CHAPTER 1

AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY OF GREAT MIGRATIONS

A careful discussion of the history of slavery and migration of the Africans in many numbers to the new world in the early 15th Century would lead us towards a sensitive understanding of the kind of “playful” relationship African Americans have with notions pertaining to location, dislocation and relocation seen through the prism of “Great Migrations.” The turbulent experience of migration has always characterized the African American life and experience.

The long and sordid history of human bondage dated back to ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome. As acknowledged by many historians, one among them David Walker, it is an established fact that slavery had long been practiced in Africa, but he charged white Christian slaveholders “with greater crimes against humanity and greater hypocrisy in justifying those crimes as any prior slave system had been guilty of” (qtd. in Gates Jr. and Mckay 129). Long before the Europeans sailed to the African coast, slavery was already an integral part of Africa’s economic organization. In the long history of slavery, the slave trade between North and West Africans was an established institution, though the status of the slave in these parts of Africa did not carry with it the stigma with which European and American slave traders and slave holders bound the Africans (Foner 58). As stated by a slave leader, Theodore Canot: “The financial genius of Africa, instead of devising banknotes on the precious metals as a circulating medium has from time immemorial declared that a human nature - the true representative and embodiment of labor, is the most valuable article on earth” (Spring 84).
It was when Portuguese mariners began trading in gold, ivory, and spices with the chieftains of the coast of West Africa in the mid-fifteenth century, that they discovered that African prisoners of war and their children could be readily supplied for sale as slaves (Foner 8-9). A remarkable development occurred after the discovery of the new world when its Spanish conquerors instituted particularly brutal forms of slavery to turn the native population into a compulsory work force. Ironically the Spanish enslavement of the indigenous peoples of Central America and the horrific effects thereafter, triggered the first importation of African slaves into the Western Hemisphere.

Bartolome de las Casas, a Spanish missionary to the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, in the year 1517 recommended his political superiors to import Africans to the Spanish colonies in order to relieve the appalling mistreatment of the indigenous peoples of New Spain. Subsequently, at least ten million human beings had been imported to North and South America forcefully, even before the slave trade to the Americans was legally abolished in the late 19th century - finally to be subjected to one of the most inhuman systems of social and economic oppression the world has ever seen (Foner 20). Even in the 16th century, when the continent was still largely a wilderness, rudimentary records show that the first black people who came to North America were not slaves, but rather, explorers. Most prominent among them, were Estevanico (d. 1539), who “opened up what is now New Mexico and Arizona for Spanish settlement, and Jean Baptiste Point du Sable (1745?-1818), who founded a trading post on the southern shore Lake Michigan from which the city of Chicago grew” (qtd. in Gates Jr. and Mckay 130).

The first Africans arrived in North American British Colonies almost as soon as European settlers did and soon after, settlers eagerly sought their labor. They
arrived at Jamestown, Virginia in 1619 aboard a Dutch Slave Ship. They were only twenty in number, including three women and had survived the desperate Middle passage from their homeland to America (Horton and Horton 27). At first, blacks were hired as indentured servants, bound to work for a fixed term of years, rather than as slaves for life. But by 1700, the growing plantation economy of Virginia heightened the demand for a work force that was cheaper than free labor and more easily controlled. America ensured their rise to economic and political preeminence over the Southern half by establishing the institution of chattel slavery that turned the black slave into life time property of his or her master.

Orlando Patterson, in his *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (1982) claims that under the chattel slavery, a slave can be equated to what he calls “a social non-person,” (5) a being that by legal definition could have no family, no personal honor, no past, and no future. According to Eric Foner, the imported African Slaves to North America were, therefore, divested as much as possible about his or her culture under chattel slavery and intended to create in the slave, a sense of complete alienation from all human ties except those that bound him or her in absolute dependence to the master’s will. What had initially started off really well as a new society with slave in no time transformed itself into a “slave society” (60-61) of the New Americas. In order to make this study more authentic, it becomes mandatory, to include here, a brief discussion of the “History of Slavery” and “Horrors” of the Middle Passage - also known popularly as the Transatlantic Slave Trade or, The First Great Migration.
SLAVERY IN AFRICA (HISTORICAL CONTEXT)

Long before the Europeans sailed to the African Coast, slavery was already an integral part of Africa’s economic organization. In the long history of slavery, however, for many reasons, slaves in Africa did not encounter anything like the horrors that besets Africans shipped to Europe and the New World as slaves. It may be said that Slavery, for many Africans, was simply a matter of degree:

What mattered was not freedom, but belonging, and slavery offered a new belonging, assimilation into a new group—albeit at first in a lowly position. A slave might be educated along with the free members of the tribe. When a male slave married, he might move away from his master’s compound, work his own fields in exchange for fixed dues, accumulate property, and even take another wife. Eventually he could expect manumission and kinship within a tribe. (Foner 2)

As the system of slave trade with Europeans and Americans burgeoned, from the 15th to the 19th centuries, African system of slavery began to become more brutal in nature. Slaves were often sold and had to begin again as aliens in new communities, which expected harder work” (Foner 2). The slave trade, over the centuries, grew more sophisticated, commercializing the African economy. The trade not only changed the everyday life of Africans, but also corrupted them. In order to meet the demands of the market for more slaves, traders stirred up wars between neighboring tribes. Tribal kings began to look for excuses to attack and kidnapping turned into a common business (qtd. in Isichei 1: 30).
EUROPEANS IN COMMAND OF THE SLAVE TRADE

As Henrietta Buckmaster writes:

The Progenitors of the first American slaves were those who had fought against the battering tides of Romans, Persians, Byzantines, and at last with their empires weakened, had seen their civilization slowly collapse before the Moslems who brought religion and slave traders from the East, and the Christians who brought religion and slave traders from the West. (3)

Africans were long accustomed to foreign invasion for slaves by the time Europeans arrived to their shores. It was nothing out of the ordinary when, in the mid-fifteenth century, the Portuguese began transporting slaves out of Africa. Soon other European nations competed in the profitable enterprise, with the English and the Dutch successively, dominating it. Shortly they began establishing small settlements, defended by forts, at intervals along the Coast, usually near the mouth of a river or an island. These settlements known as “slave factories” are guarded by factors or agents who negotiated with the Africans, encouraging them to organize slave-hunting expeditions guided by exploitative means and measures.

The enterprise was economically risky and dangerous, but, if succeeded, hugely profitable. The explorations of the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries were opening up huge new parts of the world. Americans begin in 1636 to send ships to Africa, at first, to transport slaves to the British colonies in North America but later, on a triangular voyage. For instance, they sailed from Rhode Island to Africa with a cargo of rum to trade for slaves. On the next leg, that is – the Middle Passage, they carried slaves to the Caribbean islands and North America; finally, they returned home with molasses, with which to make more rum. It is observed that “between 1725 and 1807,
more than nine hundred vessels left Rhode Island ports for the west coast of Africa, carrying away more than 105,000 slaves” (Schneider and J. Schneider 3).

One of the predominant causes for an increasing demand for importation of slaves from Africa was that the Indians of the Americas, as slaves proved unsatisfactory to the Europeans. In contrast to the Africans, who were more adapted by birth to the subtropical weather that often killed and always disheartened European laborers, the Indians of the Americas were more prone to be defeated by harsh subtropical conditions. Along with this, unlike the African slaves, the Indian slaves, with their familiarity with the countryside, were capable of frequent escapes.

On account of their historical knowledge of ancient Greece and Rome who taught them that slavery had long been commonplace, ordinary the way things were, few whites thought of slavery as a moral issue (Drescher 8). European traders had resorted at the same time to Christianity to justify themselves. They, as Christians were determined to convert the world to Christianity, with or without the consent of the “converted.” And as such, “Churchmen from the pope down gave slavery license, sometimes representing it as a crusade against pagans. God, they said, intended for some men to rule over other people, and slavery offered an opportunity to convert thousands” (Schneider and J. Schneider 4). As a result of such belief, church fathers approved mass baptisms of slaves just before they embarked on the ships that would take them forever from their homelands. With time, the slave trade flourished and nations competed for it.

