Black Metropolis National Heritage Area
Feasibility Study

Chapter 2: Study Area History and
Contributions
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“In 1929, my mother put all three of us on her hip and came north because she had a sister and two brothers that had already left Mississippi and had been writing her constantly about the improvements in the quality of life for Black people in Chicago… I didn’t know it when I was kid, but when I look back at what decisions my mother had to make at only eighteen years of age to take herself and her three children and come up here to Chicago—that took great courage!”

-- George Johnson, Founder of Johnson Products the first African-American-owned company listed on the American Stock Exchange), Bridges of Memory: Chicago’s First Wave of Black Migration

Some 45 years following the enactment of the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery in 1865, six million African-Americans chose to migrate from the South to the North in pursuit of educational and work opportunities. Some African-Americans were able to plan ahead for their departure, while others left with just the clothes on their backs. This collective journey was called the Great Migration.

The first wave of the Great Migration occurred from 1915-18, during World War I. However, migrants continued to move to the north at an increased rate through 1930. During this time period, African-Americans left their home states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, east Texas, and Virginia, seeking to create a new life in the North. Tens of thousands of migrants settled on the South Side of Chicago in an area that would grow to be seven miles long and one-and-a-half miles wide. Known locally as the Black Belt, 78 percent of Chicago’s African-Americans lived in this area during the Great Migration.

Upon arrival in the North, the only option was for African-Americans to create a self-sufficient community. This story is not atypical of the American migrant experience; it is a story that defines many of Chicago’s ethnic neighborhoods. The Black Belt would become more than just a self-sufficient African-American community – it would birth Chicago’s Black Metropolis, a modern metropolis with many of the luxuries and conveniences commonly known to whites. Moreover, the Black Metropolis represented a place of opportunity and would become a destination for Blacks, a place where they did not have to live in repression anymore. By 1930 the Black Metropolis would establish itself formally as Bronzeville. The name was coined by

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James Gentry, a writer for the Chicago Defender Newspaper, who felt as though the name Bronzeville better reflected the skin color of African-Americans living in the community.

The Black Metropolis rivals Harlem in African-American contributions to music, arts, culture, and business and entrepreneurial pursuits. Built by some of the most ambitious and dynamic African-Americans in Chicago’s history, the Black Metropolis story is made up of thousands of individual’s stories and experiences that have forever shaped the history of Chicago and the nation. References for the history section can be found in Appendix 9: Literature Review.

**Figure 2. Chicago's African-American Population 1840-2010 (U.S. Census Bureau)**

![Figure 2](image)

**Chicago in the 1800s: A Historic Black presence**

Although the Great Migration was the definitive event in Chicago’s rise to prominence in Black culture, African-Americans have played a prominent role in the City’s development since the 18th Century. In fact, Chicago’s first settler was a Haitian man of African and French descent, Jean Baptiste Point DuSable, who may have settled in the area as early as 1779.

In the antebellum period, before slavery was outlawed, Chicago was an important center of abolitionist activity and a stop on the Underground Railroad, the system of routes and way stations that helped escaped slaves reach freedom in Canada. Bronzeville’s churches, including First Congregational Church (birthed out of First Presbyterian Church of Chicago), Olivet Baptist and Quinn Chapel AME served as stations, with congregants opening their homes and businesses to those moving north. Many of the Chicagoans involved were themselves free Blacks or fugitive slaves, part of a small but growing local Black community. John Jones, a tailor, and his wife, Mary Jane Richardson Jones, headed anti-slavery efforts within the City in
the mid-1800s, helping hundreds of escaped slaves on their way to Canada from their house on
Dearborn Street. Mary was born a free Black in Tennessee, while John was born in North
Carolina to a free, mixed-race mother and a father of German descent. The family often served
as a link between self-emancipated slaves and white abolitionists.

By 1860, Chicago’s Black population approached 1,000. While conditions in Chicago were
certainly preferable to those in the South, Black Chicagoans experienced a great deal of hostility
in their daily lives. As in other parts of the country, their civil and human rights were severely
limited by local laws, referred to as the “Black Laws,” which enforced segregation and
prohibited Blacks from voting, testifying in courts against whites, and from gathering in groups
of more than three. Blacks living in Illinois were required to carry a Certificate of Freedom,
otherwise, they were presumed to be slaves. An 1847 revision of these statutes forbade free
Blacks from settling in Illinois. Black Laws were enforced, often by locals, making life in
Chicago treacherous for Blacks.

Even so, the City’s Black population was growing, rising from 4,000 in 1870 to 16,000 in 1890.
During the late 1800s, Chicago's Black residents were mostly domestic workers and manual
laborers. However, there was a small, but growing, representation of middle- and upper-class
professionals. In 1872, Chicago appointed its first Black police officer. At the time, Black officers
were assigned to duty in primarily in African-American neighborhoods without uniforms. In
1873, Chicago hired its first Black firefighter, William Watkins. The city’s first black firemen
were organized the same year, 1872, as the first policemen.

One of Chicago’s upper-class Black professionals was Dr. Daniel Hale Williams. Born in in
Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania, Dr. Williams eventually relocated to Janesville, Wisconsin to
study under a white doctor before entering the Chicago Medical School (known today as
Northwestern University Medical School). After completing medical school, Dr. Williams
opened his own medical office; he was one of three Black physicians in Chicago, known for his
professionalism and advanced medical credentials. Dr. Williams was appointed to the Illinois
State Board of Health (known as the Illinois Department of Public Health) and influenced many
modern medical standards and hospital rules.

