

Population Change in Appalachia Since 1910

Colton Snyder

Capstone Project

Bachelor of Science in Geography

Marshall University

Spring 2019

Population Change in Appalachia Since 1910

Abstract:

Appalachian population trends over the last century have fluctuated from large gains to enormous losses. This has led to extreme economic swings across the region. Past studies have shown Appalachia as a whole saw major growth and development in the early 1900's due to mining and manufacturing, as well as the fall of the region's main economic suppliers in the latter half of the 20th century. This study analyzes population variations across Appalachia since the early 20th century. The purpose was to show where population has varied and the links between economic changes among the sub-regions within Appalachia. Research utilized census records in the three Appalachian regions: northern, central, and southern. The results of this study indicate that areas in northern and central Appalachia began to lose population in the 1950's and are still recovering from this loss. The majority of southern Appalachia saw little decrease in population during this time and has gained population in the last thirty years. These population changes coincide with major economic variances.

Immigration in Appalachia

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Appalachia has seen a large variation in its population from one end of the spectrum to the other. The main goal of this study and the studies from which I have gathered this information is to shed light on the reasons why a large portion of Appalachians are no longer living in their homeland. To understand this it is also imperative to understand the demographic settings these individuals have come from, as well as who they are in general. To give insight into this, some background history is needed. By the early 1900's, coal companies had invested millions of dollars into building and maintaining coal mines throughout central Appalachia. According to Rice and Brown (2018), this sudden economic expansion caused a mass exodus of individuals from across the world into Appalachia. Many eastern Europeans as well as African Americans moved into the area with the hope of bettering their future. As similarly expressed by Williams (2010), these immigrants, both domestic and foreign, allowed for an economic boom in central and southern Appalachia throughout the early 1900's. In northern Appalachia, steel and iron works factories began to grow. Needing fuel for their massive operations, these factories and foundries relied heavily on the coal being mined in central and southern Appalachia. The whole region operated as a well-oiled machine.

Causes of future migration. By the 1920's, the state of coal company towns and housing had reached the news at the national level. Many were outraged at the living conditions and treatment of those who lived and worked within these communities. The Great Depression had caused much instability in the price of coal. With such a flux in revenue, mine owners had no resources to properly continue their upkeep of their mines and their towns. Many mining employees and their families began to leave their homes and head north to the manufacturing plants of Pennsylvania and Ohio as explained by Obermiller and Howe (2005). By the end of the

1940's, the coal mines were becoming increasingly strained. Conflicts were a regular part of coal country culture according to Rice et al. (2018). Due to an ever increasing economic slump going into the 1950's and 60's, many residents of Appalachia moved from the region and settled in areas north. Rowles and Watkins (1993) refer to this mass migration of Appalachians as the "Hillbilly Highway." Many migrants moved north to work in factories that had not seen the same decrease in economic activity as that of rural Appalachia. While far from home, it was common place to have entire communities of Appalachians living together, keeping their culture alive hundreds of miles away from home. Ludke and Obermiller (2014) reinforce this claim with their findings of enclaves of Appalachians, specifically West Virginians, still living in Midwestern cities such as Indianapolis and Cincinnati as recent as 2010.

Modern Migration in Appalachia.

The 1970's saw a decline in the amount of blue collar workers leaving Appalachia. Residents of the region began to stay and raise their families where they had grown up themselves. However, the emigration of Appalachians had not completely balanced. According to Ludke et al. (2014), the majority of individuals leaving the region in the last thirty years have been college educated and between the ages of twenty and forty-five. This coincides with a study conducted by Christiadi, Deskins, and Lego (2014), which found West Virginia has the highest median age of all states in America. The issue is that the younger generations are moving to larger urban areas on the fringes of Appalachia. Cities such as Raleigh, Atlanta, and Columbus are becoming more frequent destinations for young Appalachian migrants.

