Introducing the Great Migration and the Tulsa Race Riot 1921 using Human Geography

Overview: Using a geographic lense, this lesson will introduce students to the Great Migration and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921. Students will use primary and secondary sources to explore the events and consequences of this tragedy through the lense of human geography.

National Geography Standards:
• The characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth's surface. (Geography Standard 9)
• How the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of Earth's surface. (Geography Standard 13)

Oregon Geography Content Standards
• Explain how migration, immigration and communication (cultural exchange, convergence and divergence) lead to cultural changes and make predictions and draw conclusions about the global impact of cultural diffusion. (HS.17)
• Analyze the impact of human migration on physical and human systems (e.g., urbanization, immigration, urban to rural). (HS.18)
• Evaluate how differing points of view, self-interest, and global distribution of natural resources play a role in conflict over territory. (HS.19)

Connections to Common Core
• Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1)

Objectives:
In completing this activity, students should be able to:
• Explain why many African Americans left the South and moved north during this time period.
• Explain why some African Americans moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma specifically during this time period.
• Explain the conflict that caused the Tulsa Race Riot and its overall impact.

Grade Levels: High School    Time: Two 90-minute class periods

Materials:
Jigsaw Note-Taker (One copy for each student) (Appendix E)

Background/Secondary Sources

Background/Secondary Sources Analysis Questions (One copy for three readings) (Appendix E)


Maps

Library of Congress Map Analysis Tool (One for each map) (Appendix E)


Map of Tulsa [Map]. Retrieved from https://tulsaraceriot.wordpress.com/research-topics/map-of-tulsa-large/ (Appendix B)


Photographs

Library of Congress Image Analysis Tool (One for each image) (Appendix E)


Library of Congress Document Analysis Tool (One copy for each of the documents) (Appendix E)


**Background:** This is the introductory lesson to a larger unit that will explore race, poverty, and the theft of African American property from the 1900s to the present day. The Tulsa Race Riot is just one example of how African Americans lost not only their lives, but property and wealth as a result of violent racism.

**Procedures:**

**Day 1:**
- Divide students into four groups
  - Background/secondary sources (Appendix A)
  - Maps (Appendix B)
  - Photographs (Appendix C)
  - Newspapers (Appendix D)
- Hand-out corresponding documents and analysis tools (Appendix E) to each group
- Students will analyze their documents and complete the appropriate analysis tool for each document

**Day 2:**
- Student-groups will share with the rest of the class what they learned from their documents
- Students will listen and take notes from presenting groups on their Jigsaw Note-Taker (Appendix E)
- Students will use the new information to complete the assessment.

**Assessment:**
- Exit Ticket/Assessment (Appendix E)
- Rubric (Appendix E)
Appendix A: Background/Secondary

The Great Migration was a massive population shift that occurred in the United States between 1910 and 1970, when nearly 8 million African Americans left rural communities of the South seeking greater economic opportunity and racial tolerance in cities of the Northeast, Midwest, and eventually the West Coast. In 1914, 90 percent of African Americans lived in the states of the former Confederacy. By 1970 more than 50 percent of blacks lived outside the South. Scholars continue to study the so-called “push” and “pull” factors that caused this migration, as well as the dramatic economic, social, and cultural changes that resulted from it.

After the Civil War (1861–65) and through the end of the nineteenth century, most blacks remained in the South, where their ancestors had worked the land as slaves. Maintaining the communities in which they had been raised, they lived primarily in rural areas and worked in agricultural jobs. Even as free citizens, however, Southern blacks had little or no opportunity to own land or build financial independence. Generally limited to sharecropping, they remained dependent for their livelihoods on the landowners (previously slave-holders), who loaned the seed and capital (such as livestock and plows) needed to grow the crops, controlled the sale of the harvest, and kept the financial records. Moreover, whereas cotton growing had been lucrative on the large-scale model of a 500- to 1,000-acre plantation, it was extremely difficult to turn a profit on a sharecropper's tract of 40 to 50 acres. Under these circumstances, the average sharecropper struggled continually to pay his debt to the landowner and was rarely able to save enough money to buy his own tools or advance in other ways.

The severe limitation of the Southern agricultural livelihood is described as a “push” factor for migration—that is, one that eventually drove blacks out of the South. The prospect of earning higher factory wages in the industrialized cities of the North is described as a “pull” factor—one so attractive that African Americans would risk moving to an unknown region of the country to start a new life.