HORRORS OF THE MIDDLE PASSAGE

A series of triangular trading routes crisscrossed the Atlantic, carrying on the first leg, European or American manufactured goods from their home ports to trade
for slaves in Africa. On the second leg, the dreaded Middle Passage allowed them to
carry the slaves, they had purchased or captured from Africa to the slave markets of
the New World. On the third leg, they transported colonial products including
tobacco, indigo, sugar, rice and other agricultural products from the Caribbean Islands
or colonies in South or North America back to their home ports. It was the voyage
across the Atlantic, also known as the Middle Passage because it was the second or
the middle leg in the triangular trading routes linking Europe, Africa and America that
threatened the slaves because of its harrowing nature. Since the price of a slave sold in
America could be twenty to thirty times higher the price in Africa, men, women and
children were crammed aboard vessels as tightly as possible to maximize profits.
Consequently, as James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton put it, “such profits
Overcame moral scruples, spurred the growth of the trade, and increased the numbers
of enslaved Africans brought to the Americas. In fact, by the time of the American
Revolution, despite the high rate of Middle Passage mortality, enslaved Africans
composed the largest group of immigrants to the Western Hemisphere” (Horton and
E. Horton 27).

Historical records highlight that the Middle Passage usually would take at best
six weeks or even much longer. It was a difficult journey that brought about a kind of
mass migration of a forceful nature ever in the history of mankind. Almost all the
slaves arriving at the coast from the interior of Africa had never before looked upon
an ocean or a ship. Most of them were terrified and quite exhausted by the shock of
the daunting experience of capture; the long, forced march from inland; the journey
downriver chained and crammed into canoes; and the horrific experience of
imprisonment for weeks or months in the barracoon under the harsh control of white
men – stark situations they were experiencing for the first time. One must note that
the middle passage is also very significant owing to the way it marked the beginning of the first complex encounter or contact between European and African cultures in the ship - a space. In short, two distinct cultures met in space and consequently, it was where the whole journey of conflicts between the two cultures began leading to the emergence of a third space or the liminal space (Bhabha 56) in the upcoming years.

The enslaved Gustavus Vassa (Olaudah Equiano) remembered his own experiences in about 1756. “I asked how the vessel could go? They told me they could not tell; ... the vessel went on, and the white men had some spell or magic they put in the water when they liked, in order to stop the vessel. I was exceedingly amazed at this account, and really thought they (the white men) were spirits” (Horton and J. Horton 28). They were chained or closely confined to keep them from jumping overboard as long as the ship was within sight of shore. The space allowed to each slave below decks depended partly on national practice and partly on the greed of the ship’s owners and masters. According to one slave trader: “The height, sometimes, between decks was only eighteen inches, so that the unfortunate human beings could not turn around, or even on their sides... and here they are usually chained to the decks by their necks and legs” (qtd. in Zinn 29).

Whether the slaves traveled standing, sitting, or even lying down, they were always crowded. Slaver John Barbot reported on Portuguese practice about 1700: “It is pitiful to see how they crowded those poor wretches, six hundred and fifty or seven hundred in a ship, the men standing in the hold ty’d to stakes, the women between decks, and those that are with child in the great cabin and the children in the steeridge...” (qtd. in Foner 1, 31). According to The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Daily Life in America (2009), only perhaps, “a small proportion (5%) of slaves carried to the New World,” were destined for mainland America. Till 1700, only about
“20,000 Africans” had been landed in Britain’s colonies there and in the 18th Century, however, their numbers swelled up steadily. By 1770, owing to the natural reproduction of the slave population, around one-fifth of the estimated “2.3 million” persons living in the colonies (77) that were soon to become the United States were Africans and their descendants.

SLAVE TRADE AND AMERICA

Slavery, in all the English colonies, North and South, got off to a slow start in the 17th century, but increased rapidly in the 18th century, when the colonies recognized the growing need for a large labor force to develop the new continent. Slavery was encouraged by the European Governments of almost all of the colonies. African slavery was the primary labor system in the Dutch empire of New Netherlands, which fell to Britain in 1664, creating New York and New Jersey. Sooner the articles of capitulation recognized slavery as a legal institution. Slavery became legal in the original colonies by the eve of the American Revolution. Slavery, formerly a legally inconsistent system, as James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton claim “was set in the law of all the colonies: a slave inherited that status from the mother, served for a lifetime, was of African descent, and was chattel property able to be bought and sold independently of the land” (33).

Ira Berlin in The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations states that “movement” and “place” — the first plaintive utterances of the main themes of African American life were sounded even before the ships sighted American shores and these first sounds of the “contrapuntal narrative would be echoed again and again in the centuries that followed” (67). Ever since the first men and women of African descent arrived in mainland North America in the sixteenth century, they trickled onto
the continent in small numbers often accompanying European explorers for the next century. The nature of slavery changed yet again with the advent of the plantation in mainland North America. The beginnings of plantation production like tobacco in the Chesapeake in the late seventeenth century, rice in the low country in the early eighteenth century, sugar and then cotton in the Southern interior in the nineteenth century increased the level of exploitation, violence and brutality.

By midcentury, the majority of enslaved men and women in the Chesapeake had never seen Africa and the proportion of Africans declined, although transatlantic slavers continued to deliver their cargoes in the great estuary as the indigenous African American population increased. The growth of the African American or creole population reduced the slaveowners’ need for African imports and “fewer than 10,000 African slaves entered the region in the 1750s.” (Berlin 69) The first passage was over in the Chesapeake at the start of the Revolution and the region was no longer an immigrant society as native born people began to sink deep roots into the soils of mainland North America. However, in the low country of South Carolina and Georgia, claims Berlin, the slave trade continued and there, the forced migration from Africa followed a trajectory similar to that of the Chesapeake, but it started later and continued longer (70).

The barriers to transatlantic cultural continuity were enormous for slaves sent to mainland North America and transplanted Africans, disoriented and lonely lived amid “a Babel of languages” (Berlin 78). Linguistic isolation was especially painful and as such, many new arrivals struggled for comprehension. Fluency was achieved in different ways and some slaves have an ear for language and became considerable linguists as they mastered various languages of the New World. Once the barrier of language had been breached, the business of making the foreign familiar proceeded
along a broad front as Africans began to form a society of their own. Soon transplanted Africans began to “master the countryside, form friendships, and piece together new lineages from real and fictive or adoptive kin” (Berlin 78). Enslaved Africans dispersed along the periphery of mainland North America constructed African America from their experiences in the New World memories of the Old. Africans and their African American descendants took root in American soil as they made their own the land that had been forced upon them and black people became increasingly identified with the place over the course of the eighteenth century. The dense web of kinship created over the course of more than a century of American captivity endowed the place with an ever-deepening meaning for transplanting Africans and their African American children.

African American slaves regularized protocols of courtship, marriage and even divorces during the eighteenth century and ties in place deepened where in, even marriages between slaves became not simply the joining of two people, but the expansion of a lineage. As Africans and African Americans worked together, and intermarried, the web of friendship and kinship bridged the divide that once separated them. One very interesting aspect to be pointed out is that while parents and grandparents of African American slaves had survived the shock of African enslavement, the Middle Passage, and captivity in mainland America, in Berlin’s terms “the new generation of African Americans wanted something more… There was a continuous search ‘for cracks in the edifice of slavery’” (88).

Changes in the American society which were derived from the transformation of the American economy in the last third of the eighteenth century, yet became another situation that inadvertently gave slaves additional control over their own lives. As small grain production replaced tobacco in the Chesapeake region and new
techniques of tidal cultivation supplanted old inland production of rice in the low
country, along with the expansion of trade and commerce in the Atlantic ports,
specifically in the Northern colonies, the need for season-long labor in the region
declined. According to Berlin, another significant change that occurred during that
time that allowed black people to assert themselves like never before being due to an
upsurge of evangelical religion which created another breach in the slave regime. He
states:

Believing all were equal in the eyes of God and eschewing the austere
formalism and racial exclusivity of the established denominations, the
sectarians welcomed black people as brothers and sisters in Christ. Many
slaves rushed to the evangelical standard, attracted by the evangelicals’
egalitarian enthusiasm and the message that ‘Jesus Christ loved them and died
for them, as well as for white people.’ They soon demanded that the equality
of the afterworld be extended to the here and now (89).