The Brain Drain. In a phenomena known as the "Brain Drain" Ludke et al. (2014) explains that with Appalachia's educated demographic leaving the area, those who stay in the area tend to be less skilled workers with no professional background. The question of whether jobs follow

people or people follow jobs arises from this predicament. Gebremariam, Gebremedhim, and Schaeffer (2011) could possibly have an answer for this in a study they conducted concerning Appalachia's high rate of poverty. According to their study, there is a massive lack of jobs in rural Appalachia, far more sparse than other rural areas in America. Appalachia also has a poverty rate 150% higher than the national average. These two factors combined paint a bleak picture of the economic outlook in the area. However, this is not entirely the case. While northern and central Appalachia have seen decreases in population and economy, southern Appalachia has seen a rise in both. Ludke et al. (2014) found that 65% of Appalachians who moved stayed within Appalachia. Of that 65%, the majority moved from areas of the northern and central regions to the southern region. Thus, Ludke et al. (2014) shows that the "brain drain" of Appalachia is not the "dumbing down" of the region as a whole, it is the movement of education and jobs internally. Through the use of census records, it was determined that the three major regions of Appalachia- northern, central, and southern- were very different. Through the use of the US census records, Obermiller et al. (2005) was also able to reach the same conclusion. By comparing the 1990 and 2000 census, it is determined whether the idea of a mass exodus from Appalachia is still alive today. In northern Appalachia, the amount of individuals emigrating from Appalachia was much greater than those immigrating into the region. Central Appalachia's migration patterns mimicked that of the northern region in terms of socioeconomic status and age; however, in both 1990 and 2000, the number of immigrants was higher than the number of emigrants. Southern Appalachia was unlike northern and central. In both censuses, the total number of immigrants was much higher than the number of emigrants. The economic and educational status of these individuals was much different as well. More educated higher income

households were recorded as immigrating to the area, while blue collar workers emigrated, as also evidenced by Heinemann and Hadler (2015).

While gathering historical evidence to show the causes of twentieth century migration, Williams (2010) found most information from books and journals. There is a strictly qualitative aspect to the research conducted here. Williams (2010) stands out in comparison to other sources because of its lack of quantitative information. However, it is a vital piece of information because it provides background and information explaining the history of Appalachia. In their research, Christiadi et al. (2014) had two major components that guided their research, the age of West Virginians migrating and the population growth of West Virginia. To find this information, they compared both the net-migration and births minus deaths from 1991 to 2013. The information was found from the WV Department of Health and Human Resources as well as the US Census Bureau. While very similar in nature to the studies conducted by both Ludke et al. (2014) and Obermiller et al. (2005), this 2014 study shows a more in depth look as to the current population and migration trends, as well as what the future may hold. It is worth noting that Obermiller was a part of both the Obermiller et al. (2005) study as well as the Ludke et al. (2014) study. Both cases looked into the socioeconomic statuses of the counties that make up Appalachia and found their information via the US Census Bureau. Each source has used the census bureau as the major pool for their information.

Methods:

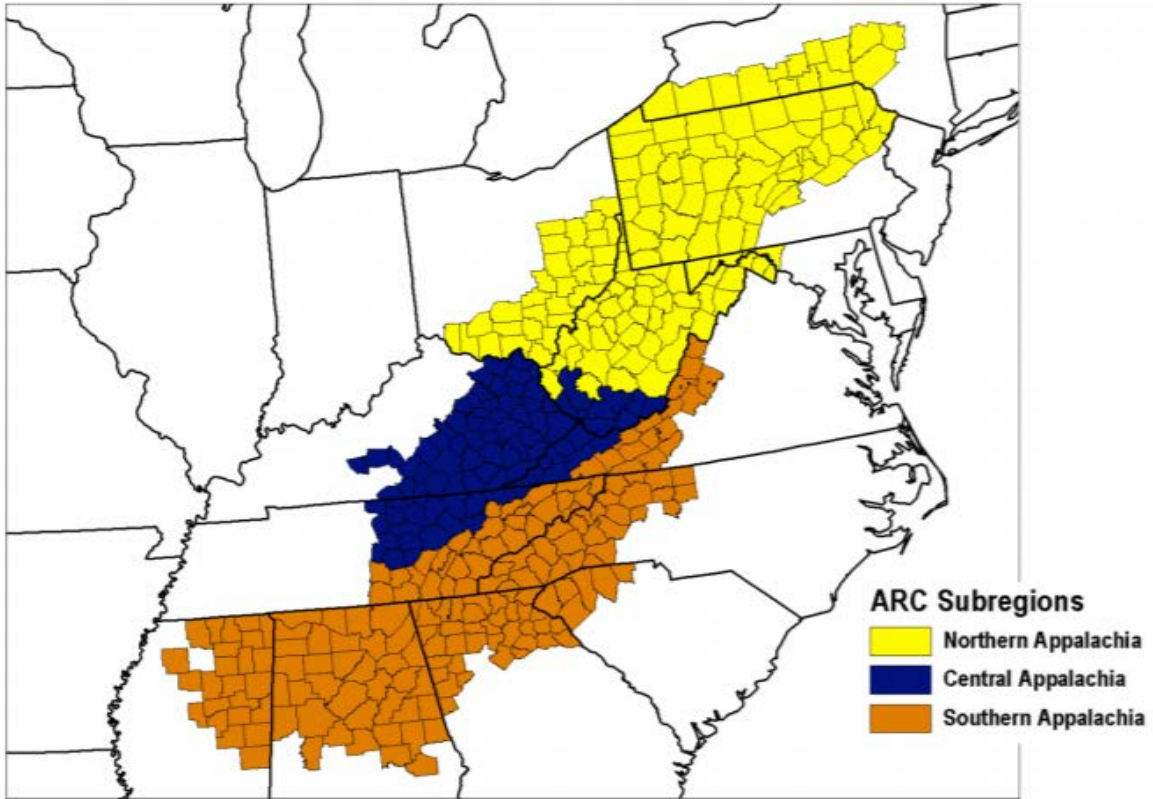
Data collection first began with the gathering of census records from all states that fall within Appalachia from 1910 to 2010. All census data collected was gathered from the United States Census Bureau which was accessed via the Internet. By using information gathered from the Appalachian Regional Commission, all counties from each state that did not fall within