Another significant “push” factor began in the late 1870s with the enactment in the South of the discriminatory statutes that later became known as Jim Crow laws. These laws mandated the physical separation of blacks and whites in all public places, including buses and railway cars, restaurants and theaters, and hospitals and schools. Validated by a series of Supreme Court rulings during the 1890s, Jim Crow policy was ultimately cemented by the landmark Plessy v. Ferguson ruling of 1896, which enshrined the doctrine of “separate but equal” in the United States. Far from providing equality, Jim Crow laws effectively consigned African Americans to the status of second-class citizens, denying their right to vote and other civil rights and curtailing their social, educational, and economic opportunities.

Despite these combined factors, African Americans did not begin leaving the South in large numbers until the second decade of the twentieth century, when World War I (1914–18) provided a critical new “pull” factor that greatly accelerated the migration of African Americans to Northern cities. Until then factory jobs in Northern cities had been largely filled by European immigrants, who had begun flooding into the United States in the 1880s, seeking prosperity in the New World. During the war years the needs of the defense industry increased demand for industrial labor,
In the early aftermath of the Civil War (1861–65) and before the Great Migration (1910–70) of Southern blacks to the North and West, the promise of economic advancement for Southern blacks was largely embodied by an emancipated slave named Booker T. Washington (1856–1915). Unlike his contemporary W. E. B. DuBois (1868–1963), who saw classical education and the growth of an elite black leadership as necessary for the political advancement of African Americans, Washington maintained that self-determination must come from economic independence, which could only be realized through the acquisition of practical skills and manual trades. Washington founded the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama to provide vocational education of this kind. As he became popular among white political leaders for his emphasis on economic opportunity over political protest, Washington was bitterly criticized by DuBois and other intellectuals as an “accommodationist” who would capitulate to the premise of white supremacy rather than fight for the equality of his race.

Booker Taliaferro Washington was born in Franklin County, Virginia, on April 5, 1856. Just nine years old when the Civil War ended, Washington struggled to gain his education while working in salt mines to help support his family. From 1872 to 1875 Washington attended the Hampton Institute, a school devoted to educating former slaves, where he was able to pay his tuition by working. Washington quickly embraced the educational philosophy of the Hampton Institute, which saw the acquisition of practical skills and manual trades as key to improving the status of African Americans. Although Washington went on to study briefly at the Wayland Seminary in Washington, D. C., he left the school, finding the purely academic and theoretical atmosphere too removed from the everyday reality that most African Americans experienced at that time.

Returning to the Hampton Institute as a teacher in 1879, Washington was soon appointed to serve as the founding principal of a new school for African Americans to be built in Tuskegee, Alabama. At the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (later renamed the Tuskegee Institute and then Tuskegee University), Washington espoused the Hampton Institute's philosophy of self-reliance, emphasizing manual and industrial education; practical trades such as carpentry, farming, mechanics, and teaching; and the value of personal discipline, cleanliness, and thrift. The Tuskegee Institute expanded, and by 1888 it covered 549 acres and enrolled more than 400 students.

In the years that followed, Washington's influence extended beyond his students in Tuskegee. In 1895, not long after the legality of Jim Crow segregation had been upheld by the Supreme Court ruling *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Washington addressed an all-white audience of about 2,000 people at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, Georgia, delivering a speech that was later dubbed the “Atlanta Compromise.” Outlining his proposal for racial harmony in the United States, he explained that educational and economic self-improvement were key to dispelling African American resentment and public protest. Ultimately Washington indicated his willingness to accept racial segregation as the price of economic opportunity, declaring, “In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.”

Washington’s speech was popular among white Americans, and he was touted as a model for his people. He went on to develop strong ties with Northern philanthropists such as Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919), George Eastman (1854–1932), Henry H. Rogers (1840–1909), and Julius Rosenwald (1862–1932), who appreciated Washington's entrepreneurial approach to race issues. Washington also became an advisor on racial matters to Presidents Theodore Roosevelt (in office 1901–09) and William H. Taft (in office 1909–13). Washington himself realized that economic opportunity alone was not enough to improve the conditions of African Americans. Although his public position never wavered, Washington privately supported campaigns against injustice. He anonymously financed lawsuits against disfranchisement and segregation and secretly influenced other legal actions.
Washington maintained a demanding public life until he became ill during a lecture series and died on November 14, 1915. At the time of his death, Tuskegee boasted an enrollment of 1,500 students and a larger endowment than any other black institution. Ironically, it was at this historical moment that blacks were beginning to migrate to the North in large numbers, believing that economic advancement would never be possible in the segregationist South.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


