

Black Migration Film Discussion Guide

Use these questions to better understand the circumstances under which people migrated and those they found upon arriving in San Francisco. Coming forward, think about how things may have changed or not, and what it takes to make change for the better.

MIGRATION

Which years did the people and their families featured in the film migrate?

Why did the people and their families featured in the film eventually migrate to San Francisco?

Were African Americans able to get an education, good paying jobs, independence and land ownership in the South during the years of 1917 through 1971? Why do you think that was so?

What values were brought to San Francisco by the people and their families featured in the film? How did those values help them achieve success?

WORK

Why couldn't Danielle's grandfather, who was trained as a pharmacist, practice as a pharmacist in the United States (San Francisco)?

Why would there be work at the shipyards for welders like Essie's husband in 1944?

Eldoris and Mae say that their mother replaced a Japanese maid who had been "interned." Why was she interned?

What kind of jobs did women have at the shipyards?

Who was the first African American MUNI operator? What famous poet-writer-actress was a cable car conductor in San Francisco?

Which 1960s-1970s federal program established the E.O.C. (Economic Opportunity Council?) Why was this program needed?

HOUSING

Why might the purchase of a home by an African American in the Bayview neighborhood in the 1930s be significant?

Why might newly arrived African Americans in the 1940s readily find housing in the Western Addition, but had to share facilities?

Why would public housing “projects” be segregated by race in the middle of the 20th century? Did segregation of public housing change over the years?

How was it that public housing became overwhelmingly Black, (at least in the Western Addition?)

JIM CROW/RACISM

Why did African Americans have to leave integrated train cars and move into segregated ones when they arrived in the South during the years described in the film?

Why would African American adults say, “yes ‘um” to southern Whites in those days?

Why did African American shipyard workers and those who worked in the canning factories lose their jobs after the War? Why couldn’t they find work?

Why would Oscar and other youth of his time say that San Francisco was always racist?

STRUGGLES/MIGRANTS

What struggles did African Americans face in San Francisco in seeking independence, good paying jobs, education and land ownership 70 years ago? 50 years ago? 30 years ago? At present?

Explain why they might persevere, and what gives them strength to do so?

Do you think migrants are any different from those who choose not to migrate?

What would it take for you to migrate? What values would you pass along to your family that would help them in that process?

What is your migration story?

Film Discussion Answers And Guide

MIGRATION

Which years did the people and their families featured in the film migrate? 1930s, 1940s and 1960-70s. There was a “great” migration of African Americans primarily from the South to the Northeast, Mid-West and the West starting around 1917 and ending around 1971.

Why did the people and their families featured in the film eventually migrate to San Francisco? The people in the documentary say their purpose in migrating was the “American Dream,” a pathway for their kids; and that there was a lack of opportunities for them in the South. “Our mother’s hopes and dreams... for a better life:” education, good paying jobs, independence, and land ownership. People brought their values from the South.

Why would there be work at the shipyards for welders like Essie’s husband in 1944? The greater San Francisco Bay area had several shipyards where ships meant for war purposes were being built. The United States was engaged in World War II in both Europe and in the Pacific.

Eldoris and Mae say that their mother replaced a Japanese maid who had been “interned.” Why was she interned? The February 2, 1942 Executive Order 9066, effectively ordered the “relocation” of Japanese and Japanese Americans away from the two coasts to prevent “espionage.” 117,000 people of Japanese descent, two-thirds of whom were native-born citizens of the United States, were subjected to removal from their homes, communities and work, and were incarcerated in arm-guarded spartan camps.

Who was the first African American MUNI operator? Audley Cole, 1942 **What famous poet-writer-actress was a MUNI conductor in San Francisco?** Maya Angelou, 1944

Which 1960s-1970s federal program established the E.O.C. (Economic Opportunity Council)? Why was this program needed? The “War on Poverty,” a Johnson era program, was meant to give opportunities to African Americans and other minorities who had been left out of economic and educational advancement due to racial bias and discrimination. “Economic Opportunity Programs” were established across the nation in areas heavily populated with disadvantaged people. In San Francisco, the Bayview, Chinatown-Telegraph Hill and Mission districts all had local E.O.C.’s serving their populations.

HOUSING

Why might newly arrived African Americans in the 1940s readily find housing in the Western Addition, but had to share facilities? About the time African Americans arrived in San Francisco for war time jobs, Japanese and Japanese Americans had been forcibly removed from their homes, businesses and communities to “relocation” camps far from the coasts. Their recently vacated flats as well as those owned by others were made available for the war effort in exchange for cash money.

Why would public housing “projects” be segregated by race in the middle of the 20th century? Did segregation of public housing change over the years? Segregation was built into the federal government’s public housing program. No-one in power believed, nor supported the idea of people of different races living together. During the civil rights movement, most federal policies which supported racial segregation were eliminated; however, African Americans and other racial minorities continued to depend upon the public housing system because they were unable to attain the same economic status as Whites.

JIM CROW/RACISM

Why did African Americans have to leave integrated train cars and move into segregated ones when they arrived in the South during the years described in the film? These were the years before “desegregation.” Following the Reconstruction Years, the south firmly held to Jim Crow laws and norms, which strictly segregated people of color from Whites. Housing, public schools, restrooms, public conveyances, water faucets, restaurants, hotels, theatres, etc., were all segregated by race. When trains from the East, West or North crossed the invisible “Mason Dixon” line, African Americans and other people of color had to vacate all but designated segregated train cars for the remainder of their trip.