

# Louisiana Migrants in California

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## Abstract

Building on earlier work completed in Los Angeles, the current phase of the study documents the migration stream of Louisianans to the San Francisco Bay Area during the African American Great Migration era. Like Southern California, the San Francisco Bay Area was a significant destination for Black Louisiana migrants. Though Los Angeles's Black population was numerically larger, the Bay Area's Black population ballooned at much higher rates than Los Angeles's during the World War II period, and cities like Oakland had higher proportions of Black residents. Through in-depth life history interviews with first- and later-generation Louisiana migrants in California, the project explores how these differing circumstances of settlement paired with Louisiana's unique history of non-binary racial hierarchies shapes migrants' experiences creating community and identity in their destination. The research advances the literature on the Great Migration, as well as current trends in sociological Black identity research that focus mainly on diversity associated with socioeconomic class distinctions, multiraciality, or immigrant ethnicity by demonstrating how internal migration, mixed racial and ethnic ancestry, and relationships to regional places inform the ways in which native-born Black American identities are constructed.

## Context

African American Great Migration

- Second wave, 1940s through 1960s
- Escaping tyranny of the Jim Crow South
- Louisiana saw hundreds of thousands of Black residents migrate to other locations, such as California, during the second wave

Louisiana Creoles

- Common terms: Creole, Louisiana Creole, Black Creole
- People from Louisiana claiming African, French, Spanish, and Native American Ancestry
- Identity shaped by one-drop rule and racially unequal hierarchies
- Ancestral mixture led to racially ambiguous population

## Research Questions

- How did migrants from specific state contexts settle in Western cities?
- How do local sociopolitical and economic contexts, internal migration, mixed racial and ethnic ancestry, and relationships to place influence native-born Black American identities?
- How does this vary across generations?

## Data & Project Activities

Overall Data

- Second phase of larger project, Southern California and Northern California
- 57 total life history interviews conducted, 10 in Northern California (in progress)
  - First-, second-, and third-generation migrants
  - Most with Louisiana Creole connections
  - The majority have New Orleans roots

URG Research Assistant Grant Activities

- Transcription review/cleaning of qualitative interview data
- Preliminary index coding
- Learning NVIVO qualitative coding software

## Preliminary Findings

- Strong Black identity in Northern California shaped by racial/ethnic demographics
  - Weaker community ties to Louisiana than Los Angeles population
    - Louisiana enclave less significant in narratives
  - Louisiana contributes to identity through
    - Negotiating identity
    - Family and memory

## Citations

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