the white workers. So women would move from job to job, filling in where needed, and laid off as soon as the order was filled or the season was over.

... And I worked in quite a few places. I couldn't think of all the names of all the places I worked. A lot of times, you know, work gets short and you get laid off. You find another job before they call you back there. And so we just go on from there. (Marie Mathis)

And that reminds me too. I was ironing, and the lady said to me ... The storm came up ... it was lightning. She said, "Willa. You through?"

I told her, "No, ma'am. I'm not through." I told her, "I don't work when it's lightning — for nobody! I'll finish and go home when I'm finished." ... What I told her. She didn't bother me. Mmhhh. "I don't work when it's lightning for nobody." I told her that too. I said, "That's why I didn't work in the factory. That's why I'm not in a factory. I want to work where I can stop."

I knew I could get another day's work, you see. I could get day's work and I knew it. (Willa Allen)

> ***"I came here to Philadelphia because people said it was better, so much better living in the North than it was in the South. But so far as I am concerned, you have got to work like a dog to have anything, anywhere you go.***
>
> **Ella Lee**

Another reason Willa preferred day work was that it enabled her to be with her family in the evenings. For women living in, this was not possible. The only time you had off was Thursday afternoons and every other Sunday. So how did you meet other folks? Go courting? Manage a family life?

And many women with children did do live-in work. Coming north, they would bring the kids with them or leave them with family until they could afford to send for them. Once the whole family was up here, there was the problem of how to raise your children from afar.

Yeah ... you can't bring them all at one time. The train fare was too much, and then you didn't know where you were going to stop at. They would take in one quicker than they would four or five. So it's best you come and make a plan for yourself and then send back and get them. 'Cause I left them with my sisters. I had three sisters down in the South, all of them are dead now, and they took care of my children and I sent after, and could soon get all of them together.

... I felt pretty good because they went to school here and went to church here, and I felt pretty good over it. No use to make sadness when you don't have to. (Lilly McKnight)

Arriving in Philadelphia, she had to seek work in a private family. In order to do that, she had to find a place for her son.

A nice women I met, she said, "Beulah, I know a woman who will take care of your child and she takes care of children. And if you want to go into this private family, well, she'll take care of your children."

They called her Mom Taylor, and she raised them just like they were her children. She had four or five children, maybe six of them ... And I thought I was perfectly contented with Mom Taylor because she had other people's children there and took 'em just like her own. Taught them to get up and how to wash their selves, how to do little jobs and do little jobs, to wash the dishes. Some would have a day to clean their room, just like if she were their mother.

And I felt pretty well satisfied because he was there with those boys and girls. I felt pretty good. I felt like it was the place for me.

I worked for Mrs. Richards for all those years and she know I had this child, and on certain days she would come out there, let him stay with me overnight and over the weekends, and then he would go back to Mom Taylor. (Beulah Collins)

Circumstances wouldn't change much during the 1920s. Though day work was rapidly replacing live-in, black women would have to wait another generation until other types of jobs would open for them.

Housework was the backbone of the black economy in the city of Philadelphia. Men could be laid off or injured, the stock market could rise or fall, the world could turn upside down. But for black women, steady employment, often with the same family for many years, was always there — year in and year out.

So how should we conclude our program on domestic work in the city — about not only an occupation, but a way of life that today is as rare as it once was common?

It was a world of mixed blessings. Women developed a philosophy of life that sustained them. As Lilly says, "No use making trouble when you don't have to." They worked hard, raised their children, supported their families, stuck close to the church, and led quiet lives. Some are bitter, some contented. Some happy they made the move; others wish they had never come.

Well, I think the white thought they were better than the colored. They considered us poor, under like slaves, and "You do this" and "You do that" and "I'm the ... above you."

She wasn't going to give me all she could give me. That goes with white people right up here today. They ain't goin' to give us what they give white people. They ain't going to give us what they are goin' to give their sister and brother. They just got something against colored people, the black race.

And they wanted us to work for them. But you ain't too black to work for them. You ain't too black to get down there and scrub their kitchen, wash their dishes. But you are too black ... there's just something about that black skin. They don't consider God made us at all. (Beulah Collins)

I came here to Philadelphia because people said it was better, so much better living in the North than it was in the South. But so far as I am concerned, you have got to work like a dog to have anything, anywhere you go.

Now you are recording this, and I hope you let somebody read it. Now my grandmother and grandfather were slaves. Both of them were slaves. And I have plowed many a furrow in the state of Georgia. I have worked. I know what work is and I know what not work is.

And I know, honey, if you don't work, you ain't gonna have nothin' unless you steal. I know a lot. And I have worked just as hard here in the state of Pennsylvania as I worked in Georgia. Yes, I came here, and when I came here I find my family, some of them here. And some of them here died just as poor as some of them died in Georgia. Some of them died here with nothin', just like some of them died in Georgia ... and in Florida.

That's true. (Ella Lee)

In the Classroom

1. Journal Entry:

For the girls: It's 1910, and you are a black waitress at a local restaurant. You have just been replaced and demoted to a position working at the basement counter of the restaurant. Write about your feeling concerning this change in your work experience. Also comment on what you might do about this situation.

For the boys: It's 1919, and World War I has just ended. You, a black employee, are working at a local manufacturing company and have been told that you will lose your job to a returning veteran. Write about your feelings concerning this change in your work experience. Also comment on what you might do about this situation.

2. Define the following words used in this program:

domestic work	standard of living
"public work"	indiscriminately

3. For Research and Discussion:

Have the students interview a couple of male and female family members (grandparents, mother, aunt, cousins) or friends of the family who had work experience outside of the home. Make sure the students interview individuals from different age groups so that they have an opportunity to compare generational differences, if any.