In 1891, Dr. Williams founded Provident Hospital and Training School Association, at 29th and
Dearborn Streets, with a mission to train Black doctors and nurses who were denied training at
most other institutions. Dr. Williams’ outstanding leadership and commitment to the highest
standards concerning procedures and sanitary conditions led the hospital to have an 87 percent
success rate during its first year. At Provident, doctors and nurses of all races worked side-by-
side to serve Black residents who were refused care at other medical institutions, making
Provident Hospital the first interracial hospital to exist in the nation. It was at Provident
Hospital where Dr. Williams performed the first open heart surgery in 1893. This procedure
which was a great risk given the infection that could have occurred, set standards for internal
surgeries practiced throughout the world.
Today Provident Hospital continues to provide quality health care to the medically underserved. Despite its bankruptcy and closure in 1987, Provident reopened in 1990 as part of the Cook County Health and Hospitals System, one of the largest comprehensive health systems in the country. It continues to serve the health needs of the community.

Other professional African-Americans who settled in and impacted the Black Metropolis include Ferdinand L. Barnett. Born in Nashville, but reared in Michigan before arriving in Chicago in 1869, Ferdinand L. Barnett was a graduate of Chicago’s College of Law at Northwestern University affiliated Law School (which also produced the first Black female Cook County Public Defender, Rita Fry). Originally, from Nashville, Tennessee, and son of a former slave who purchased his own freedom, Barnett established Chicago’s first Black newspaper, the Chicago Conservator, in 1878. Barnett used the Conservator to advocate for racial equality and justice and he would later go on to become the first Black Assistant State’s Attorney.

Figure 3. Ida B. Wells

In 1893, Barnett would meet, and eventually marry, southern activist and journalist Ida B. Wells. Originally from Holly Springs, Mississippi, Wells’ pioneering work to document lynching led to a national campaign against the practice. Wells came to Chicago with Frederick Douglass to organize a boycott of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition. The Columbian Exposition took place over a 179-day period starting May 1, 1893. Although Blacks were welcomed as attendees, they were not allowed to be a part of the planning for the Columbian Exposition, and therefore underrepresented in the exhibits. In protest, Barnett and Wells wrote sections of a pamphlet called *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World’s Columbian Exposition*, which highlighted the exclusion of Black achievement at the Columbian Exposition and detailed the tremendous progress of Black Americans.

Ida B. Wells would become an important figure in voting rights, marching in 1913 for universal suffrage in Washington, D.C. Wells would also become instrumental in creating social services for Chicago’s Black residents. She founded the Negro Fellowship League on Chicago’s South Side, a place where southern migrants could receive assistance. She created the Alpha Suffrage Club, which played a critical role in electing Oscar De Priest as Chicago’s first Black Alderman in 1915. She would also play a key role in the 1909 National Negro Conference, which evolved into the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Just a year later the first branch of NAACP organized in Chicago. In its first 50 years, this organization fought against housing discrimination in Chicago, which led to the victory in 1940 in *Hansberry v. Lee*, which declared a single neighborhood’s restrictive covenants unconstitutional. Within a

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3 Image from [http://www.biography.com/people/ida-b-wells-9527635](http://www.biography.com/people/ida-b-wells-9527635)
decade, all restrictive covenants were invalidated under the US Supreme Court ruling in Shelley vs. Kraemer (1964). The Chicago branch of NAACP also took a stand against de facto segregation and for fair employment practices legislation. In 1930, Ida B. Wells ran for the Illinois State legislature, which made her one of the first Black women to run for public office in the United States.

Chicago’s small but dynamic and stable Black presence in the 1800s ultimately laid the groundwork for what would become a thriving community throughout the beginning of the 20th Century.

**Early 1900s: The Great Migration makes its way to Chicago**

There were a number of strong motives fueling the Great Migration. First, although slavery was no longer legal, Jim Crow laws and Black Codes constrained life for Blacks in the South through sharecropping and debt peonage. Jim Crow encouraged a “separate but equal” status for Blacks. Under Jim Crow, one of the few economic outlets available to Blacks was sharecropping. This meant that in exchange for food, seeds, tools, shelter, and use of the land, tenant farmers would pay white landowners with the fruits of their labor instead of currency. When payment was due, landowners often claimed that sharecroppers had insufficient funds or crops to pay with, thus, it became impossible for Blacks to get ahead. Sharecropping was essentially neo-slavery in the South’s post-slavery economy. When combined with floods, crop infestation and intimidation, Blacks had little opportunity for economic advancement in the South.

As WWI unfolded, industrialization and acute labor shortages fueled migration northward. Southern Blacks were viewed as a cheap and available labor pool ready to meet the demand for Chicago’s growing meat packing and steel industries. In response to labor strikes, industry management exploited the fears and prejudices of Chicago’s ethnic populations and labor unions by publicizing the fact that they were hiring Black workers. Recruiting agents would travel to the South, persuading Black men to work in northern slaughter houses and steel mills. Industries pitted Blacks against whites as part of a union-busting strategy developed by industry management. This strategy worked in part because the media focused on race, failing to document the aggressive recruiting strategy that brought Black workers to Chicago.

A direct result of this union busting strategy was that Blacks became an integral part of the new northern labor force. Increasing numbers of Black migrants moved north as word spread about life in Chicago and other northern cities. Migrants who sent letters home to relatives described Chicago as a place of opportunity, a place with plentiful jobs, music, and nightlife. These correspondences enticed relatives to follow the Mississippi Valley north on the trains of the Illinois Central Railroad and constituted what is known as the migration chain.
Life in the Black Metropolis: 1910-1930

Blacks who migrated to Chicago during the first wave of the Great Migration, created a city within a city – a Black Metropolis. During this time, the Black Metropolis was a mecca of African-American business, arts and culture, politics, and more. Many firsts were birthed in the Black Metropolis, along with countless African-American achievements. This section highlights key elements that played an important role in the Black Metropolis’ heyday.

