

MIGRATIONS

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Range. The human species is unusually adaptable to various settings, and early on began to spread far more widely than any other land-based mammal. Migrations were essential to compensate for regional population pressure or other factors. They created new interactions, and often new tensions and hostilities, with established local populations, in a pattern that persists today. At the same time, migration is not a human constant: it varies with time period and region. It also reflects other changes, ranging from available transportation to government policies, or lack thereof, in controlling borders.

Hunting and Gathering. The most important migrations in human history occurred before the Agricultural Age. From its origins in East Africa, various human species migrated both within the continent and beyond, and this would be true of *Homo sapiens sapiens* as well, undoubtedly reflecting the population pressures to which hunting and gathering peoples were particularly sensitive. The species ultimately poured out of Africa and into the Middle East, from which two basic directions then occurred: one to various parts of Europe and South Asia, the other to East Asia and ultimately across the then-existing bridge that connected Asia to Alaska, populating the Americas. These were the patterns that, before agriculture, populated the earth.

Agriculture. Agricultural peoples migrated less readily, tied as they were to the land and to settled family traditions and, often, ownership claims. But two kinds of migration occurred in early agriculture even so. In key regions, like China, growing regional contacts and even a common government could encourage movement within the region. Thus in classical China, with government backing, peoples moved from north to south, mixing with ethnic groups there. Also early in agriculture people in southeast Asia, in the Austric language group, began to fan out in the Pacific, ultimately reaching the Polynesian islands. In Africa, Bantu-speaking farmers began to fan out from their base in west-central Africa, ultimately reaching large portions of the south and east – mainly through peaceful penetration. More modest migrations brought agricultural Greeks to settlements in Mediterranean islands (including Sicily) and in the Middle East. These agricultural migrations brought new cultural forms as well as the economic system to additional areas, though in some cases local populations were subordinated in the process.

Nomads. The second kind of migration occurred mainly from nomadic centers, particularly in Central Asia, where people accustomed to herding animals spilled out into adjacent regions – often because of population growth, sometimes because of perceived advantages in the neighboring societies where, over time, the migrants would settle down. Many of these movements combined invasion with simple population movements. Several major waves were involved. Around 1000 BCE Indo-European groups pressed into southern Europe but also into Persia and the Indian subcontinent. Often they disrupted agriculture for a time, preferring hunting and animal herding. But ultimately they settled down, adopting agriculture, working out relationships with prior local populations through intermarriage, subordination (as in India's early caste system) or some other mechanisms. Indo-European religious beliefs and languages evolved as part of these separate regional developments. A later wave of invasions from central Asia at the end of the classical period, spearheaded by the Huns, was more strictly military, but it encouraged other nomadic migrations in reaction to the resultant pressure, most obviously the movement of Germanic tribes into the Roman Empire. Similar types of incursions into agricultural areas occurred periodically in central America, bringing groups like the Toltecs, or later the Aztecs into contact with prior agricultural settlements from their home base farther north.

The Postclassical Period. This basic pattern persisted into the postclassical period, though with different groups involved. In some cases population reductions caused by disease created opportunities for migrant newcomers. A mixture of migrants and conquerors thus brought Arab peoples from the south of the peninsula through much of the Middle East and North Africa, where again they mixed with locals (some of whom converted not only to Islam but to Arab identity). Arab recruitment of slaves also brought people in from Europe and eastern Africa, in a pattern of forced migration that over time would involve millions of people. Slavic migrations moved into east-central Europe toward the end of the classical period as well. Jewish migration took smaller but important groups from the Middle East, as the Roman Empire weakened, into various parts of Europe though particularly Poland. Later still, Turkic peoples migrated from central Asia into the Middle East, seeking additional grazing land but gradually converting to agriculture, and exercising some military muscle as well. Scandinavian migrations took Vikings to various parts of

Europe, though in smaller numbers, and also to Russia. The Mongol invasions at the end of this period focused more on military conquest than on big population movements, though there was some activity.

The Early Modern period. The most important migration streams in the centuries after 1450 took migrants across the Atlantic, to lands that were increasingly vacated as a result of disease. Various European groups moved, though not in massive numbers. In Latin America they often mixed quickly with surviving natives to create a new, rapidly growing mixed race group. The African slave trade involved forced migration on an unprecedented scale, to meet new labor needs in the Americas. Interacting with local rulers and merchants in Africa, European slave traders ultimately seized 10 to 12 million people. Much smaller migrations in the same period brought some Arab and Indian merchants to east Africa. And Dutch colonists in southern Africa imported up to half a million slaves from southeast Asia, serving as the base of what became known as the “coloured” population, including a substantial number of Muslims (who were not however initially allowed to practice their religion).

