

Unit 3

Human Migrations

Section 1

Unit Materials

Questions To Consider

Question 1.

How and why did early humans migrate out of Africa and across the earth's varied landscapes?

Question 2.

What kinds of evidence do scholars use to trace the paths of early human migrations?

Question 3.

How can contemporary people's creation myths and spoken language give scholars clues about the paths of early human migrations?

Question 4.

Early humans moved across the earth's landscapes in response to the challenges and opportunities posed by the environment. Global migration continues today. How have the reasons for human migration changed over time?

The Big Picture

How is this topic related to Increasing Integration?

All humans are linked through their common origins in Africa.

How is this topic related to Proliferating Difference?

Since the time humans began to migrate out of Africa 100,000 years ago, human populations have developed different myths, languages, cultures, and physical features.

Unit Purpose

- One of the most basic and continuous themes in world history is the story of human migration, which began over 100,000 years ago and continues today.
- The story of early human migrations demonstrates the ability of humans to adapt to social and environmental change.
- Although human populations did develop some differences from one another, they all share a common genetic heritage.

Unit Content Overview

From their origins in Africa, humans now claim and occupy every continent except Antarctica. Today, we seem to accept without question the notion that humans are migratory creatures. But how did this unlikely primate become so numerous and so widespread across the globe? How did humans survive as they moved across the earth's various landscapes? From where did they start and where did they go?

This unit explores both the history of human migration and the means by which scholars have begun to unravel the clues of this ancient story. The story of human migration began when the first humans picked up bundles, weapons, and children, and moved toward a different location. They moved because they had to — whether their reasons were decreasing access to food and shelter, population pressure, or environmental degradation. They moved, in other words, when the risks of staying in place exceeded the perceived dangers of venturing to a new area. In doing so, they hoped to better their chances of surviving, thriving, and reproducing.

Eventually, humans moved across nearly all of the earth's landscapes, including rainforests, deserts, tundra, ice, oceans, and mountains. Scholars speculate that their upright stance and large brains assisted humans in developing the means and the strategies to move over long distances. These same features enabled humans to overcome environmental and physical barriers in a variety of landscapes, and to adapt successfully to the social, political, and ecological realities of their new homes. The result has been the expansion of the species from a mere ten thousand to twenty thousand individuals at the beginnings of human migrations to more than six billion individuals today.

Unit References

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Christopher Ehret, "Bantu Expansions: Re-Envisioning a Central Problem of Early African History," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 34, no. 1 (2001).

Clive Gamble, *Timewalkers: The Prehistory of Global Colonization* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994)

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NOVA. *The Mysterious Mummies of China*, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/chinamum/> (accessed March 14, 2003).

Steve Olson, *Mapping Human History: Discovering the Past through Our Genes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002).

Chris Stringer and Robin McKie, *African Exodus: The Origins of Modern Humanity*, 1st American ed. (New York: Henry Holt, 1997).

Global Historical Context

- Time period: Foundations

- The major feature of world populations through time is their increasing numbers. It is likely that many early human migrations resulted from the pressure of such demographic increases on limited food resources; disease, drought, famine, war, and natural disaster figure among the most important causes of early human migrations. Approximately 100,000 years ago, the first migrations of *Homo sapiens* out of their African homeland likely coincided with the ability to use spoken language and to control fire. Over the next 87,000 years humans migrated to every continent, encompassing a wide variety of natural environments. The Americas were the last continents to be reached by *Homo sapiens*, about 13,000 years ago.

AP Themes

- Explores interactions in economies and politics because conflict between peoples was likely one of the reasons early humans migrated away from their homelands.
- Examines change and continuity by focusing on global changes in human population distribution in the Foundations period.
- Discusses technology, demography, and environment by looking at the ways in which technologies such as fire were critical to changing global human demography. In turn, these changes had profound effects on natural environments.