Some evangelicals, to that end, voluntarily joined black men and women in
their opposition to slavery and on occasion, in a commitment to full equality. But the
large crack in the edifice of slavery came with the outbreak of revolutionary warfare,
beginning with the American War for Independence and extending through the
French and Haitian revolutions. Black people and their white allies denounced the
hypocrisy of slavery in the land of liberty and demands of freedom echoed across the
new republic. It was not surprising to observe that slaves petitioned legislatures, went
to court, and opened direct negotiations with their owners for freedom. Slavery, in
Berlin’s words “tottered and in some places, it fell under the unrelenting assault,
propelling large numbers of black men and women mostly African Americans to
freedom” (89). The Northern colonies began the liquidation of slavery through the
constitutional mandates, judicial decrees, and legislation which provided for slavery’s eventual demise. According to Arthur Zilversmit, more than “100,000 black people” or, more than “one in ten Black Americans,” enjoyed the freedom and the Revolution broke the coincidence between blackness and slavery. A “distinctive African American culture” became far more “visible” with names no longer always concealed behind the façade of bondage by the beginning of the nineteenth century (213-16).

Slavery moved South over time and white immigrants who were mostly indentured servants worked for an agreed-upon time and thereby earned their freedom. They provided ample labor in the North and as their numbers swelled, northern colonial governments passed laws shutting out blacks from some occupations. But the heat, the swamps and the low wages of the South did not appeal to free labor and settlers of the Deep South who came from slaveholding territories considered slavery as a way of life. So slavery flourished in the South, where planters needed many hands to clear, drain and cultivate the fertile lands along the coast, but gradually died out on the Northern Atlantic Coast with its poor small farms with rocky soil. The invention of the cotton gin and the boom in the international demand for Southern cotton also motivated planters who turned to the Southwest for new, fertile land and to slavery to supply the workers for this labor-based crop. As a result, one can observe that in 1790, “more than 600,000 of the 697,624 slaves in what has become the continental United States lived in the Southern States. By 1830, the North had only 3,568 slaves, two-thirds of them in New Jersey while the Old South had 2,005,457” (Foner 52).

The domestic slave trade within the United States has also resulted into another phase of forced migration of African Americans and it did not begin with the
abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in 1807 but originated half a century earlier in the 1760s. According to available historical sources, it was “extensive between 1787 and 1807” (Inikori and Engerman 241), a period in which more Africans were forced to the shores than in some two decades in North American history. The domestic trade continued into the 1860s and displaced some “4 million slaves” (Morgan 20). It can be said that this forced migration successfully unlocked a great reservoir of labor and fastened up the process of the rapid expansion of the “Peculiar Institution.” On the one hand, the domestic slave trade brought misery, separating families and increasing the climate of insecurity in the community. But on the other hand, it also distributed the African American population throughout the South in a migration that hugely surpassed in volume the transatlantic slave trade to North America.

THE SECOND GREAT MIGRATION

Having survived the trauma of enslavement, the horror of the Atlantic crossing, and the nightmare of American slavery, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, people of African descent had rooted themselves on the west side of the Atlantic. Most of them were American born and many “had American-born parents, grandparents, and even great grandparents” (Berlin 99). Black life took a variety of forms – slave and free, plantation and farm, rural and urban— and it differed from place to place. Berlin claims that over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, distinctive African American cultures had emerged and also a confluence of the diverse heritage of Africa, the American experience, and the unique status of peoples of African descent (99). In an article, “The Domestication of the Slave Trade in the United States,” Adam Rothman states:
Slave owners in the United States pioneered a substantial movement of slaves within the United States, uprooting slaves from the Atlantic seaboard and transplanting them to the south and west. This combination of isolation and expansion constituted the domestication of the slave trade in the United States, one of the most important transformations of slavery in North America from the American Revolution to the Civil War (32).

In the years between the elections of Thomas Jefferson in 1800 and Abraham Lincoln in 1860, more than one million black people—slave and free—were forced from the homes they and their forebears had created in the most difficult of circumstances. Berlin states that “this great migration, really a second Middle Passage, dwarfed the transatlantic slave trade that had carried African peoples to mainland North America” (100). According to him, the massive migration sent black people across the continent, assigning the vast majority another half century of captivity. Ousted from their seaboard residence, they were forcibly transported into the American interior as part of slavery’s expansion, redefining African American life.

Like those who had been forcibly transported across the Atlantic, the lives of men and women ensnared in the second great migration were changed forever. According to Michael Tadman, throughout the first two decades of the nineteenth century, planters in transit carried most of their slaves with them to the interior. Tadman highlighted in Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South, the notion of “Planter Migration,” wherein “such migrations, of course, did cause separations of slave families. Indeed, where the ownership of family members was split between neighboring planters, separations could be extensive. But the trade
was a far more nakedly commercial activity, and one where, it seems, there was little
question of slaveowners taking care of their ‘people’’’ (8). But over time, the
westward-moving slave owners surrendered control of slave transit to a new group of
merchants whose sole business became the trade in human beings.

Steven Deyle in *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in America*
stresses that this second great migration began slowly in the years following the
American Revolution, when so-called “Georgia men” transported slaves southward in
the wake of emancipation in the northern states and widespread manumission in the
northern portion of the seaboard South. Black men and women, on the eve of
freedom, saw liberty snatched from their grasp as slaveholders and slave traders
conspired to defeat the promise of post-Revolutionary Emancipation. Most
importantly, as Deyle emphasizes “it transformed the perception of American slaves,
who were now seen not only as laborers but also as valuable investments in
themselves” (16-17). In the great rush to transform men and women into cash,
Georgia men cared little about the distinction between those enslaved for a term and
those enslaved for life, or even the distinction between slavery and freedom. As a
result, “free people of color found themselves swept into the transcontinental dragnet
and kidnapping increased sharply and remained an omnipresent danger to free black
men and women” (Berlin 102).

The internal slave trade became the largest enterprise in the South outside of
the plantation itself, rivaling the transatlantic trade of centuries past. The slave trade
once again, with its hubs and regional centers, its spurs and circuits, reached into
every cranny of Southern society and forced movement had again become an integral
part of black life. In the half century following the close of the transatlantic slave
trade, both planters and traders expanded the transcontinental transfer of black men and women. To Berlin, “the cascade of humanity flowing from the seaboard south swelled ever larger” (103). He states that during the second decade of the nineteenth century, “traders and owners sent out an estimated 120,000 slaves westward and southward during the second decade of the nineteenth century, with the states and territories of Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, and Louisiana being the largest recipients” (103). Substantially that number increased and reached a high point during the following decade and yet again, “during the 1830s, when slave traders and migrating planters ousted almost 300,000 black men, women and children” (103).

Even the outbreak of the Civil War hardly ended the deportation of black men and women and slaveholders on the periphery of the South, fearing that their slaves would escape to the advancing Union army, shipped them inland. By the time the Confederate defeat ended the second great migration, the geography of black America had been radically restructured; the center of slave life had shifted from the seaboard south to the interior. Richard H. Steckel in “The African American Population of the United States, 1790-1920,” states that nearly “half” of all enslaved African Americans resided in “Virginia in 1790” and on the eve of the Civil War, that figure had shriveled to “12 percent.” While Virginia’s slave population increased just barely during the nineteenth century, Maryland’s declined. Meanwhile, the slave populations of “Alabama, Mississippi, Arkankas. and Texas” swelled beyond recognition. In “1860s, well over 400,000 lived in Mississippi alone and more than half of the slave population resided in the Southern interior on the eve of the civil war” (437-53).

Like its international predecessor, the internal slave trade also warped the sexual balance of the black population, at least for a time. In an article “The Interstate
Slave Trade in Antislavery Politics”, David L. Lightner opines that the settled seaborne South became a disproportionately “female society” as enslaved men trekked west to build the new plantation economy and the female majority within the slave population fit well with the seaborne South’s function as the “nursery of the workplace” for the Southern interior (119-122). However, within a generation of the arrival of the first slaves, a sexually balanced population emerged in the cotton South, both assuring the viability of the planters’ labor force and reestablishing “a self-sustaining black population” (Tadman 25-27).