The Long 19th Century. Most migrations in the Agricultural Age reflected reasonably porous political boundaries, though of course some conquests, as with the Mongols, managed to penetrate even well-organized states like China. Most of the migrations, also, were one-way affairs. Groups of migrants, moving together, sometimes across several generations, went from one place to settle in another, rarely coming back. This pattern began to change in the long 19th century for several reasons, though basic forces like population pressure were still crucial to many displacements. Industrialization and commercial agriculture in several regions – most obviously, parts of the Americas and Australia/New Zealand – created new opportunities, particularly as the slave trade, and slavery itself, began to dry up after 1808. At the same time, steam shipping greatly expanded the capacity for mobility. And new sources of news – advertisements from needy American companies, newspapers, letters from earlier immigrants – created greater knowledge, or false hopes, about riches to be gained by change. During the first half of the 19th century most migrants were still from Western and central Europe, reaching the “settler societies” where opportunities in farming and industry expanded. Movement also brought many French Canadians into the United States. The second half of the century, when population growth slowed in the West but expanded elsewhere, saw longer-distance jumps. Ten million people migrated from Italy, mainly to parts of Latin America as well as the United States, 2.5 million Russians, 4 million from Austria-Hungary. But Asian migration also began, though in smaller numbers, with workers often on indentured contracts. Almost 200,000 Indians moved outside Asia, to places like the Caribbean and southern Africa; Chinese expanded to the Americas and Pacific regions in Latin America, as well as to southeast Asia. Substantial movements also occurred from Japan.

Motives. Historians debate both the motives and the types of people who migrated at this point. Some were undoubtedly pushed by misery, like the Irish who fled the potato famine of 1846-7. Others faced growing hostility, like Jews in Russia who encountered persecution and violence. Some were lured by agents or advertisements, issued by American railroads or steel companies. Many immigrants were not in fact the poorest in their region, for they needed some funds simply to pay their fares. Debate applies also to whether migrants were unusually enterprising, or simply a more random mixture.

Complexities. Other complications began to differentiate this migration from previous patterns. Increasingly migrants moved into societies with more clearly defined governments and national identities. This could expose them to significant prejudices, on grounds of their “strangeness”, and also quick efforts to change aspects of their culture. At the same time, it was now possible for many migrants to go back to their places of origin, if they did not like the new territory or made some money that allowed them to return in greater styles. Substantial percentages of southern and eastern European immigrants to the United States – other than Jews – did indeed return, where they could affect local conditions and, sometimes, annoy their neighbors with their showy ways. Rising immigration, combined with racial prejudices, might also cause policy shifts. A number of American states, and ultimately the national government, sought to restrict immigration and to exclude entirely certain groups like the Chinese. Many local populations view immigrants as dangerous as well as inferior. Many immigrants themselves, as a result, mixed a certain amount of accommodation to their new cultures with a desire to preserve separate ethnic and religious identities.

Contemporary Patterns. Immigration slowed globally during the first half of the 20th century, thanks to new legal restrictions but also economic disruptions of war and depression. Some movement continued, including a first group of Muslim North Africans who migrated to France. European governments themselves recruited masses of workers from various parts of Asia to provide labor during World War I, and some of them stayed. Increasing numbers of

governments, however, now required formal passports in order to travel, much less migrate, and this on the whole helped restrict the flow. The situation changed dramatically, however, after about 1950. Masses of people in agricultural regions, or regions just beginning to industrialize, pressed by population growth, sought to surge into the industrial areas. Japan discouraged much influx, but the United States shifted gears and began to accept the largest immigrant flow in its history. Western Europe also became a major immigrant receiver for the first time, and Canada and Australia/New Zealand remained important targets as well. Other centers, like the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, recruited massive numbers of migrant workers for construction sites and other centers, though they were not allowed to become citizens. Sending societies now included West Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Philippines, Turkey as well as parts of Asia such as South Korea, India and Pakistan. Turmoil in the Middle East and parts of Africa, after 2012, created unprecedented efforts at illegal immigration particularly into Europe, with refugees often manipulated by shipping agents. Never before had immigration involved such long distances or such a dramatic mixture of cultural traditions. A key result was growing ethnic tension, including outright violence against immigrants particularly in parts of Western Europe. Politicians in many societies, including the United States, periodically debated various kinds of restrictions on the flow. Many scholars believed that immigrants remained a source of entrepreneurial vitality as well as contributing essential labor in societies where natural population growth had slowed or ceased. The process of movement, resistance and assimilation was a vital part of contemporary world history, as well as the history of many of the world's regions.

Sources

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And "Global Migration, 1846-1940." By Adam McKeown. From *Journal of World History*. Volume 15, Number 2 (June, 2004). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20068611>

Primary Sources

"How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York." By Jacob A. Riis. From *Project Gutenberg*. <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/45502>

Suggested Reading:

Migration in World History. By Patrick Manning (Routledge, 2012).

The Global Prehistory of Human Migration. Edited by Peter Bellwood (Wiley-Blackwell, 2014).

Global Migration and the World Economy: Two Centuries of Policy and Performance. By Timothy J. Hatton and Jeffrey G. Williamson (MIT Press, 2008)

Discussion

1. What was the impetus for migration in the pre-history period? Ancient Mediterranean?
2. How different was migration in the Agricultural Age from hunter-gatherer migrations?
3. How has the family impact of migrations changed over time?
4. How did forced migration impact the Americas? What was its impact on Africa?
5. What caused migration around the turn of the 20th century? How did it affect the countries receiving migrants?
6. Why was there a gender imbalance in migration in the modern period? Why did this change over time?
7. What major migrations occurred in non-Western regions during the modern period?
8. Has the nature of migration changed with globalization?