The students should inquire about the types of jobs they had, where they worked, how they got to work, how satisfied they were with their work experience, and whether or not they felt discriminated against. Have the students bring this information into class for discussion.

Make a list on the blackboard for the students' survey findings for each category of questions. Ask the students if they can draw any generalizations from their survey responses.

THE GREAT MIGRATION

Men's Work

For a black man, the only jobs available were the unskilled, backbreaking work of a laborer. This was true even for black men who had training in skilled professions.

Well, the South was always very ... a part of it — I don't say all of it — but the state I was born in, South Carolina, there wasn't much enterprise there — factories and stuff like that. It was more of farmin' country. Raised cotton and corn and stuff like that. And therefore the wages was practically nothin'. And when the war broke out, why, the people left there coming up here looking for work in the war plants, and that's what brought me up here. (Harvey Wilson)

The migration to Philadelphia did not begin in the summer of 1916, when the first trainload of black laborers was brought up by the Pennsylvania Railroad. There had been a steady stream coming for decades: Some 44,000 arrived between 1890 and 1910 as part of the "advance guard."

Most of the jobs back then were of two kinds: "service" and as unskilled laborers. The service jobs — as porters, servants, waiters, barbers — had traditionally been black folks' work.

But with the rise of Jim Crow during the early years of this century, blacks were being driven out by the Italians, Portuguese and other immigrant groups.

Now a black man with broad shoulders and strong arms could always find work hauling, digging and toting for the street railways, railroads, steel mills and on the waterfront, where great numbers of strong, unskilled laborers were required. And many of the men employed by the Philadelphia Mass Transit Co., Atlantic Refining, Franklin Sugar and others were either recruited in, or recently up from the South.

Rev. Charles Albert Tindley's first job upon his arrival in Philadelphia was as a hod carrier.

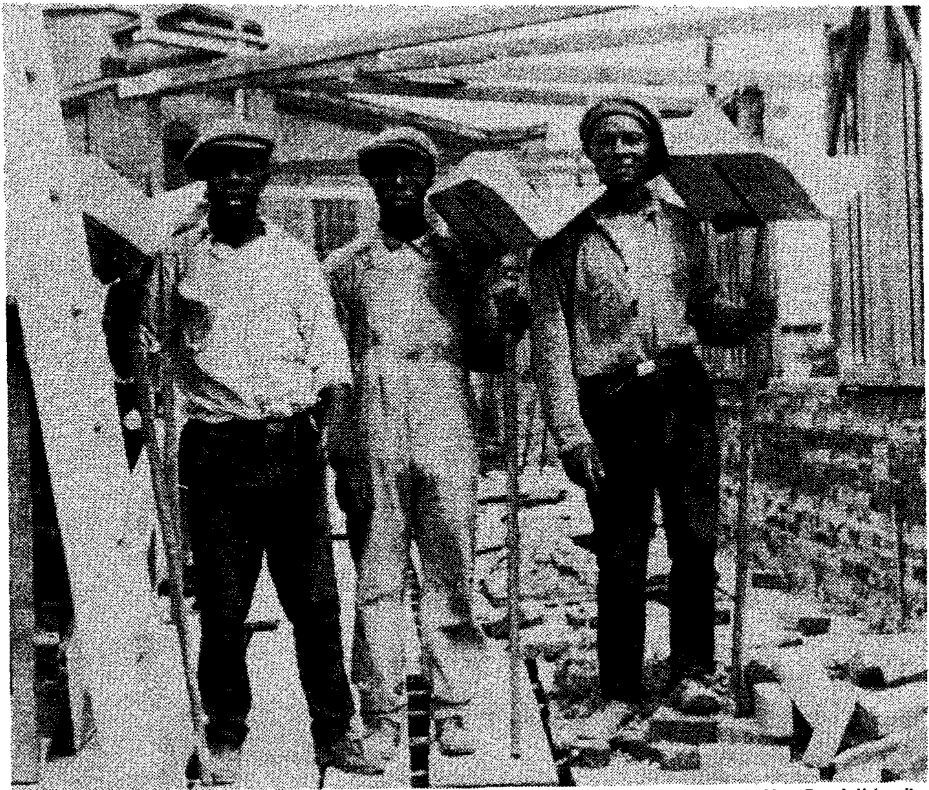
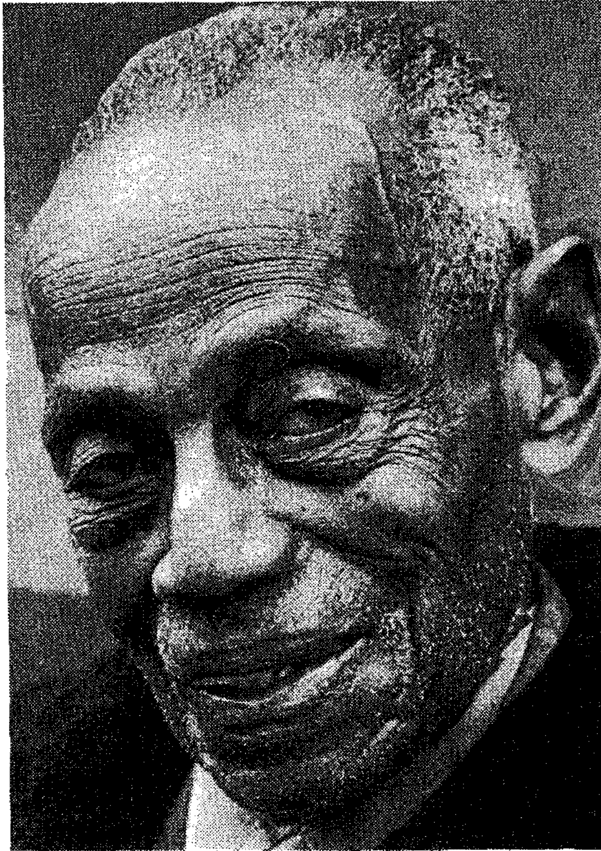


Photo Courtesy of Urban Archives, Temple University

Hod carriers in 1924; carrying bricks was typical of the job opportunities for blacks in that era



Special to the Daily News by Donnie Roberts

William Fields remembers a hard winter in 1917

Some even treated their black workers with some sense of justice. By 1900 the Midvale Steel plant in the Nicetown section of the city employed some 800 to 1,000 men, paid them wages equal to their white counterparts and allowed upward advancement.