Journalism

Founded by Robert S. Abbott in 1905, the Chicago Defender offered daily news coverage to both the local and regional African-American community, advocating for justice and increased civil rights. Abbott was a migrant from St. Simons Island, Georgia who settled in Chicago in the late 1800s. The Defender helped make Abbott one of the first Black millionaires. He built the Defender’s distribution network around Chicago’s railroads, including the Illinois Central Railroad.

The Illinois Central served as more than just a mode of escape to the North; for those who remained in the South, the railroad was a critical link to information about relatives and opportunity. Pullman porters were key messengers, smuggling newspapers like the Defender from Chicago and catalogues from Sears and Roebuck.

The Chicago Defender campaigned endlessly, encouraging Blacks to leave behind the racism of the South and be a part of the migration that was shaping Chicago. Abbott treated migration stories and stories of Southern racial injustice as front page news. The Defender advertised plentiful housing and listed numerous jobs for those wishing to escape the oppression of the South, it was also the first newspaper to incorporate a full entertainment section, describing Chicago’s many cultural highlights. Chicago was portrayed as a lively city where it was commonplace for Blacks to go out to the theater, dine at fancy restaurants, and attend sporting events. The Defender even devised a campaign for a Great Northern Drive Day on May 15, 1917, a day when Blacks were urged to move north en masse.

Abbott’s commitment to Chicago’s Black community continued to expand over time. One of the many social issues Abbott believed in was expanding opportunities for the disadvantaged, especially youth. In 1923, Abbott and his managing editor Luicius Harper created a youth-focused section of the Defender—the Bud Billiken Club – named after a Chinese mythical

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figure, a Billiken, the guardian angel of children. Young Black males across the nation signed up to become members of the Bud Billiken Club. It was such a success that Abbott wanted to thank the members of the Club and the newsboys who sold the Defender on Chicago street corners, with a parade. The first Bud Billiken parade was held on August 11, 1929, and gave youth an opportunity to showcase their talents and celebrate their participation in the Defender’s success.

The Defender boomed during its early years. In 1915, its circulation was 16,000, by 1918 it was 125,000, and by the early 1920s circulation was over 200,000. Nearly two-thirds of the Defender’s readers came from outside of Chicago. Eventually, the Defender would become known as "America’s Black Newspaper.” The Defender wasn’t the only Black newspaper that came to be in the Black Metropolis. Soon the local competition would heat up and the Chicago Bee would emerge as an alternative to the Defender, and Chicago would become known as a national center of Black journalism.

The burgeoning Black news industry in Chicago opened the door for other journalist entrepreneurs. In 1919, Claude A. Barnett established the Associated Negro Press (ANP). The ANP worked much like today’s Associated Press, collecting news of interest to the Black community and syndicating articles to Black newspapers throughout the nation. The ANP helped to advance a national conversation on the many issues plaguing the Black community, including voting rights, desegregation of the armed forces, housing, and equal access for Black journalists. Besides its Bronzeville headquarters, the ANP had offices in Atlanta, Boston, Kansas City, New Orleans, and New York.

Abbott and his work with the Chicago Defender laid the foundation for media mogul John H. Johnson. Originally from Arkansas City, Arkansas, Johnson created Johnson Publishing Company, the largest Black-owned and operated publishing company in the world. Johnson’s magazines, beginning with Negro Digest in 1942, followed by Ebony and Jet, started in 1945 and 1951, respectively, became staples in African-American homes. Much of Johnson’s success came from his ability to convince top American companies that it was in their economic interest to reach the African-American market, and that his publications were the way to do so. Johnson’s success led him to be the first African-American to own a building in downtown Chicago on Michigan Avenue. He was also the first African American to appear on Forbes’

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annual rankings of the wealthiest Americans. Johnson Publishing Company’s Ebony Fashion Fair, which began as a small fundraiser for a New Orleans Hospital, grew to be the country’s largest traveling fashion show, lasting 50 years and raising more than $50 million for charities from New York to Mississippi.

**Business and entrepreneurial pursuits**

With growing prosperity and little support from Chicago’s white business establishment, Blacks established their own financial center in the heart of the Black Metropolis at 35th and State Streets. Coined as Black Wall Street, Blacks were able to deposit their earnings, open savings accounts, and access mortgages and business loans for the first time (although access to capital outside the community continued to be limited by larger racist financial practices). The opportunity to participate in the financial realm was due in large part to two Black entrepreneurs – Jesse Binga and Anthony Overton – who laid much of the financial and economic foundation of the Black Metropolis.

One of the Black Metropolis’ most successful financial institutions was the Binga Bank, Chicago’s first Black-owned financial institution. Originally from Detroit, having come to Chicago to attend the 1893 World’s Fair, Jesse Binga saw opportunity in Chicago and never looked back. He began his career in the real estate business with ten dollars, purchasing homes from Whites (who wanted to move away from the growing Black Belt), refurbished them, and sold them to Blacks who were eager to own property for the first time. Binga would eventually buy an entire block—known as the Binga Block—on State Street between 47th and 48th Streets. Binga Block featured a number of Black-owned businesses, including: a barbershop, beauty parlor, fish market, florist, milliner, pharmacy, photographer, and a tailor.

Binga opened his bank, using the money he earned in real estate, to further support the Black community’s desire to own their property; Binga Bank immediately began providing loans to homebuyers. By the mid-1920s, Binga Bank was one of the nation’s largest Black-owned financial institutions with assets totaling more than $1 million. Binga set the stage for future economic development throughout the Black Metropolis and Chicago. After Binga, a number of Black-owned banks opened, establishing a Black banking dynasty that included: Douglass

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Another prominent entrepreneur of Black Wall Street was Louisiana native, and son of freed slaves, Anthony Overton. With a strong commitment to racial advancement, Overton earned a law degree, served as a municipal judge, and built an economic empire in the Black Metropolis. His primary business, the Overton Hygienic Company, was a cosmetics firm. Overton became the first Black cosmetics company to have products on the shelves at Woolworth drug stores. Later, Overton would found The Half Century Magazine and the Chicago Bee newspaper (a direct competitor to the Chicago Defender), Douglass Bank, and Victory Life Insurance Company. Overton vowed to build his companies by employing only Blacks – a proud stance against the white business establishment, pushing forward civil rights and employment opportunity for Blacks. Together the Binga and Overton empires met the needs of Black Metropolis residents, from jobs, to offering the goods and services that were necessary for everyday life in the City.