Appalachia were deleted. The Appalachian counties were then divided into the three major regions of Appalachia: northern, central, and southern. The first census collected was the 1910 census, as it showed a good sampling of the clientele who migrated into each area to work in the early 20th century economic boom. This boom involved the mining operations that powered the central and southern regions of Appalachia which fueled the manufacturing that was the heart of northern Appalachia. The data collected from census records in the mid-20th century was used to show a major transition period in Appalachian history. At the time the information was collected for these census records; many residents were moving north and west, causing major population loss. Both the 1980 and 1990 census were used to show another transition period in Appalachian history. For the first time in many years, Appalachians began to move home. The final census record used was the 2010 census. The most recent census allows for an accurate picture of Appalachian demographics currently.

Analysis and Results:

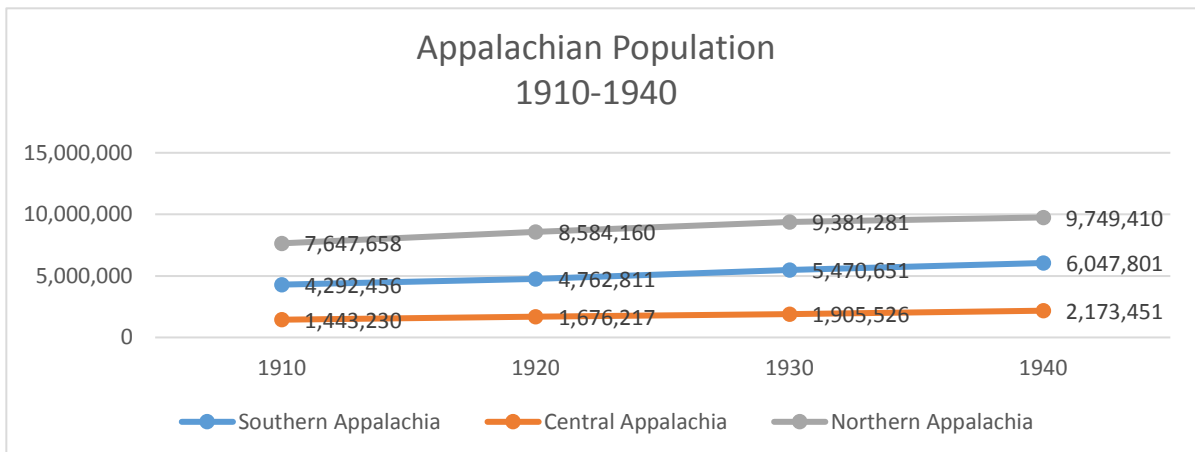
Each of the census records show the rise, fall, and eventual second rise of Appalachia's population throughout the 20th century. The main goal of this study was to compare the trends that were shown. It was found that because of the increased need for miners and employees related to mining in the 1910's and 1920's, the population of central and southern Appalachia rose drastically. Likewise in northern Appalachia the need for factory workers and manufacturers was in high demand causing a major population influx. To understand what is

classified as “Appalachia,” the map below shows the states and counties that fall within the region as a whole; as well as the three sub-regions that makeup Appalachia.