But before the war, companies like Midvale were in a small minority. Blacks were still excluded from most forms of industrial employment until the curtailment of immigration from Europe at the outbreak of the war forced employers to turn south for their workers.

Between July 1916 and January 1917, the Pennsylvania Railroad would bring 12,000 men north on free transportation to work for the railroad. Some 2,000 of them came to Philadelphia. The men were put up in makeshift labor camps: tents and converted boxcars supplied with cots and separate facilities with showers and toilets.

Now we stopped at a place at the railroad that was like a shanty where the train ended up at, and I told you, they had done fixed food and everything like that for us, so you was workin' on the railroad then.

Some of the boys that come to Philadelphia and went around and got acquainted with some people, and they tell us when they come back and say why are we sleeping there and telling how good Philly was. So I decided I would try Philly out. So they, the people that brought us up here, they didn't mind me. They didn't mind you leaving.

You could leave anytime you want. So I worked about a week and then decided to come to Philadelphia. (Ernest Grey)

And indeed, why live in a tent and do backbreaking work, when only miles away lay the big city? Jobs were plentiful — in hotels, in private service and especially in the city's heavy industries.

As did others like him, Mr. Grey stayed a week, received his first paycheck, and then made his way to the city, putting up at a boarding house on 16th and Lombard streets. The next day he and a friend made their way across the river to Camden, where they got jobs with the Campbell Soup Co.

The railroad soon discontinued its experiment in free transportation. But by then the migration was in full flow. In August 1918, 850 requisitions by Philadelphia area industries were placed for 257,164 men. Of that number, 186,000 were for Negroes to be used in unskilled labor.

William Fields worked as a waiter in Dallas, Texas, when the railroad's labor agent came to town. He came here on the free transportation in the summer of 1917.

After the summer hotel season ended, he hired on as a porter at Strawbridge's. But the $11 a week paid there was less than he had been making in Dallas. So he headed out to the Baldwin Locomotive Works in Eddystone to work in the molding shop. That lasted until Thanksgiving, when began one of the worst winters in the city's history.

It snowed from Thanksgiving till March, every night and every day. It sure did ... It was rough. I really got my fingers and toes frosted, because I was just jobbing around, and when one day they had teams, you know, and he was carrying them from Delaware Avenue out to 46th Street. That's the day I got my hands and toes frosted.

And I wasn't really dressed for this part of the country at that time. I still had my Southern clothes. So it got kinda rough. That was the roughest winter. We haven't had one like that since then, like that one. (William Fields)

Winter eventually passed, and with the coming of spring, the flood of migrants would reach its peak, some 12,000 people pouring into the city between April and June; most of them heading for work in the city's industries.

Father was a hammer shop foreman at Midvale. Every Sunday morning before church somebody would come to the house, bringing a brother, a cousin, a relative, a friend, who had just come from the South to Philadelphia to get a job which had actually started in some firms immediately after the start of World War I.

They were just ordinary people from the farms — people who were farmers or worked farm work. Most of them were people with little education. But at that time most jobs in mills — especially in steel mills and plants of that type — didn't require any education at all. It wasn't necessary. Just brute strength, so that it wasn't necessary to be able to read or write.

And these were surplus workers who at the slightest slacking of activity would be the first to be laid off. And they never worried about additional workers to any extent because there would always be men outside the employment offices inquiring about jobs. (Jack Jones)

Business was booming and production churning at a frantic pace. Hughsey Childs came north to visit his brother in the fall of 1917, ended up staying the winter, and hired on at the Midvale plant in Nicetown.

And you see, it was so dangerous, people were getting killed just like that. Yeah, it was dangerous. Fallin' into those big vats where they would

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Men

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cool that, cool those barrels to a gun. They had an oil well. That's what they cooled them in. They didn't cool them in water. They cooled them in oil. and sometimes you see just a blue light. That's where a man had slipped and fallen over into that thing. [Clap.] Didn't see his body no more. That's just how they died. (Hughsey Childs)

The war industries, employing thousands, allowed blacks to break into manufacturing and mechanical jobs not previously considered within the range of their activities — and not just into unskilled positions. They were employed as crane operators at Baldwin's Eddystone plant, as sugar foremen at Campbell Soup, as inspectors and crew foremen at Hog Island.

For the common laborer, wages were at an all-time high. Things were looking pretty good all round. And then came the end of the war.

Well, most of the fellas, well, they got good jobs during the war. Steel plants, defense plants. They got good jobs. Course, after the war they didn't get good jobs. They laid 'em off.

They lost their jobs, yeah. Some of them went back home. Yeah. Any good jobs after the war was over, you get laid off. Course, a lot of those fellas come back ... You had to give them their jobs back.

I know a lot of boys from my home had good jobs at the steel plant, Midvale Steel. They all lost their jobs because after the war was over, them boys come back, they all want their jobs back and they had to give 'em their jobs back ...

You couldn't do nothin'. The jobs were meant to fight for the country, and if you didn't get killed and come back, then they entitled to have their jobs back. (James Plunkett)

Now I was there when the Armistice was signed. And you probably know with your Philadelphia history that immediately after the Armistice, when all the war business shut down and there was a period of very little work and jobs were scarce and a lot of competition by the Negroes of West Philadelphia and North Philadelphia against the whites, the Italians particularly in South Philadelphia.