Like the international one, the internal slave trade, viewed as a whole mixed people from different regions and the resultant jumbling also made it more difficult for black people to find kin and friends among those sold South. In Berlin’s words: “the heterogeneity of the internal slave trade left black migrants isolated and alone, so that black men and women taken from the seaborne South experienced all the horrors of their ancestors’ transatlantic journey”, but the shared experience of being bought and sold “unified black people as perhaps no other” (111). The destination of most seaborne slaves moved steadily westward with the expansion of the cotton kingdom, so that the trek from the interior was arduous and, for many, increasingly long. Like the transatlantic slave trade, their westward journey was also traumatic and often deadly. Logic no more prevailed in the second Middle Passage than it did in the first, although the logic of commerce urged that these valued commodities are well fed and housed. Traders, eager to pad their profits, bedded their slaves with little protection, forcing them to sleep on the dark ground in open fields or some equally uninviting board floor in drafty buildings. According to Robert William Fogel, while the “mortality rate” for the internal slave trade never approached that of the transatlantic transfer, it “surpassed that of those who remained in the seaborne states” (127-28).
all, slaves sold along the way rarely remained in place for long and were often resold, thus reliving over and over the horrific protocols of the trade.

Men and women still looked for certain ways to maintain connections as the places they had made their own were about to be taken away from them. Significantly, if the transatlantic passage permanently severed the ties with family, friends, and country, the transcontinental passage left the hope, however slim, that those connections could be maintained. But the stark reality, for the vast majority of deportees was that the journey from the seaboard South to the interior, like the transatlantic passage, was a one-way trip. Like the first, this second middle passage, permanently severed its victims from the life they had once known. A former Virginia slave, interviewed in the 1930s, professed, “had two brothers sold away an’ ain’t never seen ‘em no mo’til dis day” (qtd. in Perdue 206). But if they could not go home, states Berlin, and the number of migrants who reversed field and returned to their old homes was infinitesimal—“the new arrivals remained intensely interested in and often deeply knowledgeable of their old homes” (121). They refreshed and renewed knowledge of the seaboard and kept earlier arrivals alert to the people they had left behind and small shards of information in the forms of news carried by the new arrivals, gossip secured from their owners’ table—enlisted memories of the world they had lost but never surrendered.

Having experienced all the nightmares of the second Middle Passage and arriving at some dense forest or forbidding clearing, deportees rehearsed the experience of the first black arrivals to plantation America. As they searched for the familiar amid the foreign, the new ecology disoriented the migrants. Richard H. Steckel states that the rough frontier conditions, debilitating work regimes, and the
brutal treatment left men and women psychologically spent as well as physically exhausted. Steckel claims: “prior to the abolition of slavery, mortality rates of American blacks exceeded those of whites, but were below those of slave populations elsewhere in the hemisphere. Although slaves gained freedom after the Civil War, the black population continued to face poor health” (434) and often under the lash, black men and women worked at a quick pace in the face of frontier dangers to get the first crops into the ground. The forced migrants faced endless difficulties during those first years beyond the workplace and exhaustion compounded a deep melancholy that cast a pall over black life.

Black people had recovered their balance and began to make the land their own within a generation of their arrival in the Southern interior. They too created a new life built upon their own experiences and memories like the first generation of Africans in mainland North America by mastering over landscape and the skills the new crops demanded. As stated by Berlin, this time, their memories, however, were not “drawn from Africa, from which they were removed by a century or more of American experience, but the Chesapeake, the low country, or occasionally the North, the world of their parents and often grandparents” (123). Since the internal slave trade remained open and slave traders continued to import slaves from the seaboard, the new society in the interior emerged slowly and unevenly. Moreover, other areas remained open to settlement even as portions of the interior matured into settled plantation societies.

If the same terror that gripped Africans caught in the transatlantic trade touched African Americans crossing the North American continent, the latter had one advantage. Shared common experiences and language allowed slave deportees from
the seaboard to communicate freely. In this way, the new generation of forced migrants escaped the linguistic isolation that so weighted upon black men and women in the first Middle Passage and such familiarity enabled them to almost immediately begin reconstructing an African American society in their new location. The black men and women like their forebears who had been shipped across the Atlantic, ensnared in the internal slave trade also carried much with them on their transcontinental journey. Berlin claims:

The rapid reemergence of the slaves’ economy, the reconstruction of the slave family, and the growth of the African American Christianity offer hints as to the cultural baggage that enslaved black men and women brought with them and how it was remade in the course of the transcontinental journey. Even though the slaves’ economy had been disrupted by the forced migration from the seaboard to the interior, but in time, plantation society matured and slaves revived their economy (124).

There was no turning back once slaveholders conceded the slave’s ability to work independently and retain a portion of the product of their labor. Berlin describes “slaves demanded the right to keep barnyard fowl, maintain gardens and provision grounds, and market their produce” (124). Much as it had been in the seaboard South, before long the slaves’ economy metamorphosed from a privilege to an entitlement. The trading networks they established with others familiarized them with their neighbors, creating family ties, communities of interest, and, before long, political alliances. As such, Charles Ball sold south from Maryland and gained acceptance among the slaves of his new plantation only when he agreed to contribute his overwork “earnings into the family stock” (qtd. in Berlin 125)
As could be seen from the Ball’s instance, the slave family reemerged slowly and once again, the family became the center of slave life despite the lack of legal sanction and enormous practical difficulties. The family served as the locus of education, governance, and occupational training as in the seaboard South. Families established courting patterns, marriage rituals, and child bearing practices and as well defined the domestic division of labor and shaped the aspirations of young and old. To Herbert G. Gutman, the second great migration dismantled families, but not the “idea of family” (81-82). Children soon populated the new plantation region and for enslaved men and women, the arrival of a child affirmed their survival as a people. The new children also provided them with the opportunity to link the world that they had lost to the world that had been forced upon them. Slave parents restored the ties that had been forever severed by the second great migration in naming their children for some loved one left behind and in so doing; they reconnected themselves and their children with the ancestors they would never know (Berlin 127).

In *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, Herbert G. Gutman emphasizes that rituals for celebrating marriage, coming of age, breaking bread, and giving last rites to honor elders which had been transferred across the Atlantic were reconstructed along the coast of mainland North America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They were passed on to new ground during the nineteenth century and African Americans nurtured them as “mechanisms” that could “serve as part of the machinery for establishing and maintaining a wide ranging kinship mechanism” (91). These rites survived in the minds of those forcibly deported from their seaboard homes along with the unfulfilled egalitarian promise of the Age of Revolution and the Great Awakenings. Consequently, such memories became the building blocks for
reconstructing new communities in the black belt, Mississippi delta, trans-Mississippi West, and other parts of the land black men and women were making their own.

Altering the relationship between movement and place in African American life, yet again, was the arrival of freedom and civil war that changed black life dramatically. Eric Foner in *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* states: “the demise of slavery, inevitably threw open the most basic questions of the polity, economy, and society.” Furthermore, he emphasizes: “Begun to preserve the Union, and the Civil War now portended a far-reaching transformation in Southern life and a redefinition of the place of blacks in American society and of the very meaning of freedom in the American Republic” (3). The revolution of emancipation destroyed the sovereignty of the master and put in its place the discipline of the market. Former slaves believed that there would be no more beatings, no more overseers, and no more intrusions into the most intimate relations between husbands and wives and parents and children. Freed people celebrated these changes, embracing a new order that facilitated them to enjoy the produce of their own labor and promised the opportunity to reconstruct their world in accordance with the principles they had nourished as slaves. Black men and women began the process of transforming themselves into a free person even before shooting stopped. New names were taken, some of which were borrowed from former masters, but most of which harked back to a lineage established by parents and grandparents in the Americas or, occasionally, grandparents and great-grandparents in Africa. Searching out spouses and children who had been sold to distant parts of the South, they reconstructed families and churches and schools that had operated clandestinely emerged from behind the veil of secrecy and dozens of associations were created.
In the spring of 1867, the Radicals in Congress gained control over federal policy toward the South and expanded the rights of black people far beyond those defined by the Johnsonian settlement. Black men became citizens, voters, and office holders in quick order. Black lawmakers helped enact legislation providing black people with access to justice, schools, and a variety of social services, although their power was limited by the covert enmity of their white Republican allies as well as the overt hostility of white Democratic enemies. According to Berlin, “the revolution in black life would stall again, and before long, would move backward, as the Northern interest in remaking the South waned and the old regime reasserted itself” (131). All in all, the transformation that followed wartime emancipation changed the lives of the black Southerners forever.