while European immigration saw a marked decline, drastically reducing the competition for jobs. Meanwhile, African American newspapers, perhaps most notably the Chicago Defender, played a significant role in promoting the social and economic promise of the North to Southern blacks just as the South was experiencing devastating floods, an infestation of boll weevils that decimated the cotton crop, and other agricultural disasters. During the decade between 1910 and 1920, the African American population of the North and West grew by 450,000, principally in Chicago, New York City, Detroit, and Cleveland.
Black migration remained strong during the 1920s, when new anti-immigration legislation continued to limit competition for urban jobs, but it dwindled considerably during the 1930s, as the Northern industrial economy was hobbled by the Great Depression. Migration resurged again during World War II (1939–45), when many of the same push-pull factors (including wartime job opportunities, restricted foreign immigration, and continued racial hostilities in the South) launched a second wave of African Americans from the South, many of them relocating as far as Los Angeles, Oakland, and other West Coast cities. The black exodus from the South peaked during 1940s and 1950s, when nearly 3 million people abandoned the region.

Although segregation was not legally enforced outside the South, African Americans settling in industrial cities faced unmistakable racism nonetheless, including the threat of violence or intimidation if they sought to move into the same neighborhoods as whites. Relegated to living in densely populated all-black enclaves (commonly referred to as “ghettos”), African American migrants were initially confined to stereotypically “negro” jobs, such as cooks and porters, or worked in low-skilled industrial positions. Eventually black workers moved up the occupational ladder to hold an increasing number of skilled manufacturing jobs and clerical positions. At the same time, new African American communities formed, generating a new urban black culture and a growing inclination toward political activism. As African Americans in industrial cities began to agitate for fair wages, equal protection under the law, and the chance to vote and hold political office, the seeds of the civil rights movement (1950s and 1960s) were born.

By 1970 migratory flows between the North and South had more or less equalized. Not only had Jim Crow laws been overturned in the South but new manufacturing jobs and the spread of air conditioning were contributing to the emergence of the so-called Sunbelt (a coast-to-coast swath of 15 Southern states) as an attractive place to live and work. The Great Migration remains an important topic for economic historians because it effectively redefined the social, economic, and cultural fabric of the nation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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**Source Citation**

Greenwood Community (Tulsa, Oklahoma)

Situated in the northeastern part of Tulsa, Oklahoma, the Greenwood community developed into a thriving black business and residential district during the first two decades of the twentieth century. As Tulsa grew during the oil boom of the early 1900s, Greenwood prospered as well. Prevented from patronizing stores in the white section of town, black Tulsans developed their own enterprises in Greenwood instead. Its main street, Greenwood Avenue, became known popularly as the black Wall Street. In June 1921, fueled by resentment of black gains and aspirations, a white mob of Tulsans leveled thirty-five blocks of the black community in a race riot precipitated by false allegations of an attack on a white woman in downtown Tulsa by a black man. Although some of the area recovered after the destruction, Greenwood never regained the prominence it enjoyed during its heyday.

Greenwood began attracting black residents when a group of African Americans purchased land there around 1905. As the area lured more people, black Tulsans soon enjoyed their own newspaper, a barber, two doctors, and three grocers. By 1910, blacks comprised 10 percent of Tulsa’s inhabitants, and in the next few years, the city had a black police officer and several new black-owned businesses along Greenwood Avenue. At the time of the riot, Tulsa’s black population had expanded to 11,000, with around 8,000 living in Greenwood itself. Greenwood’s vibrant streets at this time also held two schools, thirteen churches, three fraternal organizations, a hospital, two newspapers, two theaters, and a public library. On Greenwood’s side streets, Tulsans could find other types of successful businesses—prostitution houses and speakeasies, where jazz blared and alcohol flowed freely.

On the morning of May 30, 1921, Dick Rowland, a black shoeshine, stepped into an elevator in downtown Tulsa operated by a young white woman named Sarah Page. While the police attempted to piece together the story of what happened next, Tulsans took the matters into their own hands. An angry white crowd—fed by newspapers that typically used words such as Little Africa and Niggertown to depict Greenwood, and manned by a flourishing local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK)—began to congregate in front of the courthouse, where authorities had detained Rowland. When a group of men from Greenwood converged on the building to protect the young man, a scuffle ensued, a shot was fired, and chaos ensued. The white mob charged into the center of Greenwood, looting, burning, and attacking residents with abandon. Several hours later, the once bustling community lay in ruins. Death estimates ranged from 27 to more than 250. Property loss amounted to millions of dollars.