And there were some nasty riots in Philadelphia during that period. And where we were located, we could look over the Walnut Street bridges and the Chestnut Street bridges from West Philadelphia. And were there from the time we could get to work at 7 in the morning. We could see whites chasing Negroes back over to West Philadelphia and Negroes streaming on back down into South Philadelphia. (Milo Manly)

The economy, of course, would recover. As the nation entered the boom times of the Roaring Twenties, the Great Migration heated up again, peaking for the decade between the fall of 1922 and 1923. But this time, with the return to "Normalcy," jobs for blacks were once again confined to the bottom rungs of the economic ladder.

Well, you see, I was a railroad man in the South. That was my job. When I came here, uh uh. No no no no no no no. You couldn't even get a job in the railroad shops here. When I come here, all that was done by whites. No colored.

So I had to take what I could get. And I didn't make no money. I had to work for a whole lot less here than I did in the South. Class of work I was doing then, I got paid for it.

And I come up here and that was out. And I never ... I stayed up here long enough to get broke and was ashamed to go back South. I would've went back, but if I'd a went back, I wouldn't have had nothin', because I didn't make nothin'.

No, that's the one mistake I made in my younger life. One mistake I made. If I had stayed in the South I think I would've been better off. Yeah, far better off. People in the South today is much better off than the people up here. (Harvey Wilson)

The men coming north included skilled artisans and mechanics, men with educations and professions. And though the wages made feeding a blast furnace in a steel mill could be a step up for someone fresh off the farm, for a baker, carpenter or a plumber, for an insurance salesman or a clerk, the lack of opportunities could be heartbreaking.

Black craftsmen and professionals were excluded from most of the skilled trades, from white-collar occupations, from skilled positions in industry, business and government.

Upon his arrival in the city Mr. Brown, interested in pursuing a career in real estate, approached a realtor and explained his qualifications.

And he said to me, "What a pity."
I said, "Sir?"
He said, "Never mind."

Then he said to me he was glad he had the opportunity to talk to me and that he didn't have no opening like that at this particular time, but he would take my name and address and so forth. But he said to me, "Now, we do have an opening for a janitor and if you know anybody that you would recommend, whoever you recommended to us, we would accept because we know that you would not recommend anybody that was not worthwhile."

And I thanked him and walked out. And I pored over that conversation and I explained it to a person that I knew there in Philadelphia, and he said to me, "You know, he was just offering you a job, a mop and broom. That's all he was doing."

And I came to the realization that was exactly what he was doing. So I felt then that the opportunities that they told me would be available to me before I left the South, it wasn't so.

I found out to my consternation that the white man up north was perfectly satisfied to ride with you on the subway cars, on the elevated trains and sit by the side of you, because when he got up to go where he had to go, he got up with his briefcase and went to his office. But when you got up, you went to a mop and broom, because there was no office for you to go to up to here.

So that is the difference. I found out that it was the same thing, only just painted with different colors. It was that same degree of segregation and denial of privileges that we thought we were going to enjoy when we came north. (Mr. Brown)

Leon Grimes worked at Horn & Hardart:

They would come in and bring a young white boy, maybe just your age, or someone right along with you, where age is concerned, and I would be what they call the head kitchen man, which was actually the head cook. They wouldn't say you was the head cook because I guess they didn't want to recognize you, but I was really a head cook and could do anything in the whole firm, no matter what it was as far as cooking and all the things in the kitchen.

Anyhow, they bring the white boy to me ... Many times I seen this happen. They bring him to me and say, "Grimes. We got a boy here we want you to train."

I say, "All right."
"Show him the ropes."
I say, "All right."

And so sometimes we train the boy, and to make a long story short, before you know it, he was a manager over me and I been there all my life.

One time I protested too much and almost got fired. I was scared too, because I had children. I had a wife and two children by that time. And they would. I told them I wanted a better job, that I got a family. I got to get a promotion. They said, "What you want?"

I said, "I can be a manager." Said, "I been around this company many years." I said, "I can manage something like that."

They cut me off. They didn't want to hear that. "Well, Grimes," he said, "We'll see what we can do."

Well, I never did hear no more from them. (Leon Grimes)

"Nope, I won't scab, but I ain't a joiner kind of fellah," said Jake. "I ain't no white folks' nigger, and I ain't no poor whites' fool. When I longshored in Philly, I was a good union man. But when I made New

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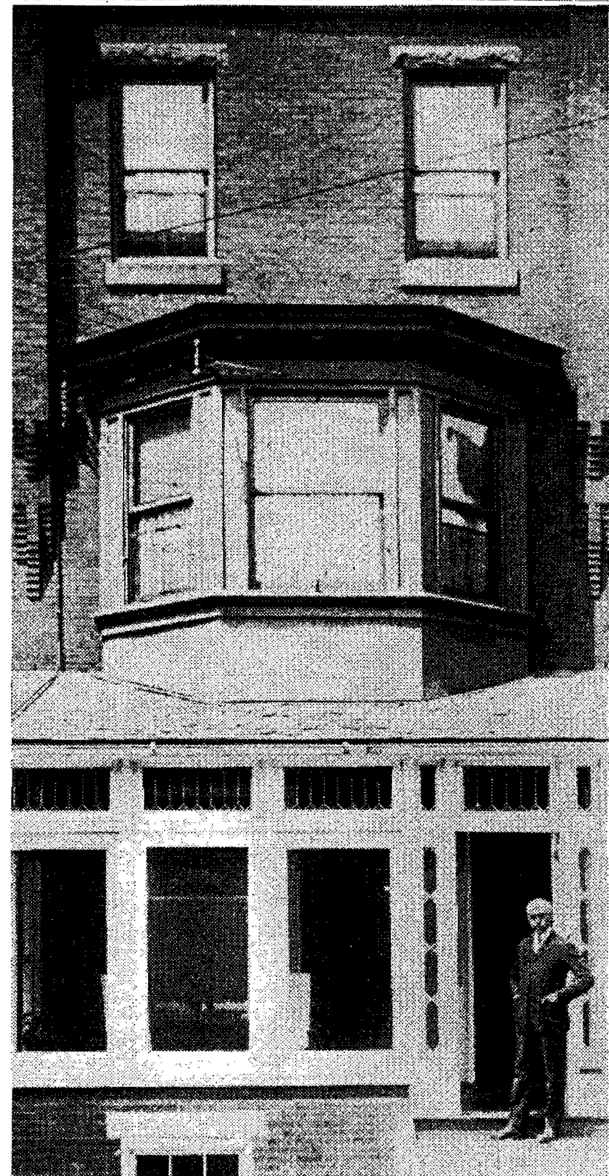

