

THE GREAT MIGRATION OF AFRICAN AMERICANS TO OAKLAND



*Welders prepare to work on SS George Washington Carver in Richmond, California, 1943.
E. F. Joseph/Anthony Potter Collection/Getty Images*

After the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869, Oakland's African American population grew steadily. The Railroad strictly employed African Americans as porters, maids, cooks, redcaps, and waiters. From 1910 to 1970, the largest mass migration of African Americans took place out of the South and to other parts of the country to escape Jim Crow laws and economic depression. The Bay Area played a large role in the second wave of Migration from the South starting in the 1940s, with a high number coming from Louisiana.

Wartime jobs in the Kaiser Richmond shipyards and Oakland Army Base drew more than 300,000 people in just 30 years. By 1970, 35 percent of Oakland's population was black - up from 3 percent in 1940. The availability of plentiful jobs engendered a Bay Area black middle class, many of whom settled in West Oakland, and led to the development of the historic Seventh Street corridor that included a bustling commercial district with black-owned businesses and a vibrant nightlife scene. During the war, the government relied on women to fill labor roles, and at its peak, some two million women contributed. Black women worked in critical roles outside of the manual labor force, as computer scientists and clerk typists.



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SOURCES

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