



1910 1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970

## **PATTERNS OF MIGRATION**

The 20 year period between 1940 and 1960 saw a dramatic shift in the black population. While the nation's 12 largest cities lost 3.5 million white people between 1950 and 1960, they gained 4.5 million non-whites (mostly African Americans). Many of the migrants from the Mississippi Delta headed north to Chicago. That's where the highways and railroads ran. They could hop on the bus or drive or hitchhike or take the train directly north. At one point 2,200 black people were arriving in Chicago every week. Between 1940 and 1960, the black population of Chicago increased almost 300%, from 278,000 to 813,000.

### **QUESTION:**

**African Americans from different parts of the south often headed to northern cities other than Chicago. Look at a map. To what cities might the migrants from the Carolinas, Alabama, and Texas usually go?**

### **QUESTION:**

**Think of the Conestoga wagons and the myths of the 19th century western expansion as depicted in westerns you've seen and their centrality to American culture. What might explain the absence of the black migration from movies, myths and stories, even your own U.S. history textbook?**

### **QUESTION:**

**In the film, Son Thomas sings his classic song, Highway 61 Blues.  
The lyrics go:**

**Y'know 61 Highway...the loneliest road I know,  
Y'know 61 Highway...the loneliest road I know,  
It runs from Chicago  
Down to the Gulf of Mexico.**

**Why do you think Highway 61 was the loneliest road? What does the music tell you? Why do you think it was called the blues? Can you think of other songs about highways or people leaving home?**