

Muddy Waters & The Great Migration

By Ian Weissman

This lesson is intended as an introduction to the Great Migration. Students will use the music of Muddy Waters as an entry point to understanding the factors that drove masses of African-Americans away from the South and the impact the move had on their lives in Northern cities, such as Chicago.

Aim: How did blues music reflect the experience of African-Americans during the Great Migration?

Do Now: Look at the images of the Mississippi Delta on the provided worksheet and describe what you see.

Instructional Plan:

1) Distribute copies of the *Mississippi Delta Images* worksheet and explain to students that they are looking at 4 images of the Mississippi Delta in the 1930's. Students will then independently describe what they notice about the Mississippi Delta.

2) Have students pair and share their responses to the Do Now. Possible responses may include, but are not limited to:

- Poverty
- Sharecropping/slavery
- Segregation
- Inequality
- Agriculture
- Manual labor

3) Distribute copies of *Map of the Mississippi Delta* worksheet and review the "Fast Facts" with students

4) Explain to students that the Mississippi Delta is the birthplace of a uniquely American style of music called the blues, which is closely tied with the experience of African-Americans.

5) Inform students that they will now listen to an example of Mississippi Delta blues by a famous bluesman named Muddy Waters.

6) Distribute copies of the "I Be's Troubled" lyrics and play [the song](#)

7) After listening to the song, students should work with a partner to complete the Song Analysis Questions. Review responses together as a class. Possible responses may include, but are not limited to:

How would you describe the tone of the song?

- Sad
- Depressed
- Lonely

How would you describe Muddy Waters' life in the Mississippi Delta?

- Hard
- Unsatisfying/unfulfilling
- Grueling/draining

What advice would you give to Muddy Waters?

- Leave the Delta
- Find a new job
- Look for something satisfying

8) Project the map of the Great Migration and ask students what they think the map is showing. Discuss as a whole class.

9) Explain that in the early 1900's, large waves of African-Americans left the South for major cities in the North. This became known as the "Great Migration". Ask students why African-Americans would want to leave the South. Possible responses may include, but are not limited to:

- Better job opportunities
- Better education
- Escape Jim Crow racism

10) Explain to students that Muddy Waters was one of the many African-Americans to make the journey north during the Great Migration. Show [this video](#) to give students context around Muddy Waters' life and experience during the Great Migration.

11) Inform students that they will now listen to a song Muddy Waters popularized after moving north to Chicago

12) Distribute copies of the "Got My Mojo Working" lyrics and play [the song](#)

13) Have students work with a partner to complete the Song Analysis Questions. Possible answers may include, but are not limited to:

What is the tone of this song?

- Confident
- Energetic
- Fast
- Loud

What do you think “mojo” is?

- Confidence
- Appeal
- Magic/voodoo
- Power

What do you think is making Muddy’s mojo work?

- Success up north
- Freedom
- Autonomy
- Escaping hardship

How does this song differ from “I Be’s Troubled”?

I Be’s Troubled	Got My Mojo Working
Slow tempo	Fast tempo
Echoes the quiet and repetitive sounds of the Mississippi Delta	Echoes the fast and chaotic movement of the Chicago city
Feelings of sorrow, hurt	Feelings of confidence, power
Traditional acoustic instruments	Modern electric instruments

What does this song tell us about Muddy Waters’ life in Chicago versus his life in the Mississippi Delta?

- Chicago gave African-Americans new confidence
- Chicago provided freedom of expression
- Chicago was an escape from the hardships of Mississippi

14) Distribute the Exit Ticket worksheet and have students complete it independently