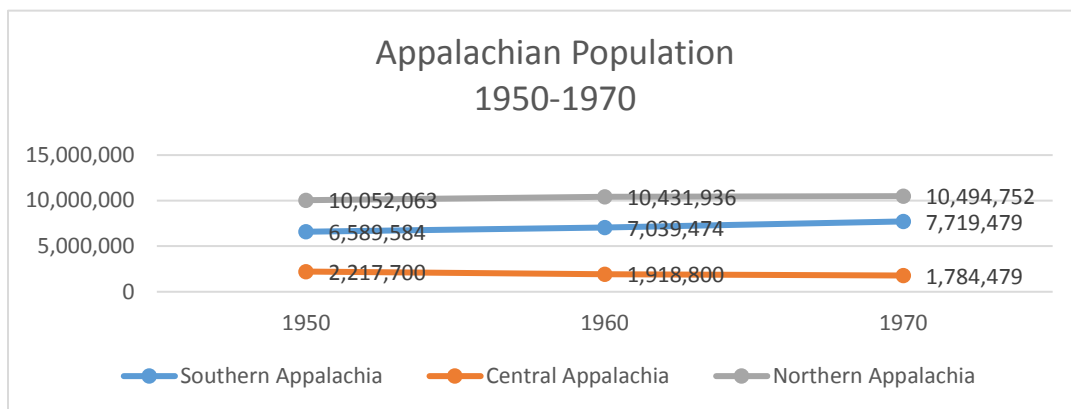
Source: Appalachian Regional Commission, 2004.

Below is the population of each Appalachian sub-region taken from the 1910 to 1940 United States census, showing the “golden age” of Appalachian growth.



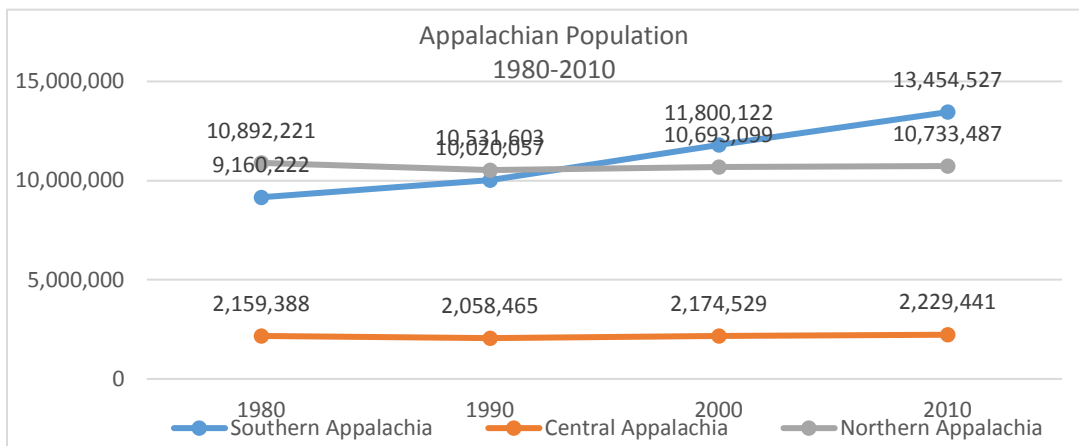
Central Appalachia has always been the smallest region in Appalachia in terms of both size and population. While northern and southern Appalachia are similar in size, their population sizes have varied over the last century. Both northern and southern Appalachia's population grew by 27% in the early 20th century. Central Appalachia's population increased by 32%. It was during this time that Appalachia as a whole was reaping the benefits of mining and manufacturing.