The sudden termination of the second Middle Passage was among the most momentous of those changes that followed emancipation. For once, freedom called a halt to the massive, forced deportation and after decades on the move, black people deepened their roots on the land to which they had been exiled. Based upon reports presented by the United States Bureau of the Census, “some 90 percent of the black population resided in the slave states in 1860” (6) and that figure did not change over the course of the next four decades. Nine out of ten African Americans still lived in the South and fully three-quarters of these in the Southern countryside at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As there was plenty of room to roam within the South, black people were not locked in place and former slaves prized nothing more than the right to travel freely. Black people were on the move everywhere and yet their patterns of movement revealed both the extent and the limit to African American mobility during that period. Black Southerners continued to churn in the years that followed challenging efforts of both former masters and federal officers who would
deny them an essential attribute of a free people and as men and women tested their freedom of movement (Berlin 132).

Following the collapse of Reconstruction in 1877, several slaves fled Mississippi to Kansas in a movement they compared to the biblical exodus. Frustrated with the failure of Reconstruction sent many black Southerners to the unorganized Western territory a decade later, where they established some two dozen black towns (Berlin 134). But what was most interesting was the fact that even the most mobile black people did not move far and the number of black people leaving South for other parts of the United States during the late nineteenth century remained small. Less than 3 percent of black people born in the South lived beyond its borders in 1870, and that proportion changed a little over the next three decades. Between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of the twentieth century, the regional distribution of the black population between North and South hardly changed. The new arrangement did not change the contours of African American geography and the reconfiguration of the plantation only tied black people more tightly to the countryside. The pronounced attachment of black Southerners to their place surprised white Northerners who anticipated movement and perhaps feared a northward exodus.

With the collapse of Reconstruction and the dissolution of the Freedmen’s Bureau, and the Supreme Court’s nullification of the Civil Rights Act, black workers were left defenseless before their enemies. The deterioration of the political rights of black people made an escape from economic subordination ever more difficult and landlords and planters, seizing their advantage, enacted a host of legal subterfuges to disenfranchise black men. “Poll taxes, literacy tests, and grandfather clauses” (Horton and Horton 227) backed by the omnipresent threat of violence forced black people out of South’s polity. Complementing and paralleling the loss of political rights was the
imposition of legislation designed to immobilize black workers, geographically as well as occupationally. Many of these new laws echoed the Black Codes enacted during Johnnsonian Reconstruction. As the imposition of the legal apparatus of white supremacy nailed African Americans to the base of the social order, constraints on their mobility grew. The postwar settlement laced them tighter rather than loosen the ties of black people to the land. Between 1880 and 1910, the number of “black sharecroppers increased from 429,000 to 673,000” (Phillips 8) and some 75 percent of black Southerners worked in such relations by the end of the nineteenth century. In short, the chains of debt came to resemble the chains of slavery, as landowners and merchants assumed a sense of proprietorship over their workers, which were much akin to the masters’ sense of proprietorship over their slaves.

The growing constraints on black life at century’s end persuaded them “not to flee but to hunker down” (Berlin 146). Segregation and exclusion quickened the development of a universe of separate churches, associations, schools and sometimes whole towns. As the majority of white people embraced white supremacy, there seemed little choice with white jurists announcing the doctrine of separate but equal and white intellectuals elaborating theories of racial superiority. As described by Edward L. Ayers in *Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction*:

Black schools, poor houses, orphanages, and hospitals, founded to help people who had once been slaves, were usually separated by race at their inception. Cities segregated cemeteries and parks; counties segregated court houses. Churches quickly broke into different congregations for blacks and whites. Hotels served one race only, blacks could see plays from the balcony or, separate seats; restaurants served one race or served them in different rooms or, from separate windows (136).
However black men and women established a place where they could act with authority, independence, and intelligence and increasingly, black life turned inward. As measured by the increased in the grisly crime of lynching, violence against black people grew and often white Southerners aimed their anger precisely at those who had succeeded in contradicting the stereotypes of African American incompetence. In the early twentieth century, however, black life was about to change again and blues men and women, who once sang about their native South, would soon add new themes to their repertoire. Songs of place would soon be replaced by “songs of movement” (Berlin 151).

THE THIRD GREAT MIGRATION

Black Southerners had seen their revolution run backward having celebrated the freedom that accompanied wartime emancipation and the enfranchisement of Radical Reconstruction. Opportunities dwindled, rights were lost, and freedoms shriveled during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Even though freedmen were elected to office at the state and national levels, hope for change was short-lived. When the last of the white southern Democrats regained control of their states by 1877, essentially reconstruction efforts were reversed. Adding more pressure during that time was the Supreme Court ruling of *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896), which stated that segregation laws did not violate the 13th and 14th amendment and finally “established the ‘separate but equal doctrine,’ which, combined with the economic dependency of southern black sharecroppers and the denial of black voting rights, circumscribed black opportunities and rights and defined southern race relations throughout the first half of the twentieth century” (Horton and E. Horton 229). In *Klux Klan: A History of Racism and Violence* compiled by the staff of the klanwatch
project of the southern poverty law center, it is stated that between 1890 and 1910, every state south of the Mason-Dixon Line, from the Atlantic Coast to Texas and Oklahoma, established a "Jim Crow" system of race relations. This period saw the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, a radical group that longed for the “Old South” (8-9). Almost “3,000 blacks were lynched between 1892 and 1903” and consequently to many African Americans, migration seemed to hold the answer to a better life. By 1930, the Great Migration had brought about “2 million” black southerners to northern cities (Conlin 545).

New forms of political domination and labor extraction emerged while slavery was not re-imposed. Although ex-Confederates and their sympathizers regained their place atop Southern society, black people were stripped of the suffrage thereby locking them in a position of social inferiority and economic dependency. The weight of the debt and the omnipresent threat of violence made escape all but impossible for many black people under such circumstances. Everything changed amid seemingly endless commentaries on the immutability of African American life in the rural South. Between 1915 and 1917, “the black belt was depopulated as black tenants, laborers, and sharecroppers fled their old homes” (Berlin 153). A near majority of black Americans by 1970 resided in the North and the West, almost entirely in cities. Black people yet again, began the reconstruction of their society.

This third great migration, in the words of Berlin “dwarfed” all previous migrations of black people and subsequently, carried more than “ten times” the number transferred from Africa to mainland North America in the transatlantic slave trade and “six times” the number of those shipped from the seaboard South to the interior by continental slavers (157). It is revealed that the original impetus of this
third migration could be found at the end of the nineteenth century, when a small beetle invaded Texas and devastated the state’s cotton crop. The South’s cotton economy collapsed in the face of the massive infestation as the boll weevil moved eastward to an even greater feast. The onset of World War I stimulated an economic boom in the North and also eliminated a most important market for Southern cotton and depressed prices. John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss Jr. in *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, noted that with many northern industrial workers “drawn into the war as soldiers… and transatlantic travel too dangerous for immigrant laborers … the factories suddenly became desperate for people to run their machines” (340). Black tenants and sharecroppers took to the road with no cotton to harvest and little hope that the next year’s crop would be better. Even though they moved from areas of infestation to those where the pest had yet to arrive and worked at a feverish pace, the resulting harvests, swollen by the workers’ extraordinary exertions, only drove prices down and further impoverished black workers.

With the entry of the United States into World War I, desperate men and women obtained opportunities to “remake” their lives on new ground. The war created a severe labor shortage in the industrial North and European industrial expansion for almost a century could no longer cross the wartime Atlantic. Also military conscription subtracted yet other white workingmen from the labor force and exacerbated the labor shortage. The escalation of the draft and the decline of European immigration taken together, made room for black men in Northern factories, railroad yards, and dry docks, allowing them to enter manufactories from which they had previously been barred. Eager to assure a ready supply of labor, the federal officials and Northern industrialists added to the Northward pull. As such, the *Department of Labor* established the *Division of Negro Economics* and corporations
sent “representatives in the South to recruit black workers” (Oliver Horton and E. Horton 87). Some of the labor agents, deeply idealistic in promoting black life outside the South and others crudely opportunistic in exploiting the migrant’s insecurity urged Black Southerners to seize the moment. Some black leaders, most famously, Robert Abbott, the militant editor of the *Chicago Defender*, on seeing the possibilities of racial advancement and also along with a larger readership for his journal, wielded the biblical imagery of an Egyptian-style exodus and a promised land to promote the advantages of black life in the North. Offers of free transportation, assurances of a better world, and guarantees of regular employment pulled black Southerners north. It could indeed be pointed out that, African American newspapers sent out the clarion call for those willing to make the decision to leave the South. *The Chicago Defender* exclaimed, “to die from the bite of frost is far more glorious than at the hands of the mob” and in 1917, the *Christian Recorder* wrote, “if a million Negroes move north and west in the next twelve months, it will be one of the greatest things for the Negro since the Emancipation Proclamation” (qtd. in John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss Jr. 340).