An initial investigation blamed the residents of Greenwood for inciting the crowd at the courthouse and for stressing equal rights. Like many of
their counterparts, a number of black Tulsans had served in the military during World War I. Upon their return home, they asserted a new sense of purpose and a demand for equality. White Tulsans, like whites across the country, felt threatened by these measures. But no white Tulsans ever served prison time for the murders, destruction, and looting that took place in Greenwood. Not until some seventy-five years later would an official reckoning of the annihilation take place, when the Oklahoma state legislature established the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot Commission in 1997 to clarify what transpired and rectify some of the injustices that prevailed. See also Tulsa (Oklahoma) Riot of 1921.


*Ann V. Collins*
Tulsa's forgotten riot: ninety years after racial violence left as many as 300 people dead, a city begins to remember

New York Times Upfront, October 24, 2011

Some secrets are so deeply buried, they're virtually erased from history.

A brutal race riot 90 years ago in Tulsa, Oklahoma, is one such case. It began the night of May 31, 1921, and continued into the next day. By some accounts, it was the most deadly racial violence in U.S. history, with an estimated 100 to 300 people killed and more than 8,000 left homeless.

Yet for decades, the riot wasn't mentioned in history books or classrooms--or even spoken about. Many lifelong Tulsa residents say they had never heard of the riot until recently.

Now, advocates for the dwindling number of surviving victims, like 94-year-old Wess Young, are trying to revisit this ugly episode in hopes of achieving some kind of justice before time runs out. Though only 4 at the time, Young can still recall fleeing with his mother and sister the night a mob of armed white men rampaged through his black neighborhood.

By the time they returned the next day, their home and the 35 blocks that made up the community of Greenwood--an area so bustling with black-owned businesses it was dubbed the "Negro Wall Street"--had been burned to the ground.

Explosive Accusations

Tulsa observed the 90th anniversary of the riot in June, but efforts to increase awareness of it and secure compensation for victims have had mixed results: Civic leaders have built monuments to acknowledge the riot, including a new Reconciliation Park, and over the last few years, the riot has been slowly introduced into the curriculum in Tulsa's public schools. But the event is just starting to get national attention in history textbooks, and victims' attempts to secure payment for damages have failed.

Young and his wife, Cathryn, worry it will only be easier to forget the riot as he and the 40 or so other survivors die.

"I think they are trying to keep this hidden," says Cathryn. "Don't talk about it, don't do nothing about it until all these people are dead."

Long before black neighborhoods erupted in rioting in cities across the U.S. during the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s, a string of riots started by whites occurred in the years after World War I ended in 1918. The Tulsa riot, like several of the others, seems to have begun with the explosive accusation that a black man had assaulted a white woman. (The charges were later dropped.)

On May 31, 1921, hundreds of armed white men gathered outside the courthouse where the defendant was being held, and a group of armed black men arrived to try to prevent a lynching. A shot was fired. The black men fled to Greenwood, pursued by the whites.

The Tulsa police chief himself enabled the violence that followed by deputizing hundreds of white men and ordering gun shops to arm them. The death toll was estimated between 100 and 300, with more than 1,200 homes destroyed. Black survivors were rounded up and held for several days by the National Guard, and many of the homeless spent the next year living in tents pitched in the ruins of their neighborhood.
A grand jury at the time blamed the black community. No one was convicted of participating in the riot, nor was anyone compensated for lost property. Soon after, the story essentially disappeared—until 15 years ago, when an Oklahoma state representative pushed to create a state commission that produced a detailed report about the riot.

Reparations?

The issue of payments to survivors has been tricky. The Oklahoma legislature refused, saying it was unconstitutional. The federal courts dismissed a lawsuit on behalf of the victims, saying the statute of limitations had expired. And efforts in Congress to remove that legal obstacle have repeatedly failed, partly because of concerns that doing so might open the door to reparations for slavery. Charles Ogletree, a Harvard law professor who represented the survivors, calls the case his "most disappointing and heartbreaking."

The Greenwood Cultural Center, which has an extensive exhibit on the riot, lost its state financing this year and could be forced to close. In the meantime, survivors are dying each month.

"It seems at times that this is how it's going to end," says Mechelle Brown, the program's coordinator. "With the survivors passing."