While the insurance industry wasn’t founded in Chicago, Chicago’s Black Metropolis was home to a number of Black-owned life insurance companies during this time, including: Supreme Liberty Life Insurance Company, founded by Arkansas native Frank Gillespie; Victory Life Insurance Company, part of the Overton Empire; and the Chicago Metropolitan Mutual Assurance Company. Black-owned insurance companies were one of the few sources of white-collar jobs open to Blacks at the time.

In addition to banking, insurance, and real estate, there were a growing number of professional service jobs in the Black Metropolis. Illinois’ first licensed Black architect was Walter T. Bailey. Born in Kewanee, Illinois, Bailey earned his architectural engineering degree at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Early in his career, Bailey was appointed head of the Tuskegee Institute’s Mechanical Industries Department and supervised the architectural and planning of a number of the Institute’s campus buildings. The Tuskegee Institute attracted many talented Black architects because of the opportunity the Institute gave them to both teach and practice the profession.

In 1924, the Black-order of the Knights of Pythias, a fraternal organization committed to charitable works, commissioned Bailey to design its international headquarters in Chicago. The National Knights of Pythias Temple was completed between 1927 and 1928. Located at 37th and State Streets, the Temple stood eight stories high – towering over other buildings in the area. At the time, the Pythias Temple was regarded as the largest and most expensive building built and designed by a Black American. Bailey’s work on the Pythias Temple jumpstarted his architectural career in Chicago.

Working closely with Bailey on the Temple, was another Black architectural engineer, Charles Sumner Duke. Born in Selma Alabama in 1879, Duke was one of a handful of Blacks to attend and/or graduate numerous outstanding academic institutions, including Phillips Exeter, a...
prestigious private preparatory school in Exeter, New Hampshire in 1901; Harvard University (Bachelor of Arts degree in mathematics); and University of Wisconsin (Master of Science degree in civil engineering in 1913). Duke was also founder of the National Technical Association, the first professional organization for African-American scientists and engineers.

**Religion and Social Services**

*Figure 7. Pilgrim Baptist Church*[^1]

Religious institutions that previously played an instrumental role in the Underground Railroad continued to play an influential role in the Black Metropolis by providing much needed housing, job training, and social services for migrants. Churches like Olivet Baptist, Quinn Chapel African Methodist Episcopal, and Pilgrim Baptist, each assisted in sustaining the Black Metropolis by encouraging congregants to support Black Wall Street and patronize local businesses in an effort to improve economic conditions for Blacks in Chicago.

Olivet Baptist Church, the oldest Black Baptist Church in Chicago, boasted a congregation that was estimated at 10,000 strong in 1920. Olivet played a major role in the Great Migration through their advertisements in the Chicago Defender and promise to assist new migrants with jobs and housing. A number of Olivet’s pastors were heavily involved in local politics and civil rights advocacy.

Quinn Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, a station on the Underground Railroad, was instrumental in the founding of Dr. Williams’ Provident Hospital. Quinn Chapel AME’s pulpit has been graced with notables such as Presidents William B. McKinley, William Howard Taft, and Barack Obama; educators George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington; poet and writer Paul Lawrence Dunbar; and Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr., Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Reverend and civil rights leader Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.

Also important to the Black Metropolis was Pilgrim Baptist Church. Designed by the 1893 World’s Fair Columbian Exhibition architects Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan, and organized in 1917, Pilgrim Baptist Church is known as the birthplace of modern gospel music. The Church’s music director Thomas A. Dorsey, from Villa Rica, Georgia, is credited as the “father of gospel music.” Numerous singers have shared their gift of gospel song at Pilgrim Baptist, including James Cleveland, Aretha Franklin, The Edwin Hawkins Singers, Mahalia Jackson, Sallie Martin, The Staple Singers, and Albertina Walker.

Complementary to local churches’ assistance was a variety of social services-based organizations. The Wabash Avenue Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), the Metropolitan Community Center, the Chicago Urban League, and Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), each offered a variety of assistance to newcomers. Services included temporary housing, home-cooked meals, instructional classes, and recreational opportunities. These organizations also assisted with employment, child welfare, workers’ rights and race relations, as well as bible study, cooking, dramatics, and stenography. In 1915, Carter G. Woodson, known as “the father of Black History” founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History at the Wabash Avenue YMCA. Eleven years later in 1926, Woodson would create Negro History Week (now Black History Month).

**Politics**

The spread of African-American influence outside of Chicago’s Black Belt gave the community greater influence in local and regional matters. The Black voting block became a formidable political force, and an integral part of the politics controlling Chicago and Illinois. During this period, the Black community steadily increased its influence in local and statewide politics, beginning with representation on the city council, and then on to the county board of commissioners, and eventually state and national legislative posts.

In 1915, residents elected two Black Americans to represent the City’s Second Ward. Republican Oscar DePriest, an Alabama native, was elected Second Ward Alderman, and Edward H. Wright (originally from New York) was elected Second Ward Committeeman. Together the two formed a formidable political tandem, with an agenda focused on giving a voice to Chicago’s Black community.