Even though black Southerners remained deeply skeptical that the white North was fundamentally different from the white South, there was no stopping to the migration that was going to happen from the South towards urban North (Berlin 159). By the mid-twentieth century, the South had become the old country, much as “Africa had become for black peoples transported across the Atlantic in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and Virginia and South Carolina had become for those shipped across the continent in the nineteenth” (Berlin 156). In a way, the South had gone North and this third passage not only transferred black people from south to north but also made urbanities out of country folk. As could be understood from Howard
Dodson and Sylviane A. Diouf’s *In Motion: The African-American Migration Experience*, the black population of Chicago grew from “44,000 in 1910 to 234,000 in 1930” and it stood at nearly half a million thirty years later. With the number of black residents increasing from about “6,000 in 1910 to 120,000” (136) twenty years later, a black Detroit enjoyed an even more explosive growth. Almost three-quarters of the nation’s black population resided in cities by the 1960s. Seven metro poles namely, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, Los Angeles and San Francisco housed two-thirds of the blacks residing outside the South. The nation’s most rural people had become its most urban at midcentury. Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops in *Demographic Trends in the Twentieth Century*, stated that northern cities also became blacker in progressions that were more geometric than arithmetic. While only “two percent” of Chicago’s population was black in 1910, black people totaled “6 percent” in 1930, “14 percent” in 1950, and “33 percent” in 1970 (260). Black people composed one-third or more of numerous Northern cities at midcentury, and were more urbanized than the white one. The plantation was becoming a distant memory for black Americans.

Young men and women saw a different vision of the town and country while men and women with families left the countryside only reluctantly. Sociologist E. Franklin Frazier in *The Negro Family in the United States* (1966) observed:

The ‘town’ offered freedom from the restraints imposed by rural churches…. In dance halls, they could give free rein to their repressed impulses without incurring the censure of the elders for ‘their sinful conduct’…. Having caught a glimpse of the world beyond … these men and women were lured to a world beyond the small towns where they might enjoy even greater freedom and more exciting adventures (210).
The character of the migrants differed according to their age, sex, and family status. The first wave of northward-moving black Southerners were generally more skilled and literate than those they left behind. They moved north with experience, confidence, and material resources. But fast on the heels of these black urbanities were country folks who had little experience with city life (Berlin 167). As the cotton economy collapsed, penniless, displaced tenants or sharecroppers innocent of urban life and carrying all their belongings in cardboard cases replaced men and women familiar with urban life, industrial employment and wage work. Black people took control of the movement north unlike with the forced migration that had moved their ancestors. They invited families and friends to join them as the first arrivals settled in their new homes. Free black men and women moved north as families, or they soon reconstructed their families. They joined neighbors, people with whom they had lived and worked whereas Africans and African Americans migrating as slaves had been transported as isolated individuals, separated from family and friends. Most did not have to invent fictive kin or reestablish social networks when they arrived at their destinations and if the first and the second passages had broken families and dismembered communities, the third passage had just the opposite effect. Messages between northward migrants and their kin filled mail boxes, telegraph wires, and, in time, telephone lines while enslaved Africans and African Americans lost their ability to communicate with their loved ones. A host of social service, fraternal societies, and church-based associations eventually supplemented these personal communications to ease the migrants’ passage.

As James R. Grossman in *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* emphasizes, unlike earlier, the movement north became the occasion to restore, rather than destroy, family and community life and another distinction
between the third passage and the forced transatlantic and transcontinental migrations was that the movement north was not a one way trip. He states “transferring families and communities northward, these migrants ensured continuity in their lives as well as in the Great Migration itself” (67). Ira Berlin states, “Every new arrival in the North seemed to add a link to the chain that connected North and South…. Networks of kin and community that bound black people together in the South thus extended northward, not only substantially reducing the material costs of migration but also easing the psychological burden as well” (172) Chain migrations also made the third passage more homogeneous than either the transatlantic or the transcontinental slave trade. Once the migrants arrived in the North, they did not stop and in time, the movement north took on a life of its own. The northward routes became well-worn grooves in which many travelled and the ability of black people to manage the move from the South mitigated the worst features of the earlier, forced migrations. In time, new variations continually emerged as the links between North and South solidified, some opportunities grew and others declined, and the nature of transport changed.

One could understand that the grand hopes for a better future were tempered by a deep understanding of the historic realities of race relations in the United States. The migrants were not surprised to learn that racial subordination would be as much a part of life in the North as it was in the South although they would be shocked by the intensity, persistence, and novel forms it took. Wonder at the marvels and the possibilities of life in the North soon gave way to first purposes—to find regular, remunerative employment. Most began their stay in the North by searching for work while some migrants had a job waiting. Black men and women, for nearly a century, had been denied a place in the North’s industrial revolution, except in the occasional role as strikebreakers. The vast majority labored irregularly either as menials,
shouldering a shovel or pushing a broom, or as domestics, cleaning, cooking, driving coaches, and minding the children of white Northerners as they were barred from factories by an unholy alliance of white employers who disparaged their abilities and white employees who disparaged their persons. W.E.B. Du Bois noted in *The Philadelphia Negro* that no matter how well trained a Negro may be, or how fitted for work of any kind, he cannot in the ordinary course of competition hope to be much more than a menial servant. (323)

Henri Florette in *Black Migration North 1900-1920* extends the notion that African Americans lived in self-contained communities, commonly known as ghettos in the North. Many African Americans, according to her, ran north to escape the Jim Crow south, only to discover that segregation existed de facto in their new home and that discrimination and prejudice were universal. Only a small number of black people escaped the servility and insecurity of what was politely called “Negro work” and as a proportion of the population, the black men and women working as professionals, proprietors, or skilled workers never amounted to more than 3 percent of the black workforce. Although their claim to status often rested as much upon their tawny color and assertions of respectability as upon their occupation or wealth, these select few had established lucrative niches within the service trades as barbers, waiters, and caterers. An even smaller number practiced medicine and law, held appointive and elective office, or ministered the gospel. But even as immigrants arrived from the South, the elite’s always precarious position within Northern society was collapsing. Black professionals and tradesmen everywhere found their historic businesses shriveling before the force of racial exclusion. As could be seen in *Urban America: A History with Documents* by Bayrd Still, between 1895 and 1905, nearly every occupation once colored people of Chicago had almost a “monopoly” were lost.
Disappearing along with their occupational niches were the small shards of patronage black politicians once enjoyed, as lily white Republicans had surrendered an earlier generation’s egalitarian commitment (279).

Ira Berlin stresses “if members of the old elite were losing ground, they did not yield their place at the top of black society easily” (178). Their pride of place rested upon the embrace of bourgeois ideals of self-empowerment through education, religious orthodoxy, and values of frugality, industry and temperance. To demonstrate that they deserved a position within the great American middle class as well as to support these ideals—blacks created a host of exclusive associations, like Chicago’s Appomattox Club, New York’s Century Club, Cleveland’s Caterers Club, and Detroit’s Oak and Ivy Club. The elite celebrated their lineage as often as their ideals and many of their forebears had led “the struggle against slavery alongside white abolitionists, whose descendants served as patrons and political allies” and as such gloried in the name of “Old Settlers” (Berlin 179).