But there are signs that the story of the Tulsa riot might not vanish from history. In a recent survey, three quarters of the city's residents said they were aware of the riot. And on a national level, one of the three biggest textbook publishers now mentions the riot in its books, and a second says it plans to do so in future editions.

Last year, the John Hope Franklin Reconciliation Park opened with state funding. It has several memorials to the riot and is planning a center for racial reconciliation. Julius Pegues, head of the park's board, calls its mission critical.

"We intend to take the high road," Pegues says, "and move this city forward for both black and white."

Sulzberger, A.G.

Source Citation

Appendix B: Maps

City of Tulsa Pocket Map
Aerial View of Tulsa Oklahoma
Map of Tulsa
US Natural Resources Map

Practice map reading skills with a fully illustrated US map.
Appendix C: Photographs

Furniture in street during race riot, probably due to eviction, Tulsa, Oklahoma
Smoke billowing over Tulsa, Oklahoma during 1921 race riots
Smoldering ruins of African American's homes following race riots in Tulsa, Oklahoma
First Picture of Havoc Wrought in Tulsa Riot
Tulsa Race Riot
Appendix D: Newspapers

The Morning Tulsa daily world.
175 ARE KILLED IN FIERCE RACE RIOTS AT TULSA, OKLA.

AUDACIOUS WINS MINEOLA;
ENGLISH DERBY TO HUMORIST

Racing Results, Charts and Baseball

BASEBALL

10 BLOCKS BURNED IN RIOTS;
2,000 NEGROES ARE ROUNDED UP

FIRE INSURANCE FUNDS USED
TO GAMBLE IN STOCKS; STATE
MARTIAL LAW IS DECLARED
AND TROOPS ARE RUSHED IN
TO SAVE WHITES AND NEGROES

WHITE RESIDENTS SADNESS OF CITY

MINEOLA HANDICAP IS WON
BY AUDACIOUS AT 7 TO 5

RACING RESULTS
The Morning Tulsa Daily World (June 2)

DEAD ESTIMATED AT 100; CITY IS QUIET

In the Wake of Tulsa's Race War

5,000 NEGRO REFUGEES GUARDED IN CAMP AT COUNTY FAIR GROUNDS

Newspaper front page with images and text reporting the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921.
GRAND JURY TO PROBE RIOTING CALLED.
Appendix E: Additional Resources

Questions for Background/Encyclopedia Sources for Tulsa Race Riots

Directions: Use the attached documents/readings to answer the following questions. Cite evidence as you answer the questions. You will share this information with the rest of the class.

1. During the Great Migration, what pushed many African Americans away from the South?

2. What pulled African Americans to Tulsa, Oklahoma and the Greenwood Neighborhood in particular?

3. What was the initial conflict that sparked the Tulsa Race Riot in 1921? What were some of the deeper root causes?

Map Analysis Tool
Image Analysis Tool
Document Analysis Tool
Introducing the Great Migration and the Tulsa Race Riot 1921 using Human Geography: Jigsaw Note-Taker
**Directions:** As each group presents, take notes on their findings. **This information will help you complete the final assessment.** You don’t need to take notes for your own group. Keep in mind that your goal when listening to these expert groups is to uncover the following information:

- Who were the inhabitants of Tulsa during this time period?
- What brought African Americans to this location?
- What were the push/pull factors involved in the African American migration?
- What were some of the White attitudes toward African Americans at this time in this location?
- What were the specific events and consequences of the Tulsa Race Riot?
- How do maps, images, and newspaper articles help illuminate the Great Migration and the Tulsa Race Riot?

Make sure your notes address these questions. Ask the expert groups to clarify and elaborate when needed!

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Introducing the Great Migration and the Tulsa Race Riot 1921 using Human Geography:
Exit Ticket/Assessment

Use your notes from the group presentations to help you answer the questions.

1. How would you characterize the people who lived in Tulsa, Oklahoma in the 1920s? Describe the racial makeup, occupations, and attitudes of the inhabitants based on evidence.
2. Why was there tension between the African American and White inhabitants of Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1921? How many different reasons can you identify?

3. Why did so many African Americans leave the South during the *Great Migration* of the twentieth century?

4. Why did some African Americans move to Tulsa, Oklahoma during this time?

5. What did these African Americans lose during the Tulsa Race Riot?

**Introducing the Great Migration and the Tulsa Race Riot 1921 using Human Geography: Scoring Rubric**

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