



# GEOGRAPHIC MOBILITY IN THE UNITED STATES — 1920-1950

## TEACHER VERSION

**Subject Level:**

High School History

**Grade Level:**

9-10

**Approx. Time Required:**

45-60 minutes

**Learning Objectives:**

- Students will be able to analyze, compare, and interpret maps on U.S. population density from three periods in the early 20th century.
- Students will be able to understand how events during these three periods affected geographic mobility.
- Students will be able to understand more recent trends in population movement.

## Activity Description

Students will examine maps to explore changes in population density in the United States during three decades: 1920-1930 (Post-Progressive Era), 1930-1940 (Great Depression), and 1940-1950 (World War II). They will then determine what happened during each decade that likely influenced geographic mobility. Students will also examine a map of more recent population data (for 2000-2010) to understand trends in population movement.

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**Topics:**

- Data visualizations
- Geographic mobility
- The Great Depression
- Migration
- Population density
- Post-Progressive Era
- World War II

**Skills Taught:**

- Analyzing change over time
  - Comparing and contrasting
  - Making predictions
  - Reading and interpreting maps
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## Materials Required

- The student version of this activity, 3 pages
- A computer with Internet access for each student

A teacher computer with Internet access and a projector to display web sites is optional.

## Activity Items

This activity uses the following online tools:

- Before and After 1940: Change in Population Density  
[www.census.gov/dataviz/visualizations/010](http://www.census.gov/dataviz/visualizations/010)
- Population Change by Decade, 1910-2010  
[www.census.gov/dataviz/visualizations/049](http://www.census.gov/dataviz/visualizations/049)

For more information to help you introduce your students to the U.S. Census Bureau, read "[Census Bureau 101 for Students](#)." This information sheet can be printed and passed out to your students as well.

## Standards Addressed

See charts below. For more information, read

["Overview of Education Standards and Guidelines Addressed in Statistics in Schools Activities."](#)

## Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

Standard	Strand	Cluster
<p><b>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH 9-10.7</b></p> <p>Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text.</p>	<p>RH 9-10 - History/ Social Studies</p>	<p>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</p>

## UCLA National Standards for History: U.S. History Content Standards

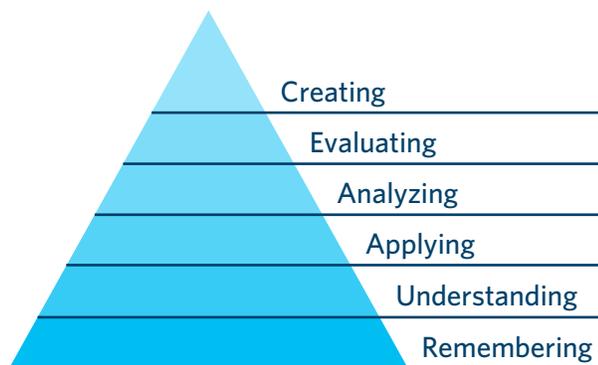
Era	Standard
8 - The Great Depression and World War II (1929-1945)	<b>Standard 1B:</b> The student understands how American life changed during the 1930s.
9 - Postwar United States (1945 to Early 1970s)	<b>Standard 1:</b> The economic boom and social transformation of postwar United States

## UCLA National Standards for History: Historical Thinking Standards

Standard	Description
Standard 2: Historical Comprehension	Draw upon data in historical maps. Students will look at maps of U.S. population data from three different decades to understand how events in the early 20th century influenced geographic mobility.

## Bloom's Taxonomy

Students will **analyze** how events during three periods of U.S. history affected geographic mobility.



## Teacher Notes

### Before the Activity

Students must understand the following key terms:

- **Geographic mobility** – the ability of people to move from one geographic location to another
- **Population density** – the number of people per unit of area

Students should have a basic understanding of the following concepts:

- The economic, political, and social changes that occurred in the United States during the Post-Progressive Era, the Great Depression, and World War II

### During the Activity

Teachers should monitor students as they work.

### After the Activity

Teachers should select (or ask students to select) a print or digital text whose author argues that a certain qualitative factor has an impact on U.S. population change now or in the future. Teachers could use this 2016 NPR article titled “Do Americans Really Move To Canada Because Of Politics?” ([www.npr.org/2016/03/30/472279572/do-americans-actually-follow-through-on-election-threats-to-move-to-canada](http://www.npr.org/2016/03/30/472279572/do-americans-actually-follow-through-on-election-threats-to-move-to-canada)).