In an article, “The African American ‘Great Migration’ and Beyond”, it is observed that:

As the Great Migration proceeded, the South suffered substantial losses of its native-born black population, with over 2.5 million southern-born blacks living outside of the region by 1950 and over 4 million by 1980. Equally impressive is the dramatic overall increase in the non-southern black population, fueled largely by the southern migrants and their northern-born offspring. Thus, in purely demographic terms, the Great Migration produced a dramatic geographic redistribution of the African American population (210).
The pressing need for labor during World War I allowed the new arrivals and many older residents to break the industrial color line and the migrants almost immediately, took place in the assembly lines from which black workers had long been excluded. More than two-thirds of Cleveland’s black men labored in factories and other industrial sites by the 1920s. A similar pattern could be found in other Northern cities, but still, new arrivals struggled against the traditional opposition of white employers. In some places, they made little headway, and the black unemployment rate remained higher than that of the whites. Black women also made some advances and they too began to find a place in Northern factories and as such, “many women hoped the wartime need for labor would break down traditional barriers that had barred them from employment…. To a limited extend, the optimism was warranted” (Gillon and Cathy 660). It is found that between 1910 and 1920, the proportion of women working in factories “doubled,” while the proportion laboring as domestics began to slowly decline. Even then Black women workers found it particularly difficult to break the industrial color line because they were continued to be funneled into domestic employment and other low-status, low-paying jobs with little chance of advancement. Many of the women who had left jobs as teachers in the South found themselves cleaning houses in the North. Nearly nine of ten black families, for all their striving, lived below the federal poverty line as late as the 1940s. The economic standings of most Southern migrants had hardly improved on the eve of World War II.

The first arrivals in the North needed places to live, as well as jobs. During most of the nineteenth century, black people had lived scattered across Northern cities. Although small in number when compared to what will follow, the movement of black people in the urban North during the late nineteenth century reshaped racial
residential patterns, creating areas in which black people composed a large portion of the residents. In general, as the black Southerners entered the North, they were funneled into areas that were composed disproportionately of African American. Often at the behest of white real estate agents, white residents hastily evacuated these areas and the newcomers found themselves living in neighborhoods composed almost entirely of people of their own color. Racial segregation increased steadily during the twentieth century and ghettos emerged as the concentration of black people increased and black areas of the cities became blacker. The ghettos grew, expanding in paroxysms of violence during the next half century and black people could not live safely beyond the borders of these enclaves. In Ira Berlin’s words, “ghettos became the destinations of thousands of black Southerners, many of whom knew little of Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh, or New York, but knew all about the South Side, Paradise Valley, Little Africa, or Harlem” (183).

The expanding ghettos not only restructured relationships between white and black people but also among black people and swallowed all people of African descent. Forced to create a city within a city, old residents and new arrivals soon found excitement in the places where they could locate their own food, religion, and music. Ghettos hummed with familiar smells and sounds, as restaurants serving black-eyed peas and ham-hocks, clubs and theatres featuring down-home music, and churches preaching the old-time gospel appeared everywhere. These places attracted ambitious black men and women, preachers, novelists, musicians, businessmen, and artists of all sorts found comfort and dollars in the black audience.

Adam Greene in Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955 highlighted that “most leading lights of the African-American culture and
intellect viewed Harlem as their spiritual home” (23-24) and the most famous of these cultural enclaves namely, New York’s Harlem and Chicago’s Bronzeville left a lasting mark on African American and American culture. The renascences of the twentieth century generated a sense of pride which eventually was captured in the word “soul” that spoke to the essence of African American life. The inner city ceased to be a place of confinement, but a familiar terrain and even a home turf and by the 1930s, the inner city was also becoming a source of political power.

Migrants joined with the Old Settlers to create a new politics, employing the suffrage which had been denied to them in the South. As Berlin puts forth: “Emerging from churches, social service agencies, women’s clubs, labor unions, neighborhood organizations, the Communist and Socialist parties, as well as fuller participation in both the Republican and Democratic parties - the new politics were quick to seize the celebratory rhetoric of American democracy and turned it against the American apartheid system” (184). Black men and women organized rent strikes and boycotts and demanded equal pay for equal work and warred against exclusion and segregation in schools, restaurants, theatres, and the work place. Their efforts were supported by a growing network of newspaper like Chicago’s Defender, New York’s Amsterdam News, and Pittsburgh’s Courier, that enjoyed a larger reach, knitting local struggles into a national movement. Black men before long began appearing in municipal and state legislatures and Oscar De Priest, in 1928, “took a seat in Congress as the representative from Chicago” (Berlin 185).

Black voters over time became increasingly important part of the Northern electorate and became an active element in the New Deal coalition, turning away from the party of Lincoln. Black voters, in many districts in the North held the balance of
power, a claim at least some white politicians took seriously. Political activism swelled beyond the boundaries of partisan politics as a new, more militant civil rights movement demanded full equality. American mobilization for war provided new leverage for civil rights advocates in 1940 and they demanded a desegregation of the armed forces and equal access to employment in the expanding defense industries. Under the leadership of A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, militants threatened a massive march of black people in Washington, shaking the Roosevelt administration. In June 1941 a reluctant President Roosevelt issued an executive order providing full and equitable participation of all workers in defense industries. After numerous public hearings and continued protests by the NAACP and the African American community groups, President Roosevelt also set up the Fair “Employment Practices Commission” to enforce the order and the situation at last began to change. It could be said that by “December 1944, blacks, who made up only 6.5 percent of the total population of Los Angeles, had 14 percent of all shipyard jobs. Their representation in aircraft plants was significantly lower, but it nevertheless gave a minority of them access for the first time to well-paying semiskilled if not skilled jobs” (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 56)

Again the shortage of workers during the war allowed black men and women to secure employment in jobs previously reserved for whites. Many gained their positions as civil servants in expanding federal, state, and municipal bureaucracies, as teachers, postal workers, middle managers, and clerks of all sorts. Particularly in the defense industry, the advances were real even though rank discrimination remained. An expanding cadre of black men and women exchanged their blue collars for white and enjoyed greater stability of employment, a chance for regular salary increases, access to health care, and pensions at retirement, all the while escaping from the
exhausting labor of the assembly line. Wartime prosperity, not only enlarged black communities, but also made them more diverse. They distinguished themselves not so much by the size of their bank accounts, but by their dress, deportment, and associational memberships that together made a visible claim to respectability.

The black inner city underwent its own transformation following World War II as the black population grew in number and density. Federal policy makers, joined by redlining bankers and mortgage brokers, both determined to maintain racial homogeneity kept black people penned in decaying urban neighborhoods, denying them access to home ownership in the new suburbs by endorsing racially restrictive covenants. As such, “already in the 1930s a few blacks had tried to move into the Watts neighborhood, but the white citizens in the area, as they had done with the Mexicans, refused to permit African Americans to break down the restrictive zoning laws by settling there” (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 56).

Other changes reshaped African American life in postwar America. While black people could do little to break the vice grip of residential segregation, their growing political presence and economic prosperity stoked the struggle for equality (Berlin 190). The proportion of black men and women employed in white-collar jobs doubled between 1940 and 1960 and the long-term changes set in motion by the third great migration and by the immediate effects of the Civil Rights movement decisively altered the economic structure of black society. Ira Berlin notes: “The black middle class continued to prosper as never before. The number of black families earning $10,000 or more (in constant dollars) more than doubled the years between 1960 and 1969” (192). But while the black middle class gained ground at midcentury, black industrial workers lost it, as the ladder of industrial employment collapsed, and with it
the possibilities of rising within the industrial hierarchy. Further the reorganization of the American economy left many black men and women without access to employment as factories abandoned Northern cities for the suburbs, then left the suburbs for the South, and then the South for foreign destinations. The black men and women of the third great migration, who had secured a toehold in the industrial working class during World War II and enjoyed the postwar prosperity, saw their grip slipping as the structure of American manufacturing shook in the 1960s and after. The skills of those experienced in the old smokestack manufactories did not transfer easily to the new high-tech industries and the Civil Rights movement did little to improve the material conditions of black people in the inner city. Excluded from the dynamic sector of the American economy, once again buffeted by the changing nature of production, and tied to the most vulnerable industries, black men and women saw their connections to regular work unraveling.

Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr in *Ethnic Los Angeles (1996)* pointed out a significant turn of events:

The principles of ameliorating inequality for minority groups and welcoming new immigrants clash when newcomers compete for jobs with African Americans or other indigenous minority groups. Economic conflict and subsequent tension among minority groups can easily undermine the civil rights movement. Worse, this tension is simultaneously stirring a conservative backlash against civil rights and generating a nativist movement bent on stopping immigration (166).