Related Units

- Unit 14. Land and Labor Relationships: What factors shape the ways in which the basic resources are exploited by a society? From southeast Asia to Russia to Africa and the Americas, the ratios between land availability and the usable labor force were the primary basis of pre-industrial economies; however, politics, environment, and culture played a part as well. This unit is related to Unit 3 because its attention to systems of forced migration demonstrates both continuities in the theme of human migration, as well as differences in the historical reasons humans migrated.
- Unit 24. Globalization and Economics: How have the forces of globalization shaped the modern world? This unit travels from the Soviet Union to Sri Lanka and Chile to study the role of technology and the impact of economic and political changes wrought by globalization. It is related to Unit 3 because it documents both continuities in the story of human migration, and the economic and environmental consequences of global migrations in the modern period.
- Unit 25. Global Popular Culture: What are the sounds and sights of an emerging global culture? From World Cup soccer to Coca-Cola, modern icons reflect the intertwined cultural, political, and commercial dimensions of globalization. This unit listens to and looks at the music and images of global production and consumption — from reggae to the Olympics. It is related to Unit 3 because it demonstrates some of the cultural consequences of human migrations in the modern period.
- Unit 26. World History and Identity: How have global forces redefined both individual and group identities in the modern world? This unit examines the transnational identity that emerged from the Chinese diaspora, and compares it to a newly redefined national Chechen identity forged through war with Russia. It is related to Unit 3 because it

illustrates how human migration in the modern period can have dramatic effects on culture and identity.

Section 2

Video-Related Materials

Video Segment 1: Out of Africa

Where and how did human migration begin? This segment explores the scientific, archaeological, and linguistic evidence scholars have used to answer this question. Most scholars now agree that evidence overwhelmingly points to the African origins of humanity. All of the oldest human fossils have been found in Africa, and genetic studies of our own species (*Homo sapiens*) have shown that modern peoples all over the world are genetically related to modern Africans. Archaeological findings have shown that *Homo sapiens* began moving out of Africa into Eurasia between 70,000 and 140,000 years ago, probably because of environmental changes brought about during an Ice Age. Scholars believe that this period of migration coincided with the use of spoken language, and that this ability — combined with increasingly sophisticated social organization and tool-making capabilities — was an important factor in *Homo sapiens*' successful adaptation to a variety of environments.

Video Segment 2: Peopling the Pacific and the Americas

Once *Homo sapiens* began to migrate out of Africa approximately 100,000 years ago, they spread out across nearly every type of natural environment and eventually populated every habitable area of the world. This segment traces the peopling of the Pacific and the Americas, using a combination of scientific, linguistic, and oral clues. The first indisputable evidence of human habitation on the Australian continent dates back 35,000 years. This evidence is supplemented by the oral tradition of Australian Aborigines, which tells of a “dream time” when peoples came by canoe from the sea to populate the land. In addition, the fact that Aboriginal languages are distinct from other human languages testifies to the existence of human populations on the continent for many millennia. Between 75,000 and 12,000 years ago, humans also reached the Americas. They traveled there via a land bridge at the Bering Strait that was created during an Ice Age. Archaeological evidence dating from 13,000 years ago demonstrates that these early settlers were hunters who used a particular type of spear point to kill their prey. Because no other archaeological evidence of humans predates these “Clovis” spear points, scholars believe that these hunters were the first humans to populate the Americas.

Video Segment 3: Linguistic Clues: Bantu Expansion in Sub-Saharan Africa

The study of language can offer important clues about the historic migration of peoples around the world. Some distinctive linguistic features, such as click sounds, can reveal patterns of movement if they are found in geographically distant populations. Also, similar words in different languages can demonstrate common origins. This video segment uses the Bantu migrations in Africa as an example of the ways the study of language can help scholars trace human movement in the distant past. Between 6,000 and 1,000 years ago, Bantu speakers from the Lake Chad region spread out over most of sub-Saharan Africa. By about 1000 BCE, the pace of Bantu migrations quickened. They may have been aided in this process by their ability to make and use iron tools and weapons, which could have given them an advantage over other human communities. The incorporation into Bantu languages of words from other language groups, including words related to agriculture and herding, provides evidence both of other groups Bantu speakers encountered and indicates that they may have acquired knowledge of these processes from non-Bantu speakers.

Perspectives on the Past: The Urumchi Mummies of Western China

Just when historians and archaeologists think they understand the distant past, new archaeological evidence can force scholars to rethink previous assumptions. A good example of this was the discovery, in what is now western China, of some extremely well-preserved mummies. These “Urumchi” mummies were surprising because of their clearly Caucasian features, which indicated a previously unknown migration of Caucasians to this region as early as 4,000 years ago. The mummies remind scholars that there are many parts of the early human historical record that are still unknown and may perhaps never be known.

Video Details

Who Is Interviewed

- E. Kofi Agorsah
- Jerry H. Bentley
- Patrick Manning

Primary Source Materials Featured in the Video

- Mary Leakey, twentieth-century archaeologist
- Bruce Chatwin, twentieth-century author
- Sir William Jones, nineteenth-century linguist

Program Contents

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