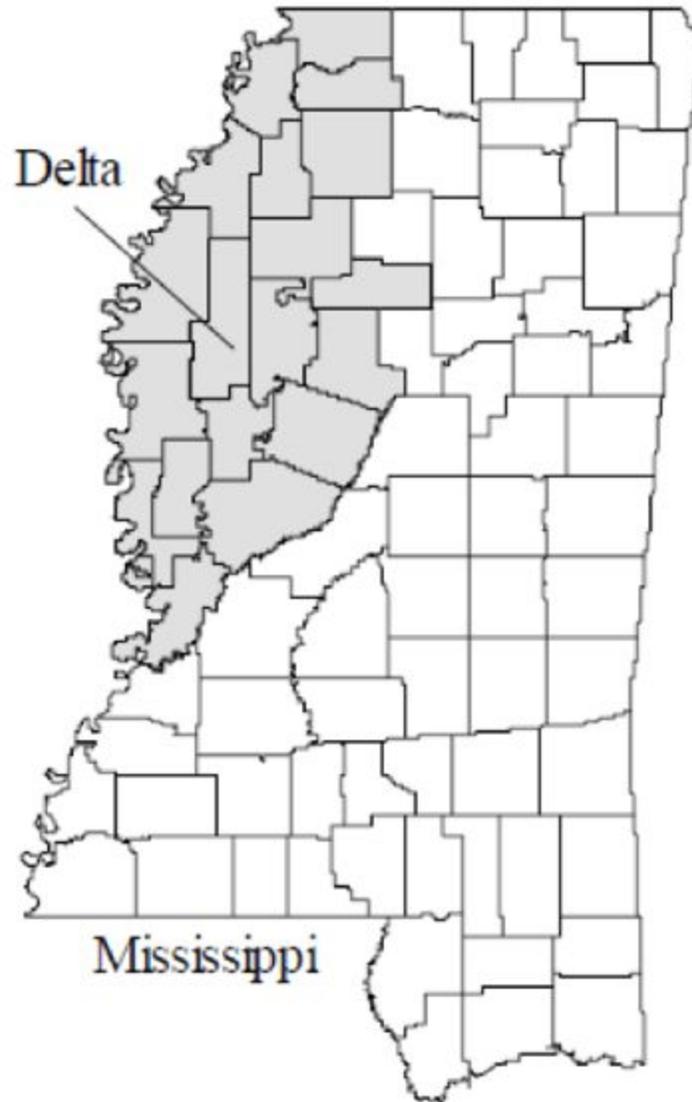
Mississippi Delta Images



Do Now: Look at these images of the Mississippi Delta in the 1930's. Describe what you see.

A large, empty rectangular box provided for the student to write their description of the images.

Map of the Mississippi Delta



Mississippi Delta Fast Facts

- Located between the Mississippi River and Yazoo River
- Major industry is agriculture
- Region routinely floods, leaving behind rich soil
- $\frac{1}{3}$ of Mississippi's African-American population resides in the Delta
- Known as the "Most Southern Place on Earth"

I Be's Troubled

By Muddy Waters

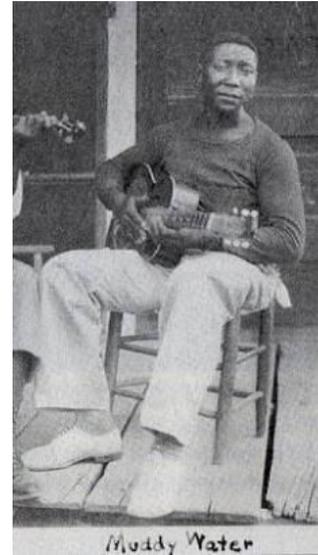
Well if I feel tomorrow, like I feel today
I'm gonna pack my suitcase, and make my getaway
Lord I'm troubled, I'm all worried in mind
And I'm never bein' satisfied, and I just can't keep from cryin'
Yeah, I know my little ol' baby, she gonna jump and shout
That ol' train be late girl, and I come walkin' out
Lord I'm troubled, I'm all worried in mind

Yeah and I'm never bein' satisfied, and I just can't keep from cryin'
Yeah, I know somebody, who' been talkin' to you
I don't need no telling, girl, I can watch the way you do
And I be troubled, I be all worried in mind

Yeah and I'm never bein' satisfied, and I just can't keep from cryin'
Yeah, now goodbye baby
Got no more to say

Just like I been tellin' you, girl, you're gonna have to leave my way
Lord I'm troubled, I'm all worried in mind
Yeah and I'm never bein' satisfied, and I just can't keep from cryin'
Yeah my baby she quit me, seem like mama was dead

