

Where Should I Live?

*“Toto, we’re not in Kansas anymore.”
—Dorothy, from the Wizard of Oz*

Choosing where to live is yet another decision graduation often demands us to make. Do we stay put for a while, move back to our hometown, to a city we’re familiar with, or one we’ve just seen on a map?

Moving from San Marcos, Texas to Houston after I graduated was not something I really had to think about. I had a great job awaiting me there, friends, family, a boyfriend, and it was a major city. So I was 100 percent confident that Houston was meant to be my home after finishing college—if only for a while.

A year later I was in a U-Haul headed from Houston to Fort Worth, where I grew up. I was not especially happy about having to move back because of job loss, but the move had advantages and I had a plan. Through living with my mom I could save up money to move to New York—a move I felt compelled to make—and most of my family lived there, including a soon-to-be born niece. So while I was not anxious to move from “H-Town” back to what I thought was appropriately nicknamed “Funky Town,” I knew that the move made sense.

Yet when the time came for me to move to New York my stomach was doing tap dances. Even after all my plans had been

finalized and I was sitting on a plane bound for the East Coast and a new life, I couldn't help but wonder if I was making the smartest decision. I was heading thousands of miles away from my family to a place notorious for cold weather, an exorbitant cost of living, rude people, crowded streets, and where the worst act of terrorism on American soil had recently taken place. What's more, I only knew one person who lived there. But, I reminded myself over and over again, it's also the publishing capital of the world; it's the most diverse city in America; there's tons to do at nearly all hours of the day; it's home to artists, singers, actresses, and NAS; and, you're also going there to get your master's degree. So, in spite of my ambivalence, I decided not to ask the pilot to turn the plane around.

I lived in New York for three years, but I was only really comfortable living there the last two. I almost packed my bags and headed to the airport once or twice in the first few months that I was there. I was appalled at having to pay \$950 for a 1 ½ bedroom apartment that was worth \$450, seeing rodents in my super clean kitchen, and going grocery shopping and to the laundromat with my own store bought cart. But I found strength in the knowledge that "if I could make it here, I could make it anywhere," and my certainty that New York was where I was supposed to be.

If you are thinking about moving to an entirely new city for career-related reasons applaud yourself for your bravery. It takes guts and a lot of faith to move somewhere new. Apparently the United States is filled with a lot of brave people. According to the Census Bureau more than six million people move each year for career-related reasons.

There will be pros and cons to any move you make, whether it is across town or across the nation. Before you decide on taking that leap of faith make sure you've done your research on the city. Consider the following factors:

1. *The People:* If the first thing you want to know before you go anywhere is "how many black folks are there?" then you may

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find yourself miserable in a city where you can go days without seeing a black face. It doesn't make much sense to move to a place that doesn't have more than a handful of people you would feel comfortable spending your free time with. Find out the following information from the city's official website before you start packing your bags:

- ◆ The racial breakdown of the city.
- ◆ The male to female ratio.
- ◆ Age demographics.

2. Cost of Living: If the salary you're offered in a certain city seems unusually high the chances are it's not just because they like you—the cost of living may be exceptionally high. This means that the salary you receive may have less spending power than that offered by another company in a different city. Before moving to a city you know little about compare the prices of certain things you know you'll need and have to pay for. Consider the following information:

- ◆ The cost of housing, including hotels and motels.
- ◆ The cost of car insurance and gas.
- ◆ Tax rates including state, local, and property taxes.
- ◆ The cost of utilities, including electricity, water, gas and phone service.
- ◆ The cost of food at grocery stores, fast food places and restaurants.

3. The Job Market: How long you'll stay with a particular company is uncertain. If you move to a city just because of a job offer it's important to know that there will be other job opportunities in that same city should you decide to quit that job, but stay in the same location. Call the city's local Chamber of Commerce to find out the following information:

- ◆ How many companies like the one you may work for are in the city.
- ◆ The average salary for your occupation in the city.
- ◆ The unemployment rate, and the rate in your field in