Photo Courtesy of I. Max Martin

Isadore Martin outside real estate office he owned on 42nd Street in 1918

Special to the Daily News by Donnie Roberts

Hughsey Childs: steel plant was dangerous

Photo Courtesy of Atwater Kent Museum

A black labor crew at Hog Island in 1917; some blacks became foremen and inspectors at the shipyard

Men

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York I done finds out that they gives the colored mens the worse piers and holds the best o' them jobs for the Irishmen.

"No, pardner, keep you' card. I take the best I kin get as I goes mah way. But I tell you, things ain't at all lovely between white and black in this heah Gawd's own country.

"But it ain't decent to scab," said Jake.

"Decent mah black moon!" shouted Zeddy. "I'll scab through hell to make mah living. Scab job or open shop or union am all the same jobs to me.

"White mens don't want niggers in them unions nohow. Ain't you a good carpenter? And ain't I a good blacksmith? But kin we get a look-in on our trade heah in this white man's city? Ain't white mens done scabbed niggers outta all the jobs they useter hold down heah in this city? Waiter, bootblack and barber shop? — I got to live and I'll scab through hell to live. ("Home to Harlem" by Claude McKay, 1929)

Before the war, work on Philadelphia's waterfront had paid poorly and been subject to chronic underemployment and unemployment. Because of the low wages and the irregular and heavy work, by 1913 over half the city's 4,400 longshoremen were black, some 60 percent of them up from the South.

Through a series of strikes and organizing efforts, a chapter of the radical union, the International Workers of the World, gained control of the waterfront under the leadership of Benjamin Fletcher, a Philadelphia-born black man.

Local 8 of the Marine Transport Workers of Philadelphia rotated black and white chairmanship on a monthly basis, it purposefully integrated its social functions and work crews and became a national model of racial cooperation and harmony. The "Wobblies" [IWW] maintained control of the waterfront until 1922 when a walkout, broken by black strikebreakers, ended the brief reign of Philadelphia's most famous integrated union.

Most of Philadelphia's industries were virulently opposed to the unionization of their employees. Its clothing and garment mills would be the last in a major Northern city to let the unions in.

By the first decade of the 20th century, Philadelphia manufacturers were importing colored men and women to break strikes in their shops and plants. They were also hired before the war as part of a strategy employed by companies to divide their workers along racial and ethnic lines, and thus prevent them from organizing: a technique once used effectively on the Philadelphia waterfront.

In part as a result of such practices, Northern labor unions — Philadelphia's included — were hostile to black workers and, in general, refused them admittance. White laborers were unwilling to work beside Negro employees; employers were reluctant to hire them and quickly dismissed them upon objections by their white workmen. So most blacks stayed away from the unions. and with good reason.

After I had established my own record as a contractor here, I was in competition with white men working, and I think they resented that. And one of the men told me, why didn't I join the paperhanger and painters' union? And I thought it over. He gave me an application form, and I discussed it with some of my other workers, especially the concrete or cement man. And he said to me, "Don't you join no union," he said, "because if you do you'll never get work."

He said, "Because if you joins the union, you will have to agree to union terms and declare that you are going to follow all the union terms and obligations. And that means that you wouldn't be able to take a job and work for less than union wages. And colored people couldn't pay union wages. And white man wouldn't pay you union wages when he could get a white man to do the same job."

He said, "And if you take that, you would never get a union job because as soon as you took a job for a colored client, you would be regarded as a scab, because you couldn't get union wages from them 'cause they were poor people and they had homes and needed some work done, but they couldn't pay union wages. So you stay out of the union."

And I found out that was good advice, because I could do work for people just by the strength of, by the strength of telling one person would tell another: just by word of mouth. (William Brown)

No, Philadelphia wasn't all it was cracked up to be. There was a ceiling of unskilled jobs that few blacks were able to break through. Last hired, first fired was a devastating reality.

But wages in Philadelphia's, as in other Northern industries, were fairly high. The income of the average unskilled black laborer's family was typical of that for other working-class Americans at the time. And, as historian Kenneth Kusmer has written, "On the whole, the black masses in the Northern ghettoes in the 1920s could view their status as representing both an absolute and a relative advance over their former condition."

There was better education available for the children. You didn't have that fear you lived with in the South. You could vote. And things were slowly changing for the better. But then again, Philadelphia still wasn't all it was craacked up to be.

The best thing I could say about Philadelphia is that Philadelphia enabled me as a self-employed man to give my family a substantial family background and something that kept them from going astray. It kept them in a position where they would know the value of good citizenship. I think I have given them that. They all are good citizens, and I am grateful for that, because my stay or tenure in Philadelphia as a self-employed person has enabled me to do that for my family, and for that I am very proud. (William Brown)

Colored man didn't get much around here years ago. Didn't get much. There weren't any good jobs. You had to take what the other fellow didn't want. (Harvey Wilson)

In the Classroom

1. **Journal Entry:** Have the students look at the photographs in this section. Ask them to write about what it would have been like to do the different types of jobs represented in each of the photographs.