Teachers should then ask students:

- What does the author say/predict about population change? What could this mean for the future of the United States?
- According to the text, what factors, including any historical events, affect current or future population change?
- Do you agree with the author’s argument? Use information from this activity to support your viewpoint, comparing the population change from the text with the changes that occurred during the Post-Progressive Era, the Great Depression, or World War II.

As part of a class discussion, teachers should have students summarize what they learned in the activity, asking them questions like:

- What did you learn?
- What are you still curious about?
- What was the purpose of this activity? Why is the information important to understand?

### Extension Idea

- Teachers could have students read an excerpt or watch a clip from “The Grapes of Wrath” that illustrates geographic mobility during the Great Depression.

## Student Activity

Click [here](#) to download a printable version for students.

### Activity Items

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- Population Change by Decade, 1910-2010  
[www.census.gov/dataviz/visualizations/049](http://www.census.gov/dataviz/visualizations/049)

### Student Learning Objectives

- I will be able to analyze, compare, and interpret maps on U.S. population density from three periods in the early 20th century.
- I will be able to understand how events during these three periods affected geographic mobility.
- I will be able to understand more recent trends in population movement.

1. Navigate to the Before and After 1940: Change in Population Density data visualization using the URL at the top of this activity. The tool shows population density shifts at the county level in 10-year intervals. Looking at the 1920-1930 map, summarize the trends in population density in your own words.

**Student answers will vary but could include: Counties in northeastern states had among the largest increases in population density.**

2. Which U.S. regions saw a decline in population density and which saw a lack of major movement?

**Student answers will vary but could include: Some southern regions, around Georgia, and some areas on the East Coast saw declines in population density. The northwestern region of the United States didn't see much movement.**

**Teachers could note for students that population density in the United States during this decade declined in mostly rural areas, reflecting population movement to cities.**

3. How could increased industrialization during this time period explain the population density changes you just discovered?

**With farming becoming more mechanized, many people who had worked in farming, including a large number of African-Americans, moved from the South to the North and West to find employment. These workers also took advantage of industrial growth by moving to northern cities.**

4. Now click on the 1930-1940 map in the data visualization, and summarize the trends in population density in your own words. Were they different from those that occurred between 1920 and 1930?

**Student answers will vary but should include that the population density patterns changed, with declines happening in the Great Plains, instead of in the South and East.**

5. How might agricultural and economic events have contributed to population density changes that occurred in the United States between 1930 and 1940?

**Student answers may vary but could include: During this time, the Dust Bowl forced people out of areas from Texas spanning north through the Great Plains to places like California and to larger cities. The boll weevil epidemic also caused bankrupt farmers and sharecroppers to move to cities to find work. In addition, economic stimulus programs under the New Deal, such as the building of the Hoover Dam and the formation of the Civilian Conservation Corps, spurred many to move to where jobs were available.**

6. Now click on the 1940-1950 map in the data visualization, and summarize the trends in population density in your own words. Are these patterns different from those in the other two maps? Why do you think this was the case?

**Student answers will vary but should include that there was more geographic mobility during this decade compared with the two other decades; many counties in the Northeast, in the Midwest, and along the West Coast saw increases in population density. This could be because people were leaving more rural counties and moving to more urban and populous counties in the Northeast and Midwest.**

7. How did war mobilization affect population density shifts between 1940 and 1950?

**Student answers may vary but could include that during World War II, people relocated to work in war supply production centers. Women, specifically, moved to new areas to take jobs previously held by men who were fighting overseas.**

8. Based on what you saw in all three decades of data, what were the major push factors (i.e., driving migration from an area) and the major pull factors (i.e., driving migration to an area) affecting population density during the early 20th century?

**Student answers may vary but could include agricultural depression and an increase in farming mechanization as major push factors and war mobilization and industrial growth as major pull factors.**

9. Using the second URL at the top of this activity, go to the Population Change by Decade, 1910–2010 data visualization. Click the play button at the bottom right, and watch the population movement through the decades. What trends do you see in more recent years, from 2000–2010?

**Student answers will vary but could include that the U.S. population shifted to the West and South.**

10. Using the overall trends you see in this data visualization, what population changes do you expect to see 5 years from now?

**Student predictions will vary.**