Shortly thereafter, in 1917, DePriest founded the Black political organization called the People’s Movement Club. By 1928, the People’s Movement Club was powerful political operation, which held its meetings in the Black Metropolis at Unity Hall. The Club helped make DePriest the first African-American elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from a northern state and forced politicians to recognize Chicago’s Black voting block. DePriest would serve three terms in Congress, speaking out against discrimination, introducing anti-lynching bills, and laying a foundation for future Black politicians to follow in his footsteps.

**Figure 8. Oscar DePriest**

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DePriest would eventually lose his seat to another Alabama-born Chicagoan, Arthur Mitchell, who, in 1934, became the first Black Democrat to hold this seat. Consistent with the wishes of the residents of the Black Metropolis, and as a direct result of his experience of being forced to move to a segregated railcar on the Illinois Central Railroad upon crossing into Arkansas, Mitchell introduced a number of bills to ban lynching and discrimination.

Following Mitchell was Georgia native, William L. Dawson. Dawson previously held the Second Ward Aldermanic seat before moving on to Congress in 1943, where he remained for 27 years. A graduate of Northwestern University Law School, Dawson began his political career as a member of the Republican Party in the 1920s as the State Central Committeeman for the First Congressional District of Illinois. Dawson moved to the Democratic Party in the 1930s, and was elected Alderman for the Second Ward of Chicago from 1933 until 1939, and served as the Democratic Party committeeman after 1939. Dawson was elected to the Seventy-eighth Congress, and thirteen succeeding terms, serving from January 3, 1943, until his death in 1970.

In addition to becoming the first African-American to chair a House committee – the Committee on Expenditures in Executive Departments – and influencing national policy throughout his life, Dawson served as a mentor for rising young Black politicians in Chicago, helping with their elections and federal appointments. One of Dawson’s mentees was Ralph Metcalfe. Metcalfe returned to Chicago after serving in WWII and representing the U.S. in the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, and was elected Committee and Alderman for Chicago’s Third Ward. In 1970, Metcalfe succeeded Dawson, his mentor, winning a seat in the Ninety-second U.S. Congress.

**Music, Arts and Culture**

While art in all forms permeated the Black Metropolis, its most important legacy may be its contribution to American music. Fronted by jazz clubs such as Dreamland Café, Palm Tavern, Royal Gardens Café, the Sunset, the Savoy, and the Plantation, the Black Metropolis became one of the world’s jazz capitals, with The Stroll (State Street) as its backdrop. It was typical to find local luminaries such as the Defender’s Robert Abbott or Jack Johnson, the first Black heavyweight boxing champion and owner of Café de Champion, mixing with average Chicagoans. Stretching from 31st to 39th Street, The Stroll was where people did just that – stroll, relax, talk, and walk to the sound of the music flowing from the clubs all night long.
New Orleans’ jazz greats such as Louis Armstrong, King Oliver, and Ferdinand Joseph LaMothe (better known as Jelly Roll Morton) brought the music of their native southern homes to packed houses on State Street in the early 1920s. Eventually, the northern and southern regional jazz styles were fused to create a distinct Chicago sound. In the 1920s, the Regal Theater opened its doors, hosting some of the country’s most talented and glamorous Black entertainers. Theatergoers could see jazz stars like Billie Holiday, Count Basie, and Duke Ellington. Later, jazz enthusiasts would enjoy the sounds of Miles Davis and Dizzy Gillespie.

Venues such as the Pekin Theater, the Panama Club, and the Sunset Café were referred to as Black and Tans, allowing all customers in, regardless of race, a rare event at the time. Musical collaboration and innovation reached new levels of intensity in the Black Metropolis. According to local lore, if a horn were held up on the corner of State and 35th Streets it would have played itself. Later, the Black Metropolis-Bronzeville community would become known for its Chicago-style blues heavily influenced by blues legend Muddy Waters. Known as the King of Chicago Blues, Waters played an electric guitar and developed a rugged style of blues – distinctly Chicago – which greatly influenced many rock-n’-roll musicians.

On Sundays in the 1930s, gospel music could be heard in the air of the Black Metropolis. The First Church of Deliverance was the first church to broadcast its services live on the radio, proliferating the reach of gospel. It has been written that, gospel music was birthed at Pilgrim Baptist Church by Thomas A. Dorsey. Dorsey composed over 1,000 gospel songs, including the well-known gospel song “Precious Lord Take My Hand.” By combining religious music with the sound of secular blues, Dorsey created something that every Black church in the nation would take hold of. Dorsey nurtured a number of gospel greats, such as James Cleveland, Mahalia Jackson, and Roberta Martin.

Mahalia Jackson hailed from New Orleans but moved to Chicago at the age of 16. Her unique vocal abilities, coupled with her association with Thomas Dorsey, made her a rising star. During the 1950s, Jackson’s vocals could be heard on radio, television, and in concert halls around the world. Audiences in Europe packed her shows; she hosted her own Sunday night

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radio show for CBS; and in 1956, Jackson performed on the Ed Sullivan show, bringing gospel music into the mainstream. Jackson was also no stranger to the civil rights movement, as she would often perform at civil rights rallies. She sang a slave spiritual at the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom before Dr. King gave his I Have a Dream speech. Less than five years later, Jackson would sing at Dr. King’s funeral.

In 1935, the Chicago Public Schools opened a second public high school for Blacks – DuSable High School – to accommodate the growing student body at Wendell Phillips High School. Named after Chicago’s first permanent settler, DuSable became known for its outstanding music program. Music instructor Captain Walter Dyett was responsible for cultivating local artists through the school’s music program, including jazz tenor saxophone player Gene Ammons; jazz pianist Dorothy Donegan; the prolific Nat King Cole; and Grammy-award winning singer Dinah Washington. Other notables that attended DuSable High School included television host and producer of Soul Train, Don Cornelius; standup comedian and actor Redd Foxx; and Chicago’s first African-American mayor, Harold Washington.

