Exodusters Activity

*Standards: 8.89, U.S. 3*

Directions: Divide students into groups. Give each group on of the documents and have them work together to answer the guided questions at the bottom. Have the students trade documents until students have seen all the documents. Have them complete the Graphic Organizer based on the documents. Students can work as a group or individually to write a paragraph that answers the following question: What factors led the Exodusters to move west?

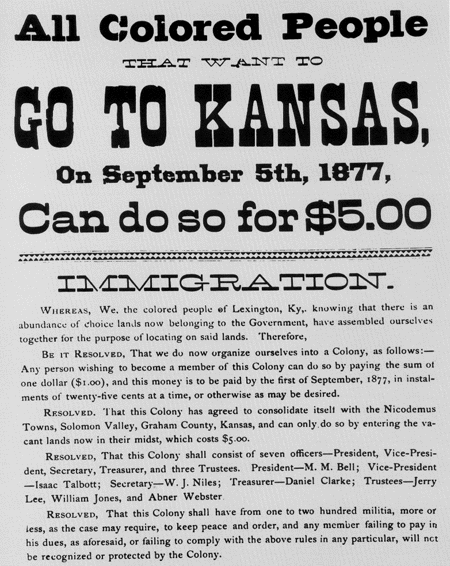
This activity is adapted from a lesson plan titled “The Westward Movement of African Americans” created for the Center for the Teaching of American History at Binghamton University.

**Document 1:   
Testimony of Benjamin Singleton  
Washington, D.C., April 17, 1880  
Given before the Senate Select Committee Investigating the "Negro Exodus from the Southern States"  
Benjamin Singleton (colored) sworn and examined by Mr. Windom:**  
  
**Q. You have brought out 7,432 people from the South to Kansas?**  
A. Yes, sir; I was the cause of it.  
  
  
**Q. That is, they came out to Kansas under your influence?**  
A. Yes, sir; I was the cause of it.  
  
  
**Q. Yes; What was the cause of your going out, and in the first place how did you happen to go there, or to send these people there?**  
A. Well, my people, for the want of land -- we needed land for our children -- and their disadvantages -- that caused my heart to grieve and sorrow; pity for my race, sir, that was coming down, instead of going up -- that caused me to go to work for them. I sent out there perhaps in '66 -- perhaps so; or in '65, any way -- my memory don't recollect which; and they brought back tolerable favorable reports; then I jacked up three or four hundred, and went into Southern Kansas, and found it was a good country, and I thought Southern Kansas was congenial to our nature, sir; and I formed a colony there, and bought about a thousand acres of ground -- the colony did -- my people.  
  
  
**Q. Have they any property now?**  
A. Yes; I have carried some people in there that when they got there they didn't have fifty cents left, and now they have got in my colony -- Singleton Colony -- a house, nice cabins, their milch [sic] cows, and pigs, and sheep, perhaps a span of horses, and trees before their yeards [sic], and some three or four or ten acres broken up, and all of them has got[sic] little houses that I carried there. They didn't go under no relief assistance; they went on their own resources; and when they went in there first the country was not overrun with them; you see they could get good wages; the country was not overstocked with people; they went to work, and I never helped them as soon as I put them on the land.  
  
  
**Q. Well, they have been coming continually, and adding from time to time to your colony these few years past, have they?**  
A. Yes, sir; I have spent, perhaps, nearly six hundred dollars flooding the country with circulars.  
  
  
**Q. You have sent the circulars yourself, have you?**  
A. Yes, sir; all over these United States.  
  
  
**Q. Did you send them into other Southern States besides Tennessee?**  
A. O [sic], yes, sir.  
  
  
**Questions:**  
1. According to Benjamin "Pap" Singleton, why did many African Americans want to move from the South?  
2. According to the document, why did Singleton choose Kansas as a destination?  
3. What were the conditions like for the migrants? Were they being successful? Explain.

**Document 2: "Testimony of Henry Adams regarding the Negro Exodus."**  
*Senate Report 693, 46th Congress, 2nd Session, Part 2, pp 101-111* as cited in Herbert Aptheker, ed. *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*. (New York, 1951) p. 715.  
  
  
**Question: I am speaking now of the period from 1870 to 1874, and you have given us the general character of the reports that you got from the South; what did you do in 1874?**  
H. Adams: Well, along in August sometime in 1874, after the White League sprung up, they organized and said this a white man's government, and the colored men should not hold any offices; they were no good but to work in the fields and take what they would give them and vote the Democratic ticket. That's what they would make public speeches and say to us, and we would hear them. We then organized an organization called the colonization council.  
  
**Question: What was the difference between that organization and your committee, as to its' objects?**  
H. Adams: Well, the committee was to investigate the condition of our race.  
  
**Question: And this organization was then to better your condition after you had found out what that condition was?**  
H. Adams: Yes, sir.  
  
**Question: The result of this investigation during these four years by your committee was the organization of this colonization council. Is that the way you wish me to understand it?**  
H. Adams: It caused it to be organized.  
  