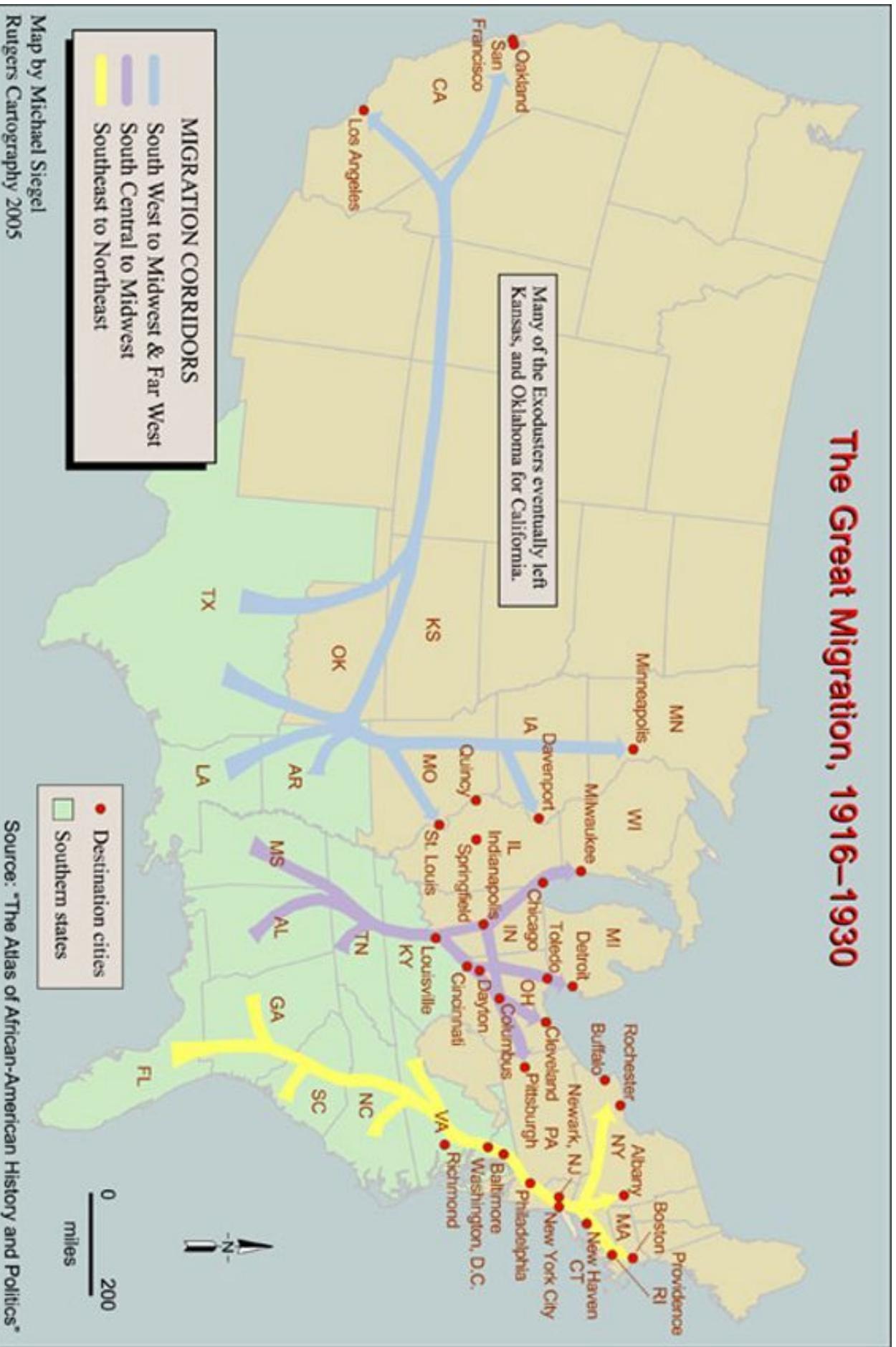
I got real worried gal, and she drove it to my head
I be's troubled, I be all worried in mind
Yeah and I'm never bein' satisfied, and I just can't keep from cryin'



Song Analysis Questions

- 1) How would you describe the tone of the song?
- 2) How would you describe Muddy Waters' life in the Mississippi Delta?
- 3) What advice would you give to Muddy Waters?

The Great Migration, 1916–1930



Got My Mojo Working

By Muddy Waters

Got my mojo working but it just won't work on you
Got my mojo working but it just won't work on you
I want to love you so bad, I don't know what to do

Going down to Louisiana to get me a mojo hand
Going down to Louisiana to get me a mojo hand
I'm going to have all you women, getcha under my command

Got my mojo working (got my mojo working)
Got my mojo working but it just won't work on you

I got a gypsy woman giving me advice
I got a gypsy woman giving me advice
I got a whole lot of tricks keeping here on ice



Song Analysis Questions

- 1) What is the tone of this song?
- 2) What do you think “mojo” is? What do you think is making Muddy’s mojo work?
- 3) How does this song differ from “I Be’s Troubled”? Why do you think that is?
- 4) What does this song tell us about Muddy Waters’ life in Chicago versus his life in the Mississippi Delta?

Exit Ticket

Using what you learned about Muddy Waters, what claim can you make about the experience of African-Americans during the Great Migration? Use 2-3 pieces of evidence.