Like Harlem’s Renaissance, Chicago’s Black Renaissance was fueled by a number of artists that included not only musicians, but visual artists, intellectuals, and writers. Chicago’s Renaissance was due in part to the federal programs of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which provided both top-down and bottom-up funding to Black Metropolis’ artists. WPA funds went directly local artists to cultivate skills in all fields. However, additional WPA funding helped finance the creation of the South Side Community Art Center, which cultivated numerous local artists including: Gordon Parks, an African-American film director, musician, photographer and writer who is acclaimed for his photographic essays in Life magazine and as the director of the 1971 film Shaft; Margaret Burroughs, artist, author, educator and one of the co-founders of the DuSable Museum of African American History; and Archibald Motley, Jr., a painter.

Numerous prominent Blacks contributed to the Black Metropolis’ literary and cultural reputation. New York writer Langston Hughes, leader of the Harlem Renaissance, wrote a popular column and comic for the Defender, which explored themes of race and Black and working-class society. Lorraine Hansberry, author and playwright, wrote “A Raisin in the Sun” which stemmed from the racially-restrictive covenants her father Carl Hansberry encountered when he tried to buy a home in the all-White Washington Park subdivision of the Woodlawn neighborhood.

Author and Bronzeville resident Richard Wright brought to light the character of race relations in both Chicago and America through his novel Native Son. Published in 1940, Native Son tells the story of a young disadvantaged Black man, Bigger Thomas, living on Chicago’s South Side who is sentenced to death for murdering a white girl. Thomas is portrayed as a product of the society he lives in, having no opportunity other than the menial one that has been predetermined by others. Wright exposed many of the social underpinnings of being Black in America through this novel. Upon its release Native Son sold over 250,000 copies nationwide, sparking a national discussion on race.
The Black Metropolis was also home to Pulitzer Prize winner Gwendolyn Brooks. Brooks authored *A Street in Bronzeville*, which was a direct reflection of life in the Black Metropolis. Brooks won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1950, and would later be honored as Illinois’ Poet Laureate in 1968; she would also serve as Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress in 1985.

**Sports and Recreation**

During the early 1900s, the way many Americans began to spend their leisure time changed. Sports emerged as major national pastime for all Americans. To that end, many prolific athletes and sporting teams emerged out of the Black Metropolis.

Famed heavyweight champion of the world, Jack Johnson, would call the Black Metropolis home during his reign from 1908 to 1915. It is believed that Johnson was the most photographed Black man of all time. Johnson’s celebrity status could not be overstated, so much so that whites across the country searched desperately for a “great white hope” to defeat him in the ring. Johnson built his training facilities behind his home at 33rd Street and South Wabash and opened Café de Champion, a jazz club, located on The Stroll.

Between the 1900s and 1930s, the Black Metropolis was home to the National Negro Baseball League. Andrew “Rube” Foster was responsible for organizing the league. Foster owned and managed the Chicago Giants, the dominant team in the league during its existence. The Giants played at Schorling Park, also called South Side Park. Schorling Park was the original home of the Chicago White Sox before they moved to Comiskey Park, now U.S. Cellular Field. Chicago’s South Side was also home to the Negro League’s East-West All Star game, bringing thousands of fans out to vote and see their favorite players play in this annual game.

In the late 1920s a group of young men from Wendell Phillips High School decided they would come together to play exhibition basketball games at famed jazz club, The Savoy. Originally called the Savoy Big Five, the team renamed themselves the Harlem Globetrotters, thinking the new name would garner them even greater interest from locals – being that Harlem was so revered. Initially the Globetrotters did not parade as jesters on the court. The Globetrotters’ comedic acts began in the late 1930s as a means to amuse the crowd and to give the small squad a breather during games.

Ohioan, Olympian, and son of Alabama sharecroppers, Jesse Owens would eventually call Chicago home. Known for his outstanding performance at the 1936 Berlin Summer Olympics, Owens served as the director and eventually as a board member of the Chicago Boys’ Club. He also served as the sports specialist to the State of Illinois’ Youth Commission. In 1956, President Eisenhower named Owens the U.S. representative to the Australian Olympic Games.

Like Owens, Ralph Metcalfe was also an outstanding sprinter. Metcalfe moved to Chicago from Atlanta, Georgia as a teen. He attended high school at Tilden Technical High on Chicago’s
South Side, and later enrolled at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. At his first Olympics, the 1932 Los Angeles Summer Games, Metcalfe took bronze in the 200-meter dash and the silver in the 100-meter dash. At the 1936 Berlin Olympics, Metcalfe and Owens were two of the four members of the gold medal winning 400-meter relay team. Later in life, Metcalfe became an important political figure in Chicago.

Texas native, and Bronzeville resident, Elizabeth “Bessie” Coleman, was inspired to become a pilot after hearing stories of returning WWI pilots. Unable to train to become a pilot in the U.S. because she was a woman, and African-American, Jesse Binga and the Defender financed her training overseas in Germany. Coleman came back to the U.S. and participated in her first air show in 1922 in New York. She would return to Chicago in 1928 to perform at the Checkerboard Airdrome (Midway Airport) performing death-defying feats in front of packed crowds. As the first African-American female pilot, Coleman inspired a generation of African-American pilots, including the Tuskegee Airmen and the Army Air Corps program, which trained African-Americans to fly and maintain combat aircraft during WWII.

The end of an era
The Great Depression brought an end the Great Migration and to the financial and economic prosperity of the Black Metropolis. The Depression affected the entire nation. Many of Black Wall Street’s financial institutions were forced to shutter their doors, leaving a gaping hole in the socio-economic strength of the community. Despite the absence of social and economic resources, the community would continue to grow in population over the next several decades, bringing with it a number of opportunities and challenges.