2. **Define** the following words used in this program:

indiscriminately itinerant
requisitions altruism
expendable

3. **For Research & Discussion:** Simulation on Economic Competition of Jobs and Cultural Differences. (Note: Have the students do this activity before they read the section.)

a. Divide the class into three groups. One group wears green ribbons, a second group wears red ribbons, and a third group wears blue ribbons.

b. Give only the green group a board game to play and some cookies (or another appropriate activity for their age group), and ask the other two groups to stand and watch for 10 minutes.

c. Take away the games and cookies from the green group and give them to the red group, having the green group join the blue group watching for 10 minutes.

d. Now take some of the green members' privileges away and give them to a few of the blue members for about five minutes.

e. Have the students take off their ribbons and bring the class back together for a discussion of what took place in the simulation.

f. Ask the members of each group to tell how they felt during the simulation. Ask them to identify their good feelings and bad feelings about the experience. Ask the students if they felt an injustice was done to the blue group and what should or could have been done about it.

The Veterans

These are the men and women who participated in the Great Migration and shared their remembrances for this history. In a special way, the story we have told is theirs.

Hattie Alexander: Born 1900, outside Greenwood, S.C. Came with her family to Philadelphia in 1917. After her father died, returned home, but then came back to the city. Worked in the garment industry for many years and received her high school equivalency degree in 1977 at the age of 77.

Willa Allen: Born 1899 in Columbia, S.C. Came to Philadelphia in 1923 with her husband, whose uncle had a job for him. She did laundry and day work in the city from 1923 to 1960. Moved to North Philadelphia.

David Amey: Born 1893 outside of Durham, N.C. After making $12 for a whole year's work raising tobacco, he came to Philadelphia in 1912, served in World War I, and upon his return to the city became a realtor in South Philadelphia. During 1923 and '24, he worked in the real estate department of the Brown and Stevens Bank.

Dr. Marion Ballard: Born 1904 on Deal Island off the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Came to Philadelphia in 1923 to secure education enough to enter the ministry. Was minister of Tindley Temple in Philadelphia.

Crosby Brittenum: Born in rural Arkansas. Came to Philadelphia in early 1920s as escort for an elder cousin who couldn't read. Worked as a barber in the city for many years.

William Brown (pseudonym): Born 1896, Jacksonville, Fla. Fled Jacksonville in 1917 and came to Philadelphia after a brief stay in New York. Worked in war industries and then established his own business as a carpentry contractor.

Edgar Campbell: Born 1902, Savannah, Ga. Family left Savannah in 1917 and arrived in Philadelphia a few years later. Mr. Campbell worked with his father's real estate business in West Philadelphia before going into politics. Helped organize the Democratic Party in West Philadelphia in the early 1930s.

Hughsey Childs: Born 1880 on a farm outside Greenwood, S.C. While visiting a brother, he worked at the Midvale Steel plant in Nicetown in 1917. He returned to the city to stay in 1921. He spent his working days as a cook in Philadelphia and the suburbs.

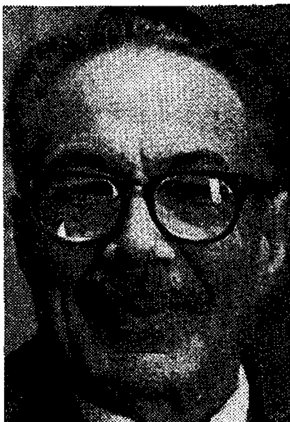
Beulah Collins: Born 1896, Eastern Shore of Maryland. After her husband died in the influenza epidemic of 1918, leaving her with child, Beulah came to Philadelphia to work as a domestic and obtain a better education for her child.

William Fields: Born 1888 in Texas. Came to Philadelphia on the free transportation in 1917 and worked at Baldwin Locomotive and Hog Island during World War I. Was a cook for over 60 years.

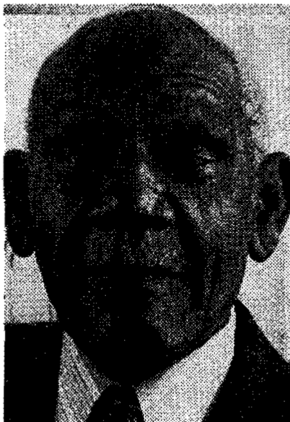
Walter Gay: Born circa 1906, Dawson, Ga. His father, one of the richest blacks in town, brought the family north in 1917 to escape persecution by the white majority. Mr. Gay went on to a prominent legal career as a partner in firm of Austin Norris.

Ernest Grey: Born circa 1897 on Cat Island, Ga. Came to Philadelphia in 1916 on the free transportation provided by the railroad and promptly got a job at Campbell Soup in Camden. He retired from laundry work in the city after 35 years.

Leon Grimes: Born 1899, Palatka, Fla. Came to Philadelphia in 1922, where mother was working as a domestic. Became a first-class cook with Horn & Hardart, where he stayed over 50 years.



Walter Gay



Special to the Daily News by Donnie Roberts

Charles Vance

Fletcher Hillian: Born 1896, Cheraw, S.C. Came to Philadelphia in 1924 after boll weevil had ravaged the family farm. Worked as janitor for North American Insurance before going to the Navy Yard in World War II, and then to Gimbels for 17 years. (Took welding in night school but, being black, could never find a job doing that.) Came here to raise his family and for better educational facilities.