The number of black households without male wage earners increased from 22 to 35 percent between 1960 and 1975. The absence of regular employment and a
living wage demoralized working people, particularly young men and women.
Without access to work, black families, which had survived slavery and segregation frayed. The infrastructure of the inner city deteriorated along with the lives of its inhabitants. The dismantling of legal segregation and the new growth of the black middle class and other changes set in motion by the Civil Rights movements allowed some black people to leave the inner city. Most moved to close-in suburbs which soon became as segregated as the inner city and the number of black men and women living in the suburbs totaled some seven million by the middle of the 1980s, more than double the number a decade earlier. Ira Berlin highlighted that “those who remained in the inner city did not always resemble the respectable, churchgoing men and women who had once composed the core of black communities” (195).

Waldinger and Bozorgmehr stated that when a series of riots following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., by 1968 decimated numerous black neighborhoods, black people were fully identified with urban life. The rise of the black middle class and the decline of black workers in what some had begun to call an “underclass” left African American society sharply divided (379). This division was also reflected in the profound alteration of the social geography of African American life over the course of the twentieth century—a process that defined a new sense of place for black people. African Americans experienced an increasing sense of “differentiation and bifurcation” by which black Americans “increasingly differ from one another in the kinds of job they perform, their educational attainment, and the neighborhoods in which they live” and “has been increasingly split between those who are well-to-do and those who are faring poorly” (380). The characterization of black society at the end of the twentieth century recalled earlier examples of the
effects of antebellum enslavement and postbellum rural impoverishment in black people.

What was clear, however, was the full identification of black life in the city which had become what the plantation had been in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and what the sharecroppers plot had been in the late nineteenth. After more than half a century of movement, black people again found the place and the surety of place spawned a new confidence. This “new confidence” as could be seen in Peniel E. Joseph’s *Waiting ’Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America*, was expressed in a variety of ways and most prominently in a series of overlapping nationalistic movements that celebrated “blackness.” While some were economic and asserted black control over production and consumption and others were political and demanded “Black Power,” all spoke of “Black Pride” which was “to be associated almost exclusively” with them (28). Clothed in sporting Afros, in dashikis, and holding high, clenched fists, the new movement asserted “Black is Beautiful” in a manner that reflected ownership of the inner city. As the third great migration drew to a close by the 1960s, black people were “both in place and every place” and during the last third of the twentieth century, “black life would again be remade, as a new diaspora brought millions of people of African descent to the United States” (Berlin 200).

**THE FOURTH GREAT MIGRATION (GLOBAL PASSAGES)**

During the last third of the twentieth century, dark-skinned peoples of African descent from all over the world descended upon the United States and the influx of people of African descent initiated yet another transformation of black society. This fourth migration still under way at the beginning of the twenty-first century, like the
earlier three promises to remake African American life. The congressmen who authored the *Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965* evinced no particular desire to enlarge the black population, yet making skilled-based merit and family ties, rather than national origins, the criteria for entry into the United States (Berlin 204).

Aristide R. Zolberg in *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America*, stated that while earlier passages began with the crack of a whip, the slam of an auctioneer’s gavel, or the whispered promise of a better job, the new migration had its origins in a fit of absent-mindedness. Zolberg emphasizes that:

> One of the strongest incentives for legalizing, from the immigrant perspective, was the right to travel internationally, followed by the right to petition for relatives to immigrate, leading its author to conclude that rather than fully integrating legalizing aliens into their identities as U.S. residents, legalization was a way to keep their ties alive with the country of origin (372).

Subsequent modifications to the 1965 law, particularly, the 1986 *Immigration and Control Act*, which granted the possibility of amnesty to numerous illegal immigrants and introduced the so-called lottery system only enlarged the portal. Others still gained entry as political refugees and asylees. Black men and women poured into the United States during the next forty years at an ever increasing rate and nations whose citizens had been denied entry or limited to quotas in the hundreds sent thousands. Newly independent nations such as Caribbean and African colonies which previously had not been recognized as places of embarkation became sources of large-scale immigration. But as with the earlier passages, the matter of labour, both the need for labor and the needs of the labourers was never far from the surface, even though the new American laws and regulations made entry into the United States possible (Berlin 204). The dynamics of a global marketplace for American employers both for
cheap, unskilled labour and for highly skilled workers were becoming increasingly evident. Post-World War II decolonization had been accompanied by promises of prosperity and democracy and the number of black people of foreign birth, entering the United States increased at an ever-faster rate, as the United States became a destination for the African diaspora. The rate continued to accelerate in the decades that followed and more arrived in the “1980s than in the 1970s, ... even more in the 1990s than in the 1980s.” (Waters, Ueda and Marrow 323-328) Their numbers continue to swell into the twenty-first century, so that “the black population closed for centuries, opened to increase from the outside” (Berlin 206).

People of African descent arrived from all parts of the globe and among the new arrivals were black Britons, some of whom descended from the Loyal Blacks who had taken refuge in England in the years that followed the American Revolution. Unlike most of the new black arrivals, early in the twentieth century, Caribbean peoples had established a presence in the United States. Many had obtained American citizenship in the intervening years, making it possible for them to sponsor members of their immediate families. With the mixture of immigrants and refugees growing steadily during the last two decades of the twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first, the African entries followed a similar pattern. According to the U.S. Censor Bureau, the immigrants’ social standing was “as diverse as the cultural baggage” they carried and following new criteria for admission to the United States, educated professionals numbered many among the new immigrants. These well-placed men and women arrived with knowledge, connections, and money rather than being driven by acts of desperation to escape political repression or drought-born famines. They desired only to transfer their credentials to the United States to obtain better jobs and higher pay as doctors, accountants, lawyers, and engineers (37-41).
As African and Afro-Caribbean people forged new selves, they also discovered a common experience as immigrants of African descent in the United States. The unity of past centuries proved more elusive for black men and women journeying in the fourth great migration. Tensions between the American-born and foreign-born blacks remained at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Yet, the very same inner-city neighborhoods in which natives and newcomers awkwardly confronted one another also became sites where they too create a new African American culture. Tensions between peoples with diverse African roots have continued to linger in the twenty-first century in part as Berlin proclaims, because immigrants have more options than earlier arrivals. Many immigrants continue to be more engaged with the politics of their old homeland rather than their new one and others find no necessity to choose between them. The ease of the autonomy of ethnic neighborhoods, the possibilities of dual citizenship, and international travel and communication has allowed immigrants to maintain multiple identities (224, 228).

But the most visible manifestations of the transformation of black life as with early passages could be found in the sounds emanating from the shared quarters. Berlin continues: “much as the spirituals arose from the transcontinental transit from the seaboard to the black belt and jazz emerged amid the movement from south to north, so hip-hop grew amid the fourth great migration” (224).

One of the predominant forms of migration for African Americans that took place was the “return” migration to the South that increased after the 1970s. As with virtually all migration streams, Steward E. Tolnoy points out that this Great Migration had a reverse flow of former migrants who headed back to the South after spending some time in the North. Furthermore, he claims “the maintenance of cross-generational familial and cultural connections to the South among many blacks in the
North has led to their selection of the South as a migration destination in the post-Great Migration era” (227). One could say that the “contrapuntal narrative,” to use Berlin’s words, of movement and place, routes and roots, fluidity and fixity that has characterized black life throughout American history has not always followed the same course and the fourth migration at the beginning of the twenty-first century would continue to shape, make and remake African American life.

Therefore, one can conclude that migration has been a central feature in the making of African American history and the experience of migration entails location, dislocation and relocation. This pattern is reflected in the structure of African American narratives dealing with migration. This study examines as to “how” this pattern is instrumental in determining the narrative structure of the novels of Toni Morrison. The subsequent chapters illustrate that Toni Morrison’s novels offer a fresh reading of African American history through the prism of the “great migrations” that made and remade African and African American life. One can see migration and the reshaping of communities to their new environments as central to the African-American experience, an experience that calls for a process of cultural revisionism, of redefining history and historical memory, and of confronting the past in innovative and constructive ways that are intentionally self-reflexive.