After World War II, the need for coal and manufacturing began to dwindle; many in Appalachia found it impossible to support themselves. In the 1950's and 1960's, hundreds of thousands of Appalachians from all areas of the region, moved west along the "Hillbilly Highway." This major loss of population was especially felt in central Appalachia, where nearly a quarter of the population relocated. The graph below shows how many Appalachians emigrated from Appalachia during the mid-20th century, particularly from central Appalachia. From 1950 to 1970 central Appalachia lost approximately 24% of its population. Northern Appalachia's population increased by approximately 4% and southern Appalachia's increased by approximately 17%.



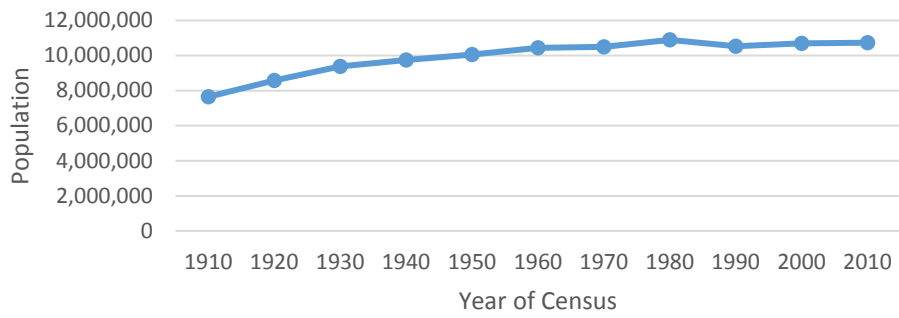
By the 1980's and 1990's Appalachia as a whole began to see an influx in population. The revitalization of coal and manufacturing had attracted many new migrants as well as many

Appalachian families that had left the area years before. Southern Appalachia began to see a much faster growth rate than its northern and central counterparts. Meanwhile central Appalachia still suffered from a teetering population. The graph below shows the population change in Appalachia over the past 40 years. It is evident that both northern and central Appalachia have seen very little growth in comparison to the southern region. Since 1980, northern Appalachia has experienced a population decline of nearly 2%. Central Appalachia's population has started to recover from its mid-century loss and has increased by 3%. Southern Appalachia's population has increased rapidly since 1980, nearly 47%, making it the most populated Appalachian region.

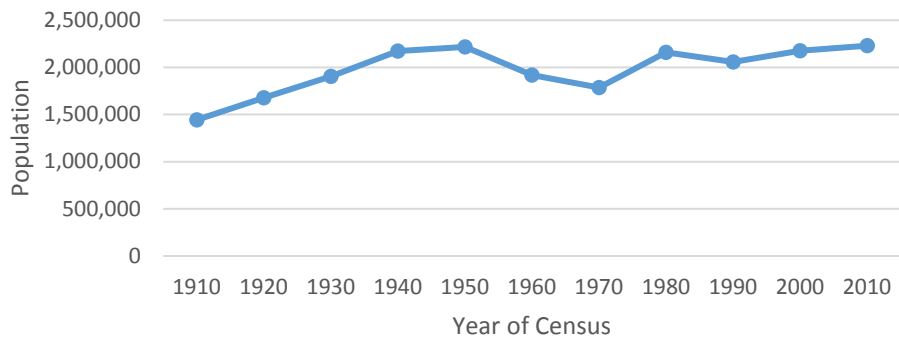


The 2010 census showed that while each Appalachian area has seen some growth, southern Appalachia is much ahead of the other two, surpassing northern Appalachian's population. Central Appalachia still struggles with population loss and a dwindling economy. This is evidenced by population increase of two million from 2000 to 2010 in the southern region in comparison to the population increase of 55,000 in the central region. By looking at the population changes for each region in its entirety it became much easier to see the real pattern of population change throughout Appalachia. The three graphs below show the population change from 1910 to 2010 in each region.

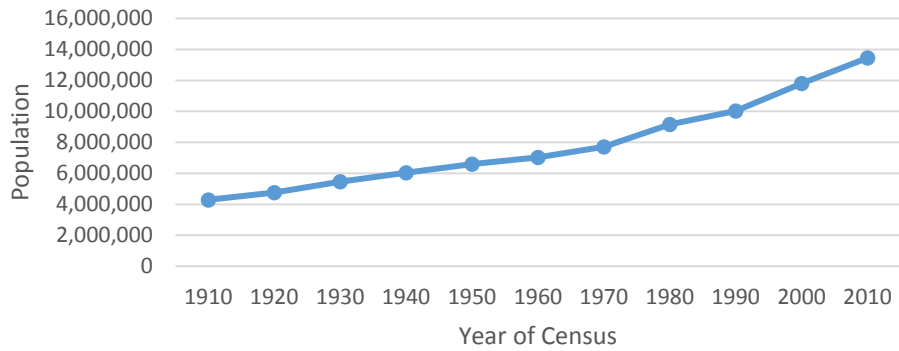
Northern Appalachian Population 1910-2010