Utensie Hillian: Born 1901 in Due West, S.C. Came to Philadelphia with her husband. Of 10 siblings, six followed her to Philadelphia and stayed with her and Fletcher before going out on their own. (The Hillians came to Philadelphia rather than going to New York because had heard they could buy their own homes in Philadelphia and they did not want to be renters.) Worked many years for the Red Cross.

Fannie Hutchinson: Born 1905 in Virginia. Was one of 16 children. Began working at age 13, and came to Philadelphia in 1926 to do housework for an uncle. She worked in a laundry and eventually owned and ran her own grocery and luncheonette in West Philadelphia.

Jack Jones: Born 1904 in Philadelphia. His father came from North Carolina and started work at Midvale Steel in Nicetown in 1889. During the war, as one of the few black foremen at Midvale, he obtained work for many men recently up from the South. Jack also worked at Midvale in the early 1920s and for a black grocery store in the early 1920s. Retired from the post office.

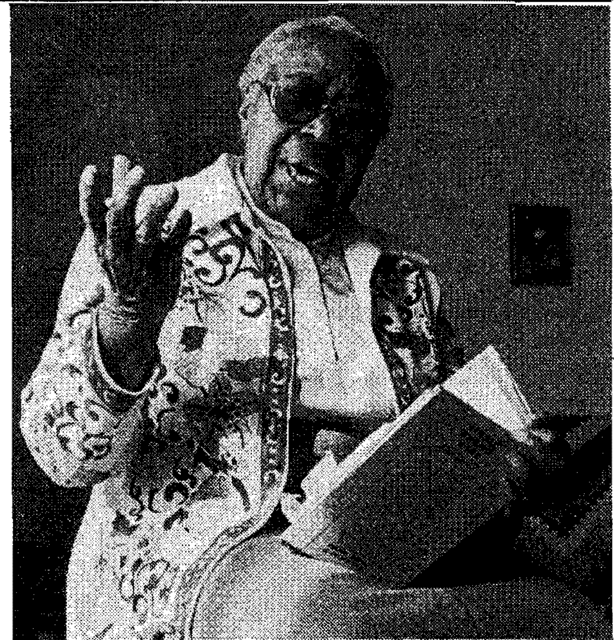
Ralph Jones: Born 1906 in Philadelphia. Graduated from Howard University and went to work for the Independent. Served as editor of the Independent and the Philadelphia Tribune. He is the author of the biography of Charles Albert Tindley and a novel, "The Pepperpot Man."

Ella Lee: Born 1893, Lee County, Ga. Came to Philadelphia from Jacksonville, Fla., in 1929 on advice that her five children could get a better education here. A widow, she did domestic and laundry work in the Philadelphia suburbs; her first job paid $5 a week. Would have gone home if she could could have when she arrived. She still hasn't gotten completely used to the city.

George Madison: Born 1909, Miller's Tavern, Va. Came north to New Jersey with his family in 1922. Came to Philadelphia in 1926 and entered Temple University in 1927. Worked a number of jobs as servant and butler before joining post office, from which he retired.

Milo Manly: Born 1902 in Philadelphia. His father, A.D. Manly, industrial secretary for the Armstrong Association, came to Philadelphia in 1902 after having been editor of the only black daily newspaper in the country in the 1890s and having served as secretary to one of the last Negro congressman of the Reconstruction era. Milo left Cheltenham High School and worked around the city before landing a job with the Relief Board during the Depression. He was active with the NAACP, and worked for many years for the Fellowship Commission. Was also chief investigator during the transit strike of 1944.

Isadore Martin: Born 1911 in Enfield, N.C. Father moved the family north to Philadelphia in 1913. Started in father's real estate business as an office boy in 1917. A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, Martin has been active in the NAACP, serving as secretary during the 1930s. Father was president of the NAACP, Philadelphia branch, during the 1920s.



Special to the Daily News by Donnie Roberts

Minnie Whitney came to Philadelphia in 1918 as a teenager

Marie Mathis: Born 1910 outside Greenwood, S.C. Father brought family north about 1922. Marie didn't like housework and took jobs in the city's tobacco factories during the 1920s.

Lilly McKnight: Born 1894 in Columbia, S.C. "Took a notion" and came to Philadelphia along with two friends in 1925. Did domestic work in the city for over 50 years.

James Plunkett: Born 1896 outside Danville, Va. Son of a sharecropper, started work on the farm at age 11. Having heard glowing reports about the North, he went to work in a brickyard outside New York in the spring of 1917 before making his way to relatives in Philadelphia, where he worked for the railroad. Over the years worked as a bartender, in construction and in factories.

William Robinson: Born 1880 in rural Georgia. "Took a notion" to come to Philadelphia in 1928 along with some friends, basically to see what things were like. First job was as a stevedore on the waterfront, but that being too heavy, took up bartending. Had his own shop in North Philadelphia for many years.

John Summers: Born 1888 in Columbus, Ohio. Came to Philadelphia in 1918 to serve as one of three colored inspectors at Hog Island shipyard. Was a reporter for black newspapers during the 1920s and politically very active, serving as state secretary for Al Smith's presidential campaign in 1928 and running for the state Legislature in 1934. Beginning in the 1930s, became a union organizer for the CIO. Helped to organize the Coatesville Steel Works in 1937.

Charles Vance: Born 1902 outside Mobile, Ala. Left home at age 15 and worked throughout the South in coal mines, labor gangs and on the railroads, before he came to Philadelphia in 1923 in search of his father. Worked in construction as a labor foreman for many years.

Arrow Vaughan: Born Northampton County, N.C. Came to Philadelphia in 1933. Worked as a nurse, married.

Minnie Whitney: Born 1902 in Accomack County, Va. Ran away from home and came to Philadelphia at the age of 16, where she did domestic work. Subsequently went to New York, where she heard there were better opportunities and returned to Philadelphia after she retired from the laundry business.