Jobs and Housing
Migration north accelerated again during WWII. Increased industrial production created many new jobs in Chicago. This, combined with the expanded use of the mechanical cotton picker in the South, again drove Blacks to northern cities. In 1940, Bronzeville’s African-American population was second only to Harlem, with over 337,000 residents.

The Chicago that migrants encountered during the second wave of the Great Migration was fundamentally different from the community the first migrants settled. Labor gains achieved in the 1930s brought a stable work environment in Chicago’s biggest industries – steel production and meat packing. However, segregation and employment and housing discrimination continued to limit opportunities for African-Americans in Chicago. Stores in the Loop would not hire African-Americans as clerks while bus drivers, police officers, and firefighters were limited to positions in Black neighborhoods. The construction trades too remained closed to Blacks. Furthermore, the narrow confines of Chicago’s Black Belt was could no longer supply the physical infrastructure needed to house the growing number of African-Americans in Chicago, even though the housing was subdivided in an attempt to contain the burgeoning population.
Racial redlining became the official policy used to enforce housing segregation. As in the past, white-owned establishment banks and insurance companies continued to refuse to lend money, write mortgages, or provide insurance policies in particular parts of the city. The practice of redlining originated in 1935, when the Federal Home Loan Bank Board (FHLBB) asked Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) to look at 239 cities and create "residential security maps" to indicate the level of security for real-estate investments in each city. Based on assumptions about the community, as opposed to individual household’s ability to satisfy lending criteria, the maps defined many minority neighborhoods as ineligible to receive financing. Banks and insurers soon adopted the HOLC’s maps and practices to guide lending and underwriting decisions. Further, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), created in 1934, also used the HOLC’s methods to assess locations for federally insured new housing construction. Since Blacks were already unwelcome in many of Chicago’s white neighborhoods, the policy effectively meant that they could not secure mortgage loans through traditional sources.

Overcoming obstacles was not uncommon to residents of greater Bronzeville. Starting in the 1940s, African-Americans took their fight over racially restrictive housing covenants to the courts. At this time many Chicago neighborhoods remained off-limits to African-Americans. Earl B. Dickerson, a Mississippi native and the first Black graduate of the University of Chicago Law School, argued one of the first legal cases against racially-restrictive covenants before the U.S. Supreme Court in Hansberry v. Lee. This case opened the door for the eventual demise of the discriminatory practice. Dickerson’s client was Carl Hansberry, author Lorraine Hansberry’s father. Ultimately, the U.S. Supreme Court would declare racially-restrictive covenants as unenforceable in the pivotal 1948 case of Shelley v. Kraemer. Dickerson went on to assist in organizing the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund. He was also the first Democrat elected as Second Ward Alderman and served as a member of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Fair Employment Practices Committee.

This easing of segregated housing policies afforded many residents the opportunity to move out of the community, but also concentrated poverty and exacerbated community disinvestment. The opportunity for middle- and upper-income African-Americans to venture to other parts of the city left a concentration of lower-income residents in Bronzeville. Left with aging and deteriorating housing stock and few local businesses, community social workers and activists took up the torch to fight for resources to better the African-American community.

Community activist Irene McCoy Gaines fought for better housing, education, employment, and social opportunity for African-Americans living in Bronzeville. Gaines served on President Herbert Hoover’s National Committee on Negro Housing. Her participation in the committee led to the drafting of a report titled *The Physical Aspect of Negro Housing*, which documented disparity of living conditions in African-American communities. Her report initiated the federal Public Works Administration’s construction of the Ida B. Wells Homes public housing project in 1941. The Ida B. Wells Homes was the fourth constructed public housing project in Chicago, but was by far the largest, and in later years consisting of more than 1,600 units.
housed in 124 buildings. Regarded a success at the time, Ida B. Wells Homes provided low-income African-Americans with newly constructed affordable housing.

**Urban Renewal**

In the 1950s and 60s urban renewal swept the South Side of Chicago and brought with it the construction of additional high-rise public housing buildings for tens of thousands of people in the Black Metropolis. Stateway Gardens, completed in 1958, became the second largest public housing project in Chicago with 1,684 units. Shortly thereafter, in 1962, the Robert Taylor Homes were built, consisting of 28 high rise buildings each 16-stories tall, totaling 4,415 apartments – one of the largest public housing developments in the nation.

At its peak, Robert Taylor Homes housed 27,000 residents, over twice the 11,000 it was planned for. That same year, the Dan Ryan Expressway opened along Bronzeville’s western border, isolating the community from other neighborhoods. (The digging of the Dan Ryan Expressway also caused the razing and relocation of the newly reconstructed Progressive Baptist Church, a church that was birthed out of the Great Migration.) Named after African-American activist and CHA board member, Robert Taylor resigned from the CHA board in 1950 because City Council refused to support building public housing locations throughout the City, which Taylor believed would have fostered racially integrated housing. Taylor was the son of Robert Robinson Taylor, the first accredited African-American architect in the United States, who was the first African-American student to enroll in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and complete his degree in architecture. Robert Robinson Taylor was a faculty member at Tuskegee Institute for almost 40 years, where he developed and managed the school’s buildings and infrastructure. Robert Taylor is the grandfather of Valerie Jarrett, Senior Advisor to President Barack Obama.

Many famous African-Americans grew up in Robert Taylor Homes, including: Maurice Cheeks, a retired National Basketball Association player and head coach of the Detroit Pistons; Deval Patrick, American politician, civil rights attorney and Democratic Governor of Massachusetts; Kirby Puckett, Major League Baseball player for the Minnesota Twins from 1984-1995; Marvin Smith, American jazz drummer and composer and known for his drumming position on the Tonight Show with Jay Leno; and actor Mr. T, known for his role on the A-Team.

