

Exodusters: African American Migration to the Great Plains

Discussion questions

1. Based on the **newspaper article about the state convention**, the **broadside advertising migration to Kansas**, the lyrics for “**The Land that Gives Birth to Freedom**,” and **Benjamin Singleton’s testimony**, what were the reasons people decided to leave the South? What were the pull factors driving people to go to Kansas?
2. Analyze the religious imagery used to describe leaving for Kansas in the lyrics for “**The Land that Gives Birth to Freedom**.” How might this religious messaging have informed African Americans’ decisions to leave? Briefly research the Biblical significance of the word, *Exodus*. How does the Biblical meaning relate to the Exoduster Movement?
3. Based on the **letter from John Turner** and the illustration from *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, in what ways did the St. Louis black community support the Exodusters? Why do you think it was important to members of that community to help the Exodusters?
4. What do the **photograph of the steamboat**, the **print from Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper**, and the **print from Harper’s Weekly** reveal about how people traveled from the South to Kansas?
5. At the end of **Benjamin Singleton’s testimony**, he calls himself “the father of the exodus.” Using the **broadside advertising migration to Kansas**, the lyrics for “**The Land that Gives Birth to Freedom**,” the **photograph of the steamboat**, and **Benjamin Singleton’s testimony**, evaluate how Singleton’s work to organize migration to Kansas provided a model and inspiration for the Exodus. Highlight evidence in the sources about the St. Louis aid efforts and the illustrations of Exodusters en route that supports the idea that the Exodus was more organic than any one promoter could claim responsibility for.
6. Compare the depictions of “old” and “new” styles of Exodus in the **illustration from Harper’s Weekly**. How do they represent different travel experiences? What challenges or obstacles are evident in the depiction of the “new” style of Exodus?
7. Based on the **excerpt from the Kansas Freedmen’s Relief Association report**, what specific kinds of support did this organization provide to the Exodusters?
8. What does the **photograph of the church building in Nicodemus** suggest about the early years of the town’s history? Using the **map of Graham County**, what can you infer about what life may have been like in the region surrounding Nicodemus? Using the **map of Exoduster towns**, explore where some of the nearest African American communities were for the residents of Nicodemus.

9. Using the [map of Exoduster towns](#), examine the locations of black communities in Kansas and Oklahoma. Considering factors like climate, neighboring populations, and topography, what experiences and challenges do you think may have been common across these communities? In what ways might life in Kansas and Oklahoma towns have been different? Do outside research to explore what African American life was like in Oklahoma and other places on the Great Plains beyond Kansas during the late nineteenth century.

Classroom activities

Ask students to create a fictional character who participated in the Exoduster Movement in the spring of 1879. Have students plot their character's journey on a map and annotate key places or moments on the trip. Students should consider factors such as where their characters originally lived, why they decided to leave the South, their travel route and experiences, and their decision about where to settle. Students should use the images and documents about the travel experience in this set to incorporate details into their annotations. Students may also use the [map of Exoduster towns](#) to select a place that their character would settle. Students should also consider what initial steps their character might take upon arriving in that town to establish a home and begin to support a family there.

Primary source analysis

For each source, ask students to indicate:

- * the author's point of view
- * the author's purpose
- * historical context
- * audience

For inquiry-based learning, ask students to:

- * explain how a source tells its story and/or makes its argument
- * explain the relationships between sources
- * compare and contrast sources in terms of point of view and method
- * support conclusions and interpretations with evidence
- * identify questions for further investigation

Additional tools

- * [Document Analysis Worksheets from the National Archives](#)
- * [Using Primary Sources from the Library of Congress](#)

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This teaching guide helps instructors use a specific primary source set, [Exodusters: African American Migration to the Great Plains](#), in the classroom. It offers discussion questions, classroom activities, and primary source analysis tools. It is intended to spark pedagogical creativity by giving a sample approach to the material. Please feel free to share, reuse, and adapt the resources in this guide for your teaching purposes.

Created by Samantha Gibson, Digital Public Library of America