Annabelle White: Born in rural South Carolina. Came to Philadelphia in 1925 with her family after her father had fled home when, having asked for his wages in cash at the sawmill, was told he would never live to spend them.

Harvey Wilson: Born 1880 in Maysville, S.C. Died 1982. Came to Philadelphia from Jacksonville in 1917. He was terribly disappointed at the lack of opportunities for black men in Philadelphia and would have returned home but for the embarrassment of not having done better. Later became a wholesale grocer in the city and church historian at Mother Bethel.

Bessie Yancey: Born 1898 in Boykins, Va. Came to Philadelphia in 1918 to secure work as an infant nurse to help support her family back home. Worked as a nurse, and a nanny in private service. Her first job in Philadelphia paid $10 a week.

Mrs. E.: Born 1892 in Philadelphia. Father was one of the city's first black police officers. She worked with the Armstrong Association from 1927 into the 1960s as an industrial secretary, helping to find work for black women in the city's industries and businesses.

This special Daily News school supplement is a project of the Newspaper in Education Program and was prepared under the auspices of the **Atwater Kent Museum — The History Museum of Philadelphia.**

The material is based on a yearlong oral history project, conducted by **Charles Hardy** and written and produced by him as a five-part radio documentary for **WHYY 91-FM.** Assisting with the interviews were Donna DeVore, Diane Turner, Harriet Garrett and Jacquie Carlisle. Assisting with locating and documenting historical photographs were George Dutton and Fredric Miller. Project photographer: Donnie Roberts. Musical consultants: David Goldenberg, Dennis Mercier, Doug Seroff and Russ Shor.

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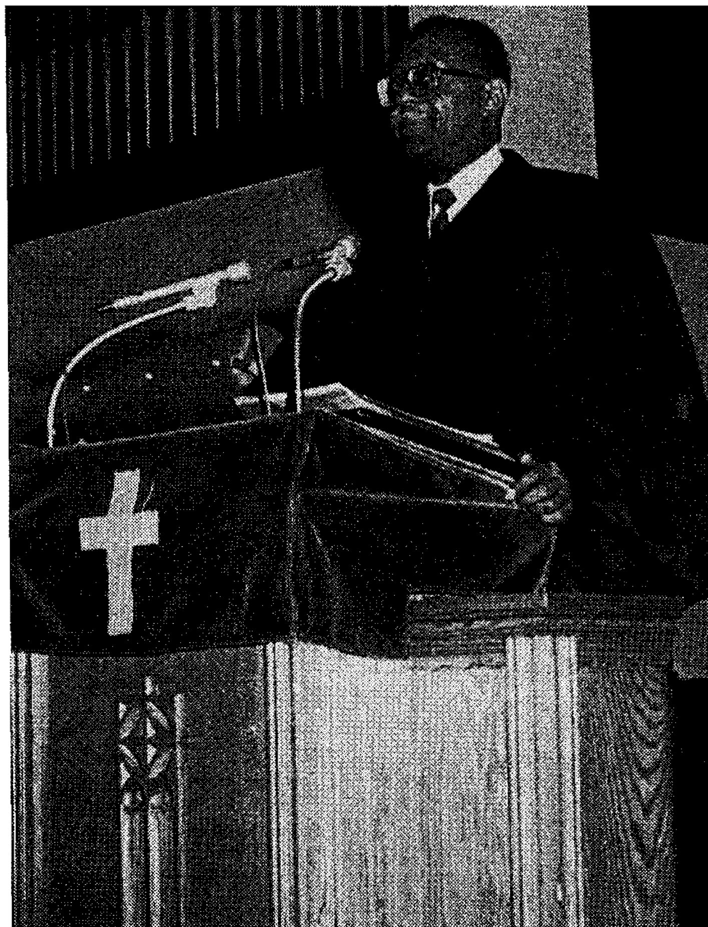
Ideas for the "In the Classroom" activities were prepared by Ellen Just Braffman of the Atwater Kent Museum and Lauryn P. Douthit and Dianne S. Partee of the African and Afro-American Studies Department, School District of Philadelphia. Charles Hardy prepared the "Speaking Our History" section of the supplement, and Morris Vogel, associate professor in the Program in Public History at Temple University, prepared the "Picturing Our History" section.

This supplement was edited by Jerry Carrier, day news editor. The front cover was designed by Leslie Udry, Daily News staff artist. Cover illustration, "The Wood Gatherer" by Michael J. Gallagher, (c. 1930) is from the Josephine Linn Collection of Philadelphia Prints, Atwater Kent Museum. Project coordinator was Lynne Berman, education services manager of Philadelphia Newspapers Inc.

For further information on special Daily News school supplements, call the Newspaper in Education Program at 854-5537.



Special to the Daily News by **Donnie Roberts**

The Voice of 'Goin' North'

The Rev. Marshall Lorenzo Shephard Jr., pastor of the Mount Olivet Tabernacle Baptist Church in Philadelphia, will narrate the series "Goin' North: Tales of the Great Migration" on WHYY 91-FM.

'Goin' North': On the Air

"Life in the South"
Monday, Feb. 11, 4:25 p.m.; Sunday, Feb. 17, 6 p.m.

"Goin' North"
Monday, Feb. 18, 4:25 p.m.; Sunday, Feb. 24, 6 p.m.

"The Newcomers"
Monday, Feb. 25, 4:25 p.m.; Sunday, March 3, 6 p.m.

"Domestic Work"
Monday, March 4, 4:25 p.m.; Sunday, March 10, 6 p.m.

"Men's Work
Monday, March 11, 4:25 p.m.; Sunday, March 17, 6 p.m.

Narrated by Rev. Marshall Lorenzo Shephard Jr., Pastor, Mount Olivet Tabernacle Baptist Church