Central Appalachian Population 1910-2010



Southern Appalachian Population 1910-2010



After comparing each region, it became evident that southern Appalachia was the only area that had gained population steadily throughout the 20th and early 21st centuries. Both northern and central Appalachia saw decreases in population after 1980, still having repercussions from the major emigration event that took place two decades before. However, all three of the Appalachian sub-regions have gained population as a whole since 2000 according to the 2010 census.

Discussion and Conclusions:

The “Hillbilly Highway,” a mass migration of Appalachians from their homeland, was isolated to the northern and central regions of Appalachia. Both of these regions saw major fluctuations in their population in the mid-20th century. Southern Appalachia has not seen a population decrease since 1910, and has nearly tripled its population in that time. Due to central Appalachia’s dependence on mining, any waver in mining production caused the region to suffer, thus the undulating population. Factories in northern Appalachia depended heavily upon the coal and ore mined in the central region, any falter it may have, so did the north. Southern Appalachia never relied heavily on mining or manufacturing. As a result, the tumultuous history of mining never effected the region, making for a more stable economy and ultimately a continuous population growth rate. As of 2010 Appalachia as a whole has seen population growth in all three regions, albeit small in some. Most of the population growth has occurred in southern Appalachia. Large cities such as Chattanooga, TN and Birmingham, AL have grown exponentially. While Atlanta, GA does not fall within Appalachia, it is close enough to have suburbs that extend into the region.

Both northern and central Appalachia have experienced a plateau in terms of population growth, with each experiencing a population increase of less than 0.5% since 2000. Cities within

northern Appalachia such as Pittsburg, PA and Morgantown, WV are still recovering from losses in manufacturing in the last century. The largest city within central Appalachia is Nashville, TN. Other cities in central Appalachia include Beckley, WV and Ashland, KY. Though Charleston, WV does not technically fall within the boundary of central Appalachia, its location allows it to have an effect on the central region. Though each Appalachian region may vary in terms of population as a whole, they are alike in the fact that urban areas of each region are gaining population while rural areas have seen a population decline.

The fluctuation of Appalachia's population is directly linked to its dependency on mining and manufacturing. While southern Appalachia saw little impact from the economic downfall of the rest of Appalachia in the mid-20th century, northern and central Appalachia are still recovering from their decline after peaking around 1950. While this study had few limitations other than time constraints, a more accurate representation of the Appalachian regions could be gathered by analyzing data based on each states' Appalachian region, as well as how demographics such as race, gender, economic status, and education played a role in Appalachian emigration in the 20th century.

Works Cited

Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). <https://www.arc.gov/>

Christiadi, Deskins, J., Lego, B. (2014, March). *Population Trends in West Virginia through 2030*. Retrieved from <http://busecon.wvu.edu>

Gebremariam, H. G., Gebremedhim, T. G., Schaeffer, P. V. (2011). Employment, Income, and Migration in Appalachia: A Spatial Simultaneous Equations Approach. *Journal of Regional Science*, 51(1), 102-120.

Heinemann, L., and Hadler, M. (2015). Resisting Economic Opportunities? An Inquiry into the Reasons and Motivations of Individuals who stay in a Socio-Economically Deprived Area. *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, 21(1), 86-104.

Ludke, R. L., and Obermiller, P. J. (2014). Recent Trends in Appalachian Migration, 2005-2009. *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, 20(1), 24-42.

Obermiller, P., Howe, S. (2005, May 5). *Moving Mountains: Appalachian Migration Patterns, 1995-2000*.

Rice, O. K., and Brown, S. W. (2014). History of West Virginia. *The West Virginia Encyclopedia*.

Rowles, G. D., and Watkins, J. F. (1993). Elderly Migration and Development in Small Communities. *Growth and Change*, 24(4).

Williams, J. A. (2010, October 20). *Migration*. Retrieved from <http://www.wvencyclopedia.org>