Urban renewal efforts were intended to revitalize declining urban neighborhoods in phases by way of massive demolition, slum clearance, and rehabilitation. In addition to the construction of public housing, urban renewal efforts in Bronzeville involved construction around IIT’s campus and Michael Reese Hospital. Institutional expansions and new residential developments (Lake Meadows, Prairie Shores and South Commons) wiped out existing homes throughout Bronzeville, scattering previously tight-knit communities elsewhere in the City.

In 1970 Chicago was home to over a million African-American residents, and a majority of these households were located in racially prescribed neighborhoods on the City’s south and west sides. A group of community leaders from the South Side, called the Citizens’ Action Program,
developed a grassroots strategy to counter redlining, called “greenlining.” Residents were encouraged to deposit savings in banks that pledged to reinvest funds in urban communities. Chicagoans also played a role in lobbying Congress to pass the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 (CRA), requiring banks to lend in areas from which they accepted deposits. The law was bolstered by the efforts of the National Training and Information Center in Chicago, led by Gale Cincotta. The Center successfully negotiated $173 million in CRA agreements from three major downtown banks in 1984, bringing loans and branch banking services to Bronzeville and other predominantly African-American Chicago neighborhoods.

During the 1990s, it became apparent that public housing throughout Chicago had deteriorated immensely. Built with the intention of providing decent and affordable housing to poor and low-income households, these developments had become communities of concentrated poverty, plagued with crime, drugs and violence. In 2000, the CHA set out to rehabilitate and redevelop all of Chicago’s public housing, under the Plan for Transformation, the largest and most ambitious public housing plan in the nation.

The Plan for Transformation echoed Robert Taylor’s hopes in the 1950s, to integrate public housing residents into the larger Chicago community. Deemed the solution to concentrated poverty in public housing properties, mixed-income communities were intended to diminish the stigma attached to public housing by attracting residents of different economic status to live side-by-side. The Plan included provisions for supportive services that would help residents become more self-sufficient, this included: job training and placement, substance abuse treatment, day care, and more. As a result of the Plan, over 10,000 units of public housing in Bronzeville were demolished between 1996 and 2011. Portions of former public housing sites in Bronzeville have been replaced with mixed-income developments, while other portions of these sites have been left vacant and idle. CHA is on deadline to complete the units it promised, which poses an opportunity to address some of Bronzeville’s now underutilized land.

The Black Metropolis: Today

In honor of the African-Americans who played a role in the Black Metropolis, the Bronzeville Walk of Fame was created in 1996. The walk of fame consists of a series of bronze plaques embedded in the sidewalks from 25th and 35th Streets along Martin Luther King Drive, and culminates with a sculpture titled “The Monument to the Great Northern Migration.” Fifteen-feet in height, the sculpture is a bronze migrant symbolizing the journey African-Americans made north to Chicago. The migrant is waving and carries a worn suitcase held together with rope. Artist and California-born African-American sculptor Alison Saar describes her work in an inscription at the site:

“This bronze monument depicts a man wearing a suit made of shoe soles rising from a mound of soles. The soles, worn and full of holes, symbolize the often difficult journey from the south to the north. It commemorates all the African-American men and women who migrated to Chicago after the Civil War.”
The Great Migration laid the foundation for the economic, cultural, and political story of Chicago’s South Side, Illinois, and the nation. As the Black Metropolis grew so did African-American’s impact on American life, culture, and democracy. From the civil rights, to the emergence of the African-American music scene, to the development of African-American entrepreneurs, to the election of the city’s first Black mayor Harold Washington in 1983, to the election of the nation’s first Black president, Chicago’s own, Barack Obama in 2008; none of these accomplishments would have been possible if not for those who fought for freedom and equal rights in the Black Metropolis.

The historical significance of the Black Metropolis, and the modern-day Bronzeville community, continues to attract new residents of all races. These individuals are staking their claim in this historic community, awaiting its resurgence. Developers and property owners are rehabbing greystones and the area’s many historic buildings.

New retail development has occurred along 35th and 47th Streets. The artistic community is expanding. In addition to the South Side Community Arts Center, one can visit a number of new art galleries and enjoy dinner and nightlife locally.

Efforts to revitalize the Black Metropolis speak to its importance. Black heritage tours of the area are given to visitors to show the landmarks that represent the Great Migration. The BVIC was established to serve as a source of information to visitors. Located in the historic Supreme/Liberty Life Building, which was once headquarters to the first African-American owned and operated insurance company in the North the BVIC provides tours to visitors from around the world and houses a gallery of African and African-American art. Today, visitors to Black Metropolis-Bronzeville can also participate in the Historic Bronzeville Annual Bike Tour, which covers 16-miles and leads participants to 40 historic sites throughout the community.

Figure 10. Monument to the Great Northern Migration


Figure 11. South Shore Drill Team, performing at the 2013 Bud Billiken Parade

![South Shore Drill Team](http://www.southshoredrillteam.org/bud-billiken-parade)


The traditions of the Black Metropolis continue to live on. The Chicago Defender’s Bud Billiken Parade, the oldest and largest African-American parade in the United States, continues to celebrate African-American achievement. Held annually on the second Saturday in August, the parade has been attended by countless African-American youth, families, alongside politicians, celebrities, and famous Grand Marshalls including Presidents Truman, Kennedy, Johnson, and Obama, and celebrities Nat King Cole, Michael Jordan, and Muhammad Ali.

In an effort to preserve the Black Metropolis’ history, the University of Chicago now hosts an extensive archive of historic documents and research material. This collection, the Black Metropolis Research Consortium, helps not only to preserve the community’s history, but share it with educators, researchers, and others who care about the legacy of the community.

Figure 12. Former President Harry S. Truman (left), John H. Sengstacke, and Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley at the 1953 Bud Billiken Parade