**Question: It caused it to be organized. Now, what was the purpose of this colonization council?**  
H. Adams: Well, it was to better our condition.  
  
**Question: In what ways did you propose to do it?**  
H. Adams: We first organized and adopted a plan to appeal to the President of the United States and to Congress to help us out of our distress, or protect us in our rights and privileges.  
  
  
**Question: Well, what other plan had you?**  
H. Adams: And if that failed our idea was then to ask them to set apart a territory in the United States for us, somewhere, where we could go with our families.  
  
**Question: You preferred to go off somewhere by yourselves?**  
H. Adams: Yes.  
  
**Question: Well, what then?**  
H. Adams: If that failed, our other object was to ask for an appropriation of money to ship us all to Liberia, in Africa; somewhere where we could live in peace and quiet.  
  
**Question: Well, and what after that?**  
H. Adams: When that failed then our idea was to appeal to other governments outside of the United States to help us get away from the United States and go there and live under their flag.  
  
**Question: Well, what did your council do now under these various modes of relief which they had marked out for themselves?**  
H. Adams: Well, we appealed, as we promised.  
  
**Question: Did you make any appeal to Congress and to the President?**  
H. Adams: Yes, sir.  
  
**Question: Who in your association, authorized that appeal; how was it gotten up?**  
H. Adams: It was gotten up by resolution.  
  
**Question: By resolution?**  
H. Adams: Yes sir; and just passed by the organization.  
  
  
**Questions:**  
1. According Henry Adams's testimony, what do you think was the purpose of the white league? Cite one specific action the league would use to accomplish its mission.  
2. Where ultimately did Adams advocate African Americans move to if settlement in a different U.S. territory did not work as planned? What is significant about this location?  
3. Why would this group of African Americans ultimately emigrate? Why might this improve the conditions under which they lived?

**Document 3:**  
**A Protest of the People of Wyandott, Kansas Concerning the Negro Immigration**  
From the Wyandotte Herald,1879  
  
  
To The People of The United States:  
  
  
Within the last two weeks over a thousand Negroes, direct from the South, have landed at Wyandott. None of them have money to carry them further west, or to purchase the necessary wherewithal to supply their most urgent necessities of food and shelter. Large numbers have died, and at least 5% of the whole number are sick with pneumonia and kindred complaints. In a word, over a thousand paupers have within a very short period of time been thrown into a town of about five thousand people, who are unable to properly provide for their want.   
  
These people are possessed of the most visionary ideas concerning what they must confront when coming to Kansas. Their sole idea seems to be to get West to go where the government land can be occupied, but they are wholly destitute of means to improve it or to sustain themselves until they can cultivate a crop. Go where they will in Kansas, they must be provided and cared for, or they will perish. We have reliable information that thousands more are coming. If so, the situation will soon be a serious one for the deluded, helpless and ignorant Negroes who are blindly rushing to Kansas, and a mighty burden will be thrown on our people. They must become virtually a public charge upon the communities where they may happen to be cast.  
  
  
In view of the state of acts, we, the undersigned citizens of Wyandott, Kansas denounce those who are encouraging these people to come to Kansas as really their worst enemies. we further say that the sentiments of this protest and memorials are those of the people of Kansas without regard to party and we request papers throughout the country to publish this protest and warning.  
  
As cited from:  
<http://pathfinderscience.net/culmig/dissertation97.htm>  
  
**Questions:**  
1. According to the document, what was the condition of the Exodusters arriving in Kansas?  
2. What is the opinion of the document about what the Exodusters are attempting to do?  
3. What does the document suggest should be done to remedy the situation?

**Document 4:**  
**Frederick Douglass on the Exodusters:**  
  
  
Even the African American leader Frederick Douglass could not comprehend the mass migration, and felt that the Blacks of the South should stand their ground, eventually winning their rights, rather than migrating from their homes:  
  
  
"...We cannot but regard the present agitation of an African Exodus from the South as ill timed, and in some respects hurtful. We stand today at the beginning of a grand and beneficent reaction. There is growing recognition of the duty and obligation of the American people to guard, protect, and defend the personal and political rights of all the people of the States....At a time like this, so full of hope and courage, it is unfortunate that a cry of despair should be raised in behalf of the colored people of the South...."  
  
As cited from:  
<http://www.nps.gov/untold/banners_and_backgrounds/expansionbanner/exoduster.htm>   
  
  
**Question:**  
1. Did Frederick Douglass support or oppose the Exodusters? Why?



**Questions:**  
1. Why do you think this group chose the word "colony" for their organization?  
2. Why do you think this group feels a need to form a militia? What was expected of each member of the colony in order to be considered a part of the community?  
3. What is one question you would like to ask the organizers of this colony if you had the chance?  
4. Why would African Americans in the South want to move to Kansas?

Graphic Organizer

Reasons to Move West

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Social | Political | Economic |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |