

When the Cup of Endurance Runs Over: Defining Northern, Migrant Public Identity for  
the American Negro

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the  
Graduate School-Newark  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

Graduate Program in American Studies

written under the direction of

Dr. Mark Krasovic

and approved by

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Newark, New Jersey

May 2013

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“When the Cup of Endurance Runs Over: Defining Northern, Migrant Public Identity for  
the American Negro”

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Scholarship on the Great Migration has largely examined the event as a collective movement of one people, pushed or pulled by a number of interdependent factors. Few have studied the migrant himself, and even fewer have documented the shift in his public identity as he became a permanent member of Northern cities. For this reason, the objective of this research is to use twenty-four objects to track and define the way Northern Black migrants used and manipulated forces to in order to create their public identity over time of the in the United States during twentieth century. This work identifies the following points as critical to the migrant’s development as a Northerner over time: the end of his life as a sharecropper; the migrant in transit and his arrival as a new implant to a Northern, urban space; and his permanent settlement in Northern cities. An analysis of architecture, political cartoons, possessions, and the outward appearance of the Negro migrant were used as primary material culture resources in order to demonstrate the essential components of his identity. Through the examination of a variety of sites, the central identity components - internal drive and ambition; commitment to social and financial mobility; and to be skillfully innovative as a worker

and inhabitant of a new environment – are linked to the development of key characteristics of the migrant’s identity at each of the three critical stages in time. This research determined that the identity of the Northern migrant was grounded in an ever-evolving hybrid of newly introduced Northern experiences and the deliberate retention of Southern qualities and traditions. Additionally, the fluidity of agency that Black migrants experienced at each stage of development led them to recognize the importance of wealth, influence, and upward mobility in order to display a positive public identity.

## Acknowledgements

The author wishes to acknowledge a number of people who made this research possible. First, I would like to thank Dr. Mark Krasovic for his supportive guidance throughout the research, writing, and editing process. His insightful critiques and push for clarity in the analysis of each object referenced in this work made the following research come together in a succinct manner, allowing my vision to flourish under his advisement. I also wish to give thanks to the American Studies Department of Rutgers University-Newark under the leadership of Dr. Robert Synder for the opportunity to undertake this project and the constant encouragement from faculty and staff alike. Additionally, staffs at both the Rutgers University Library system as well as the Mercer County Public Libraries were instrumental in assisting me in my studies. The knowledge of the people in both of these circles was invaluable to this project. I would like to thank my mother, Maurine Bell, who has always been my most fair critic, staunch advocate, and biggest fan throughout this and every research endeavor I have undertaken in my scholastic career. Lastly, I would like to thank the migrants whose ambition, perseverance, and financial aspirations allowed me to aspire to be all that I am and all that I wish to become: my grandparents- Gertrude Oglesby, Quincy Oglesby, and Leona Carr. I tell this story for them and live in eternal debt to their bravery and sacrifices as Northern migrants.

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## Introduction

Like Newark, Chicago is America's forgotten city. Both were once bustling industrial centers from the late 1800s well into the 1970s. Both were also cornerstones of the Negro migrant experience, their urban boundaries bursting at the seams to such a degree that it pushed White ethnics to the furthest rim of city boundaries possible. The public memory of both spaces, however, is now largely clouded by tumultuous racial protests during the 1960s, their bouts with urban decay throughout the 1990s, and the politically-charged gentrification efforts of the new millennium. It was not for a lack of trying among the cities' governing bodies who -before seeking out gentrification donors at the turn of the twenty first century- installed memorials, historic territory maps, statues, and plaques throughout each space in an effort to reintroduce the public to the contributions of the cities in the history and development of the United States.

In Newark, the High Street campaign along the renamed Martin Luther King Boulevard included flags and territorial markers that called pedestrians to reevaluate the main artery and how its existence and transformation over time had personified characteristics that remained central to the identity of Newark and her residents. The flags along Martin Luther King Boulevard still exist, sun-beaten by years of exposure. Originally meant to engage passersby, the flags now blend into the backdrop. Their lack of impact on the people that pass them daily speaks to the identity of the space.

Alison Saar's work "Monument to the Great Northern Migration" in South Side Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood followed suit. Built and dedicated in 1996 on the heels of the Democratic National Convention, figure one of the Monument to the Great

Northern Migration still stands amidst an urban jungle of fast food restaurants, healthcare facilities, and newly constructed yet vacant townhomes on the corner of 26<sup>th</sup> Place and Dr. Martin Luther King Drive, nay Grand Boulevard- the first street in the United States to be renamed in honor of King in the spring of 1968.<sup>1</sup> Just seven miles south of the Chicago home of Robert Abbott – the proprietor of the *Chicago Defender* which was arguably the most influential news source of the migration for Black Americans that came to Chicago and out of the American South holistically- and less than two miles west of Lake Michigan, the weathered cast bronze display also disappears against the backdrop of the modern city. Surrounded by electric streetlights twice the size of its fifteen foot stature and an active three-lane expressway on both sides that separates Chicago's business district to the North from the ethnic enclaves to the South, the commemoration of the Northern migrant is lost in the movement and poverty of inner city living during the twenty-first century. Another attempt at restructuring identity lost to objects overlooked by the audience it is meant to reach.

Leaders of each city had hoped that these new public works would highlight the positive characteristics of the city's public identity. Ultimately, visitors and citizens should take away an understanding of why certain traits are synonymous with each space. If they can take these things away, the city could successfully reestablish its influence in America through its identity. But first the objects that were being used to define the city's identity had to be accurately read and the narrative accepted by the audience.

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<sup>1</sup> Derek Alderman "Naming Streets for Martin Luther King, Jr.: No easy road" *Landscape and Race in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 222

The large amount of work that has been done by Northern Negro migrants themselves to establish their public identity is being shamefully lost by the misreading of objects, like Saar's monument, and the public memories about identity the audience is taking away. By reading and analyzing twenty-four objects related to the experience of the Northern Negro migrant in the first half of the twentieth century, this work will define key components of his public identity. It will cite three critical points in his development as a Northerner over time: the end of his life as a sharecropper; the migrant in transit and his arrival as a new implant to a Northern, urban space; and his permanent settlement in Northern cities. In examining the twenty-four objects and their influence on the identity of the Northern Negro migrant during the first wave of the Great Migration, this work will determine how the public identity of the migrant has been constructed and maintained over time.

In terms of this research, the stages of transformation for the Northern Negro migrant are carefully defined for maximum comprehension. At the first stage, the migrant is identified as a sharecropper, an employed yet abused member of the South's lowest most social class. The term pre-migrant identifies the sharecropper still as a Southern entity, but one who has decided that migration is necessary to obtain his personal goals of financial success and social mobility. As a pre-migrant, he takes the necessary mental and physical preparations to leave the region. The transient migrant is a Southern refugee en route to one of many Northern cities. The fourth term, new implant, characterizes the Southern refugee in his new urban space as he experiences Northern customs and acclimates himself to his new surroundings. Lastly, the settled migrant identifies the

Negro as a permanent resident of the North and differentiates him from the new implants arriving well after he has grown familiar with the social norms of the Northern urban space. The use of the term Negro is prevalent throughout this work. Since the naming of a people is attached to a number societal events and struggles they overcome publically and privately, this scholar refrains as often as possible from using the numerous titles that refer to people of color interchangeably. For that purpose, the term Negro and Black are used exclusively throughout this work. With the inclusion of the new Negro mentality that was critical to the development of the Northern migrant, the author feels that 'Black' is the most appropriate modern term that can be interchangeably used with the capitalized label of 'Negro.'

### **Section One: I'm bound to leave this place**

Since the 1800s, 'King Cotton' had ruled the agriculturally-dominated economy of the American South, demanding reverence above all other cash crops growing in the fertile soil of southern states. Some Negroes who had not left the rural South at the end of the Civil War had become tradesmen or domestic workers. The vast majority, however, remained in the fields as sharecroppers. Differing from the often interchanged term tenant farmer, sharecroppers possessed little formal influence over the land they toiled annually. They were heavily monitored and rarely made farming decisions concerning crops or field rotation, even though it was usually their tools as well as their purchased seed that

tended the fields and produced the crops.<sup>2</sup> Most experienced cotton pickers could pick one hundred pounds before their lunch break and a second hundred before retiring for supper in the evening.<sup>3</sup> With cotton selling at \$0.24 cents per pound by 1917, White landowners understood the value of the Negro as a worker in the sharecropping labor force. Because of this, White landowners drew up contracts to compel sharecroppers to work under any condition they saw fit. William Grimes, a member of the Southern aristocracy in North Carolina before the Civil War, submitted to the sharecropping systems in an effort to maintain his land and turn a profit on the crops that grew there. In a sharecropping contract he drew up for all those wishing to rent portions of his land, Grimes used 1,159 words to limit the agency of the Negro worker and ensure that the majority of the financial spoils were his own. While the contract itself has not been photographed or digitally reproduced, the language Grimes uses makes it clear to the audience that he as the landowner holds all of the power in the working relationship. The contract forced each renter to affirm to have “no part or interest in the cotton seed raised from the crop planted and worked by them” nor were they able to grow any vine crops, with the exception of those explicitly named, on his land.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, while Grimes did agree to provide tools and horses for working the land, it was the responsibility of the cropper to provide the fodder for the animals. If he did not, Grimes reserved the right to take from the cropper’s harvest to make up the difference.<sup>5</sup> The contract went on to

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<sup>2</sup> Lee J. Alston and Kyle D. Kauffman, “Agricultural Chutes and Ladders: New Estimates of Sharecroppers and ‘True Tenants’ in the South, 1900-1920,” *The Journal of Economic History* 57 (June 1997): 464, accessed April 19, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2951048>.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Whitaker, *On the Laps of Gods: The Red Summer of 1919 and the Struggle for Justice that Remade a Nation* (New York: Crown Publisher, 2008), 6.

<sup>4</sup> “Contract,” accessed April 19, 2013, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/122/recon/contract.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

identify dates and specifics of the renter's responsibilities to Grimes' land, making a detailed point of note that no renter under contract with him may "work off the plantation when there is any work to be done on the land he has rented, or when his work is needed by me or other croppers." It was Grimes alone who could designate what that work is at his own discretion.<sup>6</sup> All of these requirements were subject to change with or without the renter's knowledge or consent. In order to for the document to be valid, all agreeing parties had to sign clearly. Noting that most sharecroppers could not read or write, so the requirement of his signature or 'mark' on the document can be read as yet another example of oppressive mechanisms used by Whites in the Southern mainstream society to control the financial and social mobility of the migrant.

More than a list of rules, a sharecropping contract was a legally binding document socially enforced at the hands of the community's White vigilante groups that tethered Southern Negroes to both the planting and harvest season of the cotton crop and the mercy of the landowner. The contracts existed as tangible examples that demonstrated the limitations on the mobility and societal influence of the average Negro in the South during the twentieth century. It is believable that Grimes' subjugation of the Negro sharecroppers was not his immediate intention; it was most likely not even a thought that crossed his mind when this contract was created. Grimes was simply exercising the power he had over the workers; a power allotted to him by his wealth and social position in the community. That power is embodied in the pure existence of the document. Since the sharecroppers could not read, the words of the document did not hold the power; the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

visual presence of it did. Grimes' ability to use a treaty between himself and his workers as an object that when presented to the sharecroppers reminded them that they were physically forbidden to act on opportunities of social or financial growth demonstrates the power of the object itself. These contracts allowed landowning Whites like Grimes to eliminate the opportunity for Negro sharecroppers to obtain any of that wealth or power within the White community. To him, and other landowning Whites at the time, contracts like these served as an agreement to protect their livelihood and social standing as the dominant race in states like North Carolina.

These documents also served to maintain a social caste system that had deprived Negroes of wealth or upward mobility since the end of Reconstruction. Their existence preserved the role of White racial supremacy that was imbedded into Southern culture. Because of the Negro's inadequate access to wealth and mobility, he was shut out of influential social circles in mainstream society. While he may have had more power to define himself in spaces with those of similar social status, e.g. among his church congregation, he lacked the influence that was evenly distributed in every social environments. Therefore, the right to define his public identity in the American South's public sphere was extremely narrow for the sharecropper.

In 1938, artist-turned- photojournalist Russell Lee traveled to Lehi, Arkansas on a federal trip to document the experience of sharecroppers. Two years prior, journalists James Agee and Walker Evans completed a similar project for *Fortune* magazine. Their images were of mostly white tenant farms, although the images of the homemade clothing and hand built two-room wooden homes reveal similar themes of poverty shared by sharecroppers of both races. While Lee's pictures were taken well after the first wave

of the Great Migration, conditions were very similar for the Negroes of the early twentieth century. Used to rouse support from members of Congress, these pictures were taken to encourage the passage of national legislation that would improve the conditions of tenant farmers and the state of the landscape in rural communities throughout the American South. Figure two shows Lee's image of two bodiless legs, the feet of each man pointing diagonally in both directions. The thinly soled shoes are crudely laced with string and the leather is visibly worn in places. Lee, so taken by the shoes, titled this image "Cotton Pickers Feet" before submitting it to the Farm Security Administration for processing. But it is not the shoes that define the public identity of the Southern Negro in this image. Tied with frayed cotton string above and below the patella were folded pieces of burlap, the same material used to haul cotton up and down the endless rows. These makeshift knee pads exhibit the innovative nature of the Negro as a worker. While rudimentary in construction, the kneepads cement Negroes as active agents in agricultural labor system. Although subjugated their presence in the agricultural system was valuable to the success of the region. If they were hurt, the cotton did not get harvested, and no one –Black or White–was paid. To prevent this Negro sharecroppers became problem solvers.

These kneepads also created a protective barrier to safeguard of their bodies, an element Negroes could not manage in the public sphere of the Jim Crow South. In the Southern community, Blacks of every social class were controlled by mainstream society through the threat of lynching and mass violence to their property and bodies. The slightest indiscretion, be it intentional or unintentional, toward any member of the White population was grounds for physical retaliation. By protecting their bodies, the Negro



displayed a second sense control over his public identity. As a worker, he was defining his public identity to include traits of commitment, drive, and innovation. As a person in society, he was defining his physical self as valuable. It was the sense of worth that would be the foundational base that allowed Negroes to believe they were capable of cultivating and defining an identity of the Negro separate from the influence of the White mainstream. Self-worth, coupled with their ingenuity to make many products with few resources, were key characteristics honed in the South that would be essential in the hybrid identity that would become the Black Northerner.

While the person on the left in figure two has tattered but fully intact shoes, the man on the right has used the same burlap fabric and rolled cotton to construct a makeshift shoe. The crisscrossed pattern of the cotton string around the phalanges held the foot in a similar pattern as the manufactured shoe on the left. This cloth contraption was most likely the deeper meaning behind Lee's title "Cotton Pickers Feet." The construction of the footwear speaks again to the innovative nature of the sharecropper and his commitment to his physical protect and financial survival at any cost.

Sadly, sharecroppers in the American South were not provided even half of their rightful wages after the sale of cotton. Similar to the system of peonage between Mexican and Peruvian workers and the Spanish crown in sixteenth century, the American sharecropping system allowed the landlord to control the financial and social mobility of the Negro through oppressive labor practices. While sharecroppers should have earned up to \$700.00 per year in 1917, twice the price of a new Model T automobile, landlords

often manipulated the calculations to be in their favor.<sup>7</sup> “You just had to take their word for it. They never give you no details. They just say you owe so much. No matter how good account you kept, you had to go by their accounts...”<sup>8</sup> Under landowners like Grimes, Negro sharecroppers were only able to exercise the smallest steps to gain wealth and influence within Southern communities. Parallel to Grimes, who explicitly banned croppers from privately growing cotton in their home plots, other owners prohibited the raising of hogs, chickens, and other livestock whose slaughter or offspring would have produced a supplemental income for Negroes.<sup>9</sup> This supplemental income, as it was accurately defined by landowners, would not only allow Negroes to free themselves from the fabricated amount of debt to the landowner they had amassed as a sharecropper, but, as a merchant, would also make them more powerful agents within their Negro community and possibly the White community. The possibility of this was unacceptable to White, landowning males. Some landowners also required their farmers to grow cotton up to the front entrances of their cabin, limiting their food supply as well as any chance freely leave the landlord’s property or the business of sharecropping.

While the sharecropper may have been limited in power, wealth, and influence, his awareness was keen. By the turn of the century, Negroes grew tired of the system of peonage. Knowing that little to no mobility was available in this labor system, the Negro identity shifted into a pre-migrant mentality. Drawing on his innovative nature that is demonstrated through the design and construction of the kneepads, the Negro began to formulate ideas that would increase his wealth and gain mobility. He began to use the

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<sup>7</sup> Whitaker, 8.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

innovative nature that had allowed him to survive as a subjugated member of Southern society to evaluate all other available opportunities to increase his financial and social mobility in the United States. One of those options was to abandon life in the South all together.

### *Agents of Change*

Figure three shows the October fourteenth edition of the Chicago *Defender* in 1916. On page three an article ran titled “2 Million Needed: Plenty of Work in North; Railroads Still Short of Men; Must Come from South.” It ran on the far right side, just above the fold-the location of stories of importance- in Robert Abbott’s weekly newspaper. Having grown to be one of the most widely circulated sources of news that catered to the Negro race, the *Defender* began to print large weekend editions; each issue –including the one that printed this article- was twelve pages or more. Page after page was filled with announcements, events, and news that highlighted the triumphs and concerns of Negroes from every corner of the United States. On the previous page, above the fold as well, a related topical piece ran: “Savannah Alarmed over Labor Exodus.” It stood alone, surrounded by nothing of similar topic or from a nearby region. The presence of these articles in a nationally respected publication revealed the transformation of the public identity of the Negro, ninety percent of whom lived in the rural South. Across the South, the Negro- whose current identity was grounded in the suppression of the race by a system that purposefully limited their access to financial and social influence as well as equitable access to resources - was seeking out and finding other opportunities to be socially and financially successful. For those who could not

break into independent entrepreneurial opportunities, such as laundering or produce sales, the best innovation they could come up with was to go where the financial opportunities were. Since the First World War had left vacancies in Northern industrial factories, jobs in the North offered an increased wage that the Southern Negro needed in order to live and increase their mobility and societal influence. Ads also appeared in Baltimore's short lived *Afro American Ledger*, catering to young women of color. The announcements claimed that "smart" women could work in the well ventilated sewing factories.<sup>10</sup> They even advertised lunch available on site and overtime pay on weekends.<sup>11</sup>

The Black Press was one of the most influential agents of change in this process. The journalistic propaganda— in the form of staff written articles promoting financial advancements for Negroes if they relocated to the North- that was placed in the *Defender*, the Philadelphia *Tribune*, New York City's *Amsterdam News*, the Pittsburgh *Courier* and similar Black publications of the day was produced specifically to speak the truth about the conditions of the Negro in America as well as to tap into the ambitious drive of the race in order to change the state of the Negro's social existence in the country. The *Defender* in particular printed a myriad of articles like the previously mentioned that targeted skilled and unskilled Negro laborers in the South. A migrant himself, Abbott was aware that an article describing the violence against Negroes in the same edition as an article advertising jobs with wages double and triple those that sharecroppers were earning, and a third from the mouth of a successful migrant speaking directly of the opportunities in the North would work on the minds and reinforce the need for an

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<sup>10</sup> "Afro American Ledger," accessed April 16, 2013, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=ztWeZN2wRXQC&dat=19080104&printsec=frontpage&hl=en>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

innovative solution to the limited access to wealth, power, and societal influence being experienced in the South. Other mediums of the Black Press mimicked Abbott's design, as seen in figure four of the previously cited *Afro-American Ledger*. A list of personal notes featuring parties and weddings hosted by members of the Black community in the North nation runs just below an request for more seamstresses in a the Northern dress shop.

The Black Press also used their paper to provide Negroes a space where their image was positive, counteracting the stereotypes that filled White, mainstream Press outlets while simultaneously playing on the dissatisfaction of pre-migrant Negroes in the South. Looking again at the *Afro- American Ledger*, the announcements under personal notes include details of social gatherings Blacks who were prospering in the Northern environment. One states specifically how the home of Mr. and Mrs. Columbus Butler opened their home friends to their home on New Year's Day, and they were able to accommodate a large number of them.<sup>12</sup> By including these events, the Black Press not only iconized traits of positive public identity- wealth and social status, as demonstrated by the festive events held at the Butler home on New Year's Day- they confirmed for pre-migrants outside the Northern space that a positive public identity did exist and was not out of their reach. Abbott and other Black newsprints used the experience of Negroes in the North to convince Southern sharecroppers that the wealth and social standing they sought was not only achievable, but could result in the creation of a positive public

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

identity of all Negro people. Thus, with a little intentional prodding from the main media outlets of the era, pre-migrants began leaving the South in droves.

When a White man entered a southern Negro neighborhood in the early 1900s, it was rarely a positive thing; it was definitely not to offer them a chance at elevated social mobility or more money than most of them had ever made in their life. So when labor agents from Northern industry arrived on the dusty main streets of towns in rural Mississippi, the edges of vast cotton fields of Georgia, and in cities around Virginia's Chesapeake Bay, Negroes were rightfully suspicious in the beginning. Later, however, agents became as common placed in Negro neighborhoods almost as Negroes themselves.<sup>13</sup> Jacob Lawrence 1940 set of artistic works chronicling the Great Migration included this often overlooked component of the experience. Originally created untitled, Lawrence later named the twenty-eighth of the fifty-nine piece series "The labor agent sent south by northern industry was a familiar presence in the Black communities." Painted on eighteen by twelve inch hardboard using the common water-based paint Casein tempera, Lawrence uses earth toned colors to illustrate seven pre-migrants on a downward sloped dirt road. At the bottom left edge of the frame, is a labor agent. He is writing what can assumed to be the names of the committed Negro workers that plan to return North with him. Under strict orders to bring back healthy Southern Negroes of a certain age, agents received pay from steel mills and similar industries for delivering Negroes to Northern cities. As seen in figure five, the agent is clothed in black, only a blue rim around his hat identifies him. As demonstrated in Lawrence's depiction of the

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<sup>13</sup> Carole Marks, *Farewell- We're Good and Gone* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 21.

pre-migrants moving forward towards the agent and away from their former experiences in the South- represented by the desolate fields of brown earth- the image identified labor agents from the North as important units that would help Negroes define their own public identity. Labor agents provided sharecroppers with an individual choice in constructing his image. He offered the opportunity many of them sought to escape the cycle of debt they currently lived under in the sharecropping system. As a worker in Northern factories, labor agents advertised that the sharecroppers could make more money. The *Defender* had already convinced them that life in Northern cities were less racially oppressive. By providing them with an option to elevate their financial standing, labor agents affected the development of the public identity of pre-migrants for the better.

Unlike the dominant narrative about the Great Migration, Lawrence gives control of the experience back to the migrants. His placement of the labor agent in the bottom left corner of the painting speaks to the agency of the labor agent in that space compared to the agency of the pre-migrants. Contrasting the presence of the agent as one man so close to the pre-migrants, drawn as seven men grouped together, Lawrence not only showed the way labor agents stood out in the Black community, but also how the trait of determination as a public identity trait was being developed and exercised. Yes, it is true that Northern industry saw an opportunity in cheap labor of the American Negro lands; and, yes Negroes who agreed to this contract were grossly underpaid. But Lawrence ensured that the ambition and commitment to financial- thus, social mobility- that was important the pre-migrant Negro was forced into the dominant narrative and historical understanding the Great Migration. Because of Lawrence's artwork, the identity of the

individual pre-migrant and his manipulation of agency and power in order to increase his influence in the United States that would ultimately define Negro identity was permanently visible and would forever be included in the history of events that would collectively become known as the Great Migration.

The unifying voice of every Negro community in the United States in the early twentieth century was not that of the landowning Whites, but that of the Black Church. This entity, grounded in Christian teachings and traditions that predated the Civil War, help to insulate the Black community from the degradation Negroes experienced at the hands of Whites. It acted as both a protective unit and a medium between the Black community and the White, mainstream society. Some scholars like Edward Frazier go so far as to say it helped the Negro accept and cope with his inferior social status.<sup>14</sup> The innovative spirit developing in the Black community – as previously analyzed through the design and construction of the burlap kneepads- coupled with the desire for financial growth, however, would not allow the congregations of the Black Church to continue to submit willingly to their treatment by the White mainstream any longer; even if the clerical leaders, the mentors of their community, insisted upon it., the Black Church was surprisingly torn on the issue of migration. Largely silent or in chaotic disagreement, members of the Black clergy were split on how to approach the subject of or respond to the desire of their flock to immediately migrate North, as they called it, Northern Fever. Those who did speak out did so at the risk of ostracizing themselves from the people they led. In the September twenty-fifth issue of the Birmingham Age Herald in 1916, Dr.

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<sup>14</sup> Edward Franklin Fraizer, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Schocken Books), 51.



Reverend John Henry Eason's Sunday sermon appeared. The previous day, Reverend Eason's message was clear: patience.

"There are many signs of hope and promise in the skies for better things in the South for us as Negroes...Several things must come up to us as a race before we can enjoy [the] many rights and blessings that we desire."<sup>15</sup>

Eason, an obvious supporter of Booker T. Washington's gradualist approach for the equality of the race, went on to say that members of his congregation should not be so quick to leave, and definitely not in such large numbers: "Be manly and patient...It matters not where you go. Look well before you jump."<sup>16</sup> A handful of reverends supported his way of thinking, some going as far as to use their influence- influence that members of their congregation did not have and were actively seeking by leaving the South, mind you- to persuade Whites to use all political and governmental resources at their disposal to stop 'Northern fever.' On the other side of the aisle, clergy spoke of the injustices the Negro experienced as Southerners as a justification for the recent events. Some reverends even migrated themselves, taking the railway tickets offered to them by labor agents, a tactic often employed in hopes that members of the congregation would follow their community leaders and fill vacant jobs in the North. Because for one of the first times in the history of Negroes in the United States the Black Church did not have a unifying message on the issue of migration, the pre-migrant was finally able to control the definition of his own public identity. Individuals and their families examined the state of their lives in the South and made decisions based solely on their direct experiences in

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<sup>15</sup> Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997) 66.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

the community and knowledge of opportunities in the North. This new found mental freedom would reappear as a characteristic of Negroes in the North as they sought additional financial opportunities in hopes to create a positive public identity for themselves in a new, urban space.

Journalist Isabel Wilkerson's first release of *The Warmth of Other Suns* had no pictures. But the stories were powerful, so powerful that it earned her a countless awards and an opportunity to have an additional edition of the book digitally reprinted. In this edition, Wilkerson included a number of photographs she had collected during her research of the three main characters. As seen in figure six, one of them is of a migrant packing a single suitcase as he has made the decision to head to one of the many Northern cities welcoming Negroes into its city limits. Wilkerson gives the man no name, nor does she situate him among the number of push and pull factors- namely wealth and social mobility as discussed in this section- that has caused him to reach this decision. His frame is thin, but healthy, an ideal target for the labor agents infesting the region. His white, long sleeved shirt draws the eye to him, making him the central focus of the frame. Unlike the sharecroppers in figure two, this man's shoes are clean and intact. The hems of his pants are also neatly stitched and undamaged. The private water pump behind him coupled with the number of shirts and pants neatly folded and illuminating from the suitcase he packs gives an indication of his social class in the South. He is not a sharecropper. He is most likely a middle class Black, educated and ambitious- a history most similar to Wilkerson's own. But he is leaving, nonetheless. The action of packing is what separated the sharecropper from the pre-migrant. Sharecroppers adapted to the

oppressive state of the South, i.e., the kneepads and insulated, protective space of the Black Church, and developed identity traits from within to survive. Innovation was the vital characteristic of his identity, as was explored previously in this work. Pre-migrants, however, took public action that led to the development of their identity traits. By taking the trait of ingenuity a step further and being physically mobile and ambitious- demonstrated through the number of former sharecroppers that left under the recruitment of labor agents as well as the number of Southern Blacks who, like Wilkerson's image, packed the few belongings they could and in preparation to leave the Southern space entirely- pre-migrants not only separated themselves from the quintessential, obedient Southern Negro identity forced upon them by Whites, pre-migrants created an opportunity for the public identity of the Negro to be defined by Blacks themselves.

Regardless of class, pre-migrants across the South were individually making new avenues for themselves. While large in number, this was not a mass migration with a distinct set of goals for a distinct group of people. Pre-migrants separately used their agency to redefine what their identity in the United States would be; creating more of a scatter plot of experiences that would define the Negro's public identity than a lone one. By leaving the South to take advantage of any opportunity to increase their financial and social status, pre-migrants were able to safely elevate their social standing and collective influence in the United States. Their exodus made them the topic of discussion for both Northern and Southern Whites, individually and as an entire race. The value of the Negro was recognized as both a labor force and a member of his community. His actions were deemed important and specifically influenced the fate of each community and state he

abandoned to head north. With a swift, silent kick to the pocketbook of the Southern economy, the pre-migrant was well on his way to becoming a Negro of the North.

## **Section Two: Transition, Arrival, and Settlement**

In Saar's sculpture of the arriving migrant at the corner of 26<sup>th</sup> Street and Martin Luther King Boulevard in Chicago's South Side that appears in figure one, his right hand holds a single, rectangular suitcase. It hangs comfortably between his waist and knee. Tied with two pieces of rolled, cotton string the migrant's suitcase bursts at the seams. This has been a highly reproduced memory of a migrant traveler-migrants being defined as Negroes who had put their goals of upward mobility and increased social influence into action by leaving the South for one of the numerous Northern cities- that has been incorporated in and perpetuated by the dominant narrative of the events collective referred to as the Great Migration. Historically, however, Saar's sculpture did not physically represent thousands of migrants that arrived in Chicago and other Northern cities in the early twentieth century. While not the intention of the artist or the planning committee, this concocted image robbed migrants of the full recognition of their efforts. By painting the picture of a migrant with more resources from his past - clothing, blankets, trinkets of Southern life to ease the transition into Northern culture, and the convenience of the traveling bag itself- to assist in his advancement up the social and financial ladder than he actually had, his innovative actions as a new arrival in the Northern public sphere are marked as less of an achievement than they really were. Figure seven captures a contrasting and more accurate image of the traveling migrant against the stereotypical portrayal of the event and of a Southern traveler dressed in new

clothes and shoes, carrying his luggage in his hands. While neat in appearance, the following analysis will show that the arriving migrant's clothes were not new nor were many enough privileged to have the financial luxury of a new traveling bag.

In 1918, a large group of Negro migrants- most likely recruited from Alabama, based on the route of the Illinois Central Rail line – arrived in Detroit. Of the sixteen new automobile workers that are visible in figure seven, the facial features of seven are clearly defined- a nod to the growing agency of the migrant in the United States at that time. While all except one are wearing hats, only five of the seven arrivals whose faces are visible are dressed in a jacket, coat, and tie. Dust shimmers on the bottom of their thin pant legs; it is a mixture of the Southern soil brought with them from home and the Michigan earth that rustled from the ground below their feet as they walked toward their new lives in the Northern city. Thirty-two of the leather shoes, similar to the sharecroppers in figure seven, were worn. Some have more structured laces, but most appear crudely tied, giving little to no support around the ankle and implying the migrant's current economic state. There are only four traveling bags pictured in this image, and of those only two resemble cases from Jesse Shwayder's new Samson line: a popular traveling bag out of Denver, Colorado that emerged in 1910 from the Shwayder Trunk Manufacturing Company.<sup>17</sup> Shwayder's "suitcase" prototype would become a staple of durable bags for travelers and the foundation of the modern Samsonite luggage corporation.<sup>18</sup> To own a Shwayder suitcase in 1918, a pre-migrant like those arriving in Detroit would not only have had to have \$4.95 to purchase the item, but access to a store

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<sup>17</sup> "Shwayder Family Papers and Samsonite Corporation Records," accessed April 22, 2013, <http://library.du.edu/site/about/specialCollections/collections/b245.php>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

where it was sold. Even in the unlikely event that the suitcase could be purchased in the general store of a small Southern town, the pre-migrant's limited societal influence – exhibited by through the violent, racially-oppressive performances of local Whites – coupled with the flagrant animosity for preparatory action to leave the region would have made it difficult and dangerous to purchase one without scrutiny. By reading the presence of the suitcase as a physical representation of the mobility migrants practiced, the dominant narrative ignores the ambition and drive pre migrants without it still possessed.

Figure eight shows the exodus of Negro residents from Greenville, Mississippi. Over twenty of the recently displaced Southern men, women, and children stood between the railroad tracks waterlogged river's edge after a broken levee swept away most of their few belongings. Dressed in homemade cotton dresses, aprons, and shirts, the Delta natives crowded towards the boat that would take them away from Greenville to a neighboring train station to begin their first steps of migrant journey and path forward towards financial success. It is imperative to note that there is not one *Shwayder* suitcase present in the image. Fewer than five weaved baskets piled with sheets and clothing spared from the floodwaters lie by the railroad tracks alongside the pre-migrants. Most of the women and men assembled in the picture are planning this journey with only the clothes on their back. There was no furniture, house wares, or packed vehicles for migrants; nor was that the case for the people leaving Greenville. As transient members of the United States, many former sharecroppers sold or simply abandoned their belongings as part of their decision to leave the South. Willie Belle Hooper, a migrant whose family settled briefly several times in Southern cities before she eventually made

Newark, New Jersey her permanent home, recounts that her family had “no furniture, no stove to cook on”<sup>19</sup> after leaving Lathchier, Georgia- a town so small that is it not even labeled on a map. “We slept on pallets [after we arrived] and just lived.”<sup>20</sup> By an audience’s misreading of an object like the suitcase as a critical representation of the migrant experience and inaccurately implanting that analysis into the dominate narrative of an event, migrants with considerably less, like those from Greenville, are continuously robbed of the characteristic of the ambition that they possessed that would assist them in achieving financial and being socially influential members of Northern cities.

In an interview shortly after the dedication of Monument to the Great Northern Migration, Saar clarifies a fact about the suitcase in the statue’s hand. This image- chosen to represent the public identity that Negro migrants had fought hard to create against internal and external community adversity to their financial and social mobility; the image that was the largest piece of public art in the city of Chicago to date and purposefully erected in South Side’s newly renamed neighborhood of Bronzeville to redefine the public identity of *that* space- was not what it seemed. The suitcase, Saar explained, was actually empty of physical objects.<sup>21</sup> The bulging shape of the Shwayder Samson case held the “personal hopes and aspirations for a new life in a new land,” an attribute Saar also says can be seen in statue’s eyes.<sup>22</sup> While Saar’s explanation was

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<sup>19</sup> Willie Belle Hooper, interviewed by Catherine J. Lenix-Hooker, March 28, 1996 “City of Newark, NJ’s African-American Oral History Project,” transcript, City of Newark NJ’s Oral History Project, Newark Public Library, Newark, NJ.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Dianne Grams, “Territorial Markers: A Case Study of the Public Art of Bronzeville,” *The Journal of Arts, Management, Law, and Society* (Fall 2006): 237, accessed March 9, 2013, <http://tulane.edu/liberal-arts/sociology/upload/Grams-Fall-06-erritorial-markers.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

meant to restore the agency, drive, and ambition of the Negro migrant's identity back into the history of South Side Chicago, it was largely ineffective. With a statue so large in size, making the eyes of the migrant difficult for the average visitor to view, as well such a critical interpretative point missing from the informational marker at the sculpture's feet, Saar's true intentions are futile. Without this additional knowledge, the public identity of migrant as an ambitious agent of change to both his financial and social success and the fabric of the United States can be misrepresented, thus continuing to foster inaccuracies in the dominant narrative of the Negro migrant experience. While a migrant with additional resources -yes, even a suitcase- can be an agent of change, it is a misrepresentation that a migrant without those objects present is not. All migrants, regardless of their resources, were agents of change through the purposeful actions of their movement and the identity traits of innovation and determination being exercised through that movement. When objects are misreading as singular entities, it allows them to define and create migrant identity without considering other factors; meaning, if that defining object is missing the subject is assumed to not have the associated identity trait. That concept is problematic to public memory of the identity the migrants actually created. When components integral to the identity of Negro migrants, in this case the lack of abundant clothing and financial means, are missing from the dominant narrative, migrants as the subjects are deprived of the full accolades of their achievement. By over-emphasizing the presence of objects like the suitcase for all migrants- an item that did not exist as an available resource for most migrants arriving in Northern cities- continues to strip migrants of their agency and components of their identity as was done to them throughout the 1900s.



### *The Chocolate Inchworm*

It was very rare for a migrant funding his own exit to make only one migration trip to reach his final destination. The lack of proper funds and the extreme legal injustices of false arrest and raiding of colored passenger trains often contributed to this scenario. However, the Negro people inched their way up North, settling temporarily in both Southern and Northern states until reaching their individual destinations in the Northern urban. This greatly affected the public identity that they were forging. By using the resourcefulness they had cultivated as Southern sharecroppers, Negro migrants were able to work and migrate over time in order to reach the financial and social mobility they desired from leaving the South.

Figure nine shows a map of the rail lines across the United States just before the turn of the century. There is no key, but the use of standard symbols makes decoding the map a simple task. Measuring eighteen by thirty-six inches in size, the diagram shows the major and minor railroads and their connecting lines across what was the continental United States at that time. The red markings scattered in various places across the map's surface identify the numerous natural or political boundaries that affected railroad travel. Major rail lines like the Pennsylvania Railroad and the Illinois Central-which carried well over 100,000 migrants throughout the course of the first migration period from 1900-1949- are labeled using with thick, solid black lines. The smaller, connecting rail lines, which can be examined more closely in figure ten, are black in color as well, but thinner in width. Each stop is identified by a dotted black circle. In more densely populated regions throughout Southern and Northern New Jersey, the stops are frequent. More rural

sections of Maryland and Virginia, west of Baltimore, have minor line connections with more distance between each stop. The Illinois Central Railroad in figures eleven and twelve mirror the labeling pattern as the Pennsylvania line. The examinations of these cartographies allows for an understanding of the settlement patterns of the Southern Negro migrant within the boundaries of the United States.

Drawn by the prosperous industrial jobs and growing social infrastructures- one of the few underground subway systems in the United States to combat the above ground traffic congestion, new sewer systems, and the introduction of paved roads – many Negro migrants who made their way up the Pennsylvania Railroad line stopped just ten minutes shy of Harlem’s bright lights, choosing instead to settle in New Jersey’s largest city at the time, Newark. Willie Mae Hooper was one of them. Her pattern of migration followed the Pennsylvania rail line closely, making stops in many states on the East Coast before making Newark her permanent home. Hooper and her family – her mother, father, and four brothers- seemed to always stay close to the urban life. After leaving Lathchier and the comfort of her mother’s family, they lived briefly in Charleston, South Carolina. “[My father] was a family man and he didn't want to leave his family behind. So everywhere that he went, he would somehow get us there... We... came to Charleston where we did not have any relatives.”<sup>23</sup> Her mother was able to acquire work as a seamstress, and the Hooper family stayed there for a number of years. But Willie Mae’s father, restless and seeking better financial opportunities for himself and better educational opportunities for his children, pushed the family onward North and they

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<sup>23</sup> Hooper, 4.

made their next home in Raleigh, North Carolina.<sup>24</sup> After being caught ‘hoboing’ between trains from Florence, South Carolina to Raleigh for work to avoid paying a fare he did not have, Hooper’s father was jailed. This caused the family to return further south to Florence, South Carolina. After a brief stint in county jail, his bail was paid by a local White landowner who recruited him as a foreman on his plantation. The family was now tethered to the sharecropping system, grinding their plans for migration to a halt. In Florence, however, Willie’s father fought to ensure his children were educated at the local school house, much to the chagrin of the landowner. Willie Mae would remain in Florence until she was about eighteen years old.<sup>25</sup> Then, like her father, she started on her own push north. She married and worked briefly in small towns along the Pennsylvania Rail line in South Carolina. Then her husband was hired by Newark’s Ford Motor Company, a new plant that had opened only a year early in 1919. “In fact, my whole family, my husband, my father and my brother, worked for Ford.”<sup>26</sup> She finally arrived to Newark in 1920, where she lived until her death. The long journey to Northern settlement reaffirms perseverance as a core identity trait of the Northern migrant. An experience eleven years in the making, Hooper’s arrival in Newark demonstrates the physical manifestation of the pre-migrant’s ambition and determination to desire for growth- both financial and social- as a citizen of the United States.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 11.

Later generations of migrants had the benefit of automobile travel. Lemona Means remembers arriving to Newark by car from Florida.<sup>27</sup> Similar to Hooper and other migrants like her, Means settled briefly in other cities- St. Petersburg, Florida in the South and Saratoga, New York in the North- before taking residence near her sister-in-law in Newark in 1942.<sup>28</sup> The identity of the Northern migrant was greatly impacted because many migrants did not travel directly to their Northern destination. Because migrant arrival to Northern cities was staggered, the construction of their positive public identity also occurred in stages. Instead of a single group working collaboratively in different sections of the United States at one time, individuals forged their own paths to reach the financial success and societal influence they sought outside of the American South. This made characteristics of a collective public identity difficult to classify among first Negro migrants.

### *Exchanging the Mop for the Broom*

The purpose of migration for Negroes in the South was to gain access to resources and financial opportunities denied to them by the White, mainstream. Migrants like Hooper and Means spent years trying to reach the ‘promised land’ of the North. Little did they know that the health and safety conditions of Black communities in Northern cities were dire and deteriorating with every entering migrant. Wooden tenements and unpaved streets like those seen in figure thirteen mirrored the impoverished conditions many believed they had left behind in the South. The three-story structure was located in

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<sup>27</sup> Lemora Means, interviewed by Mageline E. Little, March 28, 1996, transcript, City of Newark NJ’s Oral History Project, Newark Public Library, Newark, NJ.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

Chicago's Black Belt and made using a crude mixture of cement, bricks, and wood. One glass window existed per unit, even though only four can be seen in the image. Sitting on a raised cinder block foundation, the tenement was photographed in 1941 long after its original construction when Russell Lee captured the image as a part of another project for the Farm Security Administration.<sup>29</sup> The Manhattan tenement in figure fourteen, though more sturdy than the Chicago structure in figure thirteen, still displays the limited financial mobility migrants had in the North. The wooden staircases and drying laundry lends itself to conclude that the tenants, new migrants arriving from various regions in the South, lived in cramped conditions that were less refined than their White counterparts. The mass amount of tenants- assumable through the number of items hanging between the buildings- can also draw one to conclude that escaping these spaces was near impossible. Though financial security was promised by labor agents and the Black Press, arriving migrants soon realized that the pay was not enough to remove them from these conditions. Thus, they found themselves stuck in another confining yet familiar cycle of financial immobility.

While physical conditions led to very real and present dangers in Northern Negro communities- cramped quarters caused tuberculosis to become rampant infection in the Northern cities, especially for migrants who perished quickly because of their body's inability to fight off infections in such close proximity to one other- the lack social influence and restricted mobility was also an issue. Lack of education and skills was not the problem. As author James Baldwin, a migrant to Harlem, wrote there were "too many

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<sup>29</sup> "Image of Chicago: Tenement, 1941. Back of a multifamily dwelling in Chicago rented to African-Americans. Photograph by Russell Lee, April 1941," accessed April 20, 2013, <http://www.granger.com/results.asp?image=0078915&stockindexonline.com=1>.

college graduate handymen” that he knew personally.<sup>30</sup> It was access to the best possible jobs and the ability to move up in pay scale as his value as a worker improved. Migrants were not naive enough to think that the North would bring them no social boundaries, but the system that enforced of these boundaries was unfamiliar to them. In the South, Whites were the literal and figurative law in all matters of social and financial mobility. When necessary, the minister of their Black Church would reinforce the importance of towing the line in the public sphere to his respective congregations, being sure to note that structures in place must be abided by for the safety of not only individual Negroes, but the entire Black community itself. In the North, however, race took less of a center stage than social class. It was no longer the White populace policing their actions; it was now the natively-born, Black Middle Class. Using the dual sword of the Black Church and social improvement organizations like the new National Urban League, native Northern Blacks wielded the power of the Black Middle class over the entire Negro community with extreme precision and unwavering accuracy. By targeting the underclass of their community, which happened to be arriving migrants, the Black Middle class acted as both the White mainstream and the Black Church had in the South. While systems like the Black Church and the Urban League organizations in various cities felt their constructed guidelines for arriving migrants protected the prosperity and comfortable existence free of racial strife for primarily the Black Middle Class and secondly the Negro community in which they lived, their presence created a stifling social construct that simultaneously nurtured and stunted the migrant’s contribution to the forming positive public identity of the Negro.

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<sup>30</sup> James Baldwin, *Fire Next Time* (New York: Laurel, 1962), 31.

*Taking the Good with the Bad*

The profession of social work had existed in the United States for White ethnic communities for years. With the influx of migrants, however, the White social workers either ignored the plights of the arriving Negro entirely or provided them with funds as a temporary remedy to a long-term problem. However, under the direction of Dr. George E. Haynes, the Negro-focused National Urban League sought a different solution. He would not give Negroes the fish, as White charities were doing, instead he would teach them to fish. Along with his successor Eugene Kinckle Jones, Haynes advocated not only for the formal training of Negro social workers, but the commitment to “any and all kinds of work for improving the industrial, economic, and social conditions among Negroes.”<sup>31</sup> By doing this, Haynes planned to derail any attempt from White society to use the social transgressions of arriving migrants to define the public identity of Negro in the North negatively. After arranging more equal, formal training in the field- Haynes used the funds and influence of the National Urban League to arrange for graduates of Fisk, a Black college in Nashville, to complete additional training at White colleges, specifically New York School of Social Work and University of Pittsburgh’s Carnegie School of Technology<sup>32</sup>- the National Urban League focused on achieving the latter goal.

The Urban League was crucial to the development of a navigable urban space for all Negroes. However, the work that made the previous statement true was done on the local level. In Newark, fifty-eight West Market Street is now the intersection between

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<sup>31</sup> Felix L. Armfield, *Eugene Kinckle Jones: The National Urban League, 1910-1940* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 28

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

Essex County College and Essex judicial offices. In 1917, however, it was the headquarters for the city's Urban League. In his autobiography William Ashby, the first social worker and founder of the Newark chapter of the National Urban League, described the role of a social worker in Newark in his autobiography. Called to the home of a family in a newly destitute position, Ashby met with the husband and wife to understand how their position had come to be this way. The wife told Ashby that even after saving over one hundred dollars, her husband's sickness combined with the expenses of surviving in the city had drained the family of every penny.<sup>33</sup> After confirming that the husband acted as responsibly as he could- he had informed his job that he was sick and saw a regularly doctor to document his sickness- Ashby put his influence in the city to work.

“Here's what I shall try and do for you. First thing, I shall go to the Bureau of Associated Charities and request that they give you temporary food relief. I'll ask the overseer of the poor to send you a quarter ton of coal...Fortunately for you, I know the president of the I.G. Lewis Tobacco Company. I'll see him and urge that he keep your job open for you until you can get it back.”<sup>34</sup>

By working on the local level to remedy impoverished conditions for the Negro race, the Urban League and social workers like Ashby were removing the stigma from the Negroes public identity that they were lazy, irresponsible, and a cancer to the Northern cities they resided in. They worked tirelessly within the community to shape a positive public image of the arriving migrant. Within the community, the actions of the Urban League's social work restored some of the drive that arriving migrants had lost

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<sup>33</sup> William Ashby, *Tales Without Hate* (Metuchen: Upland Press, 1996), 120.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.



when they became inhabitants of unkempt spaces and prisoners of a stagnant wage system in the North.

While organizations like the Urban League were critical to the development of a navigable urban space for all Negroes, both new arrivals and native Blacks alike, they could not singlehandedly decrease the level of poverty in Northern cities. Because poverty and limited social mobility persisted for new implants even amidst all the work that was being done by the Black Middle Class, arriving migrants in the North had to manipulate the current social norms established by the Black Middle Class to reinforce their agency within the Negro community. Yet again, new implants had to rely on their own innovative characteristics fostered as Southern sharecroppers to survive as new members of the Northern environment. Figure fifteen shows one of the first assertions of migrant presence in Northern cities as well as one of their first claiming of urban space: the storefront Church. In an effort to maintain the reserved public persona of gentility and elevated morality that had allowed them to gain a marginal amount of power in Northern society, the Black Middle Class denounced many of traditions and actions quintessential to the Southern Black Church. In doing so, they also denounced the actions and customs of the arriving migrant. They referred to the common call-and-answer style of Baptist and Methodist ministering and group led Negro spirituals as a form “barbarism.”<sup>35</sup> Instead, Middle Class Blacks declared that their pristine Episcopal, Lutheran, and Unitarian services were the more appropriate forms of worship. Like their White counterparts, most Negroes who attended these types of services were formally educated, upper-class

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<sup>35</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color, The Black Elite 1880-1920* (Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1990), 275.

members of society who descended from the church's founding families. While migrants were encouraged to attend, few did for very long. While present, however, members of the church's Black elite in Northern cities used the services as an opportunity to assimilate arriving migrants into what they deemed 'proper' Negro etiquette. Women of color in those established Churches formed committees and created guidelines that over-emphasized proper etiquette in public spaces, neat and clean clothing, personal hygiene practices, and the importance of education. They advised women to practice appropriate sexual behavior and chastity, and promoted arriving young men separate themselves from the sinful hustlers and gangsters that preyed on their Southern naiveté.

The women in figure sixteen who are waiting for to board a train to Harlem at Grand Central Station are the direct product of the respectability instructions of the Black Middle Class. Each Negro woman is neat in her appearance, silk stockings cover bare legs excluding the young girl at the center of the frame who dons white socks. Their hair is straight, curled, and neatly pinned under hats. Proper undergarments are present and intact, a dress slip peeks just barely below the skirt hem on the women at the far right front of the frame. Many of the surrounding female Negro patrons wait patiently; their suitcases sit erect at their feet, their dresses starched and pressed, with coats and purses hanging appropriately between their elbow and their wrists. The fact that a White man also waits patiently *behind* the crowd of Negro women who are exuding their respectable teachings speaks volumes about his perception of them as present forces in the space. Under the cloak of Christian values and an effort to maintain the established power structure with them at the helm of Negro culture, middle class women of color

transformed the migrant in order to eliminate the negative characteristics the ‘Jim Crow Negro’ from the Northern public identity of Blacks, and with it any reason that White society had to view and treat them as second class citizens.

While the actions of the Black Middle Class were positive in purpose they were also self serving in nature. Historian Felix Armfield attempts to downplay that the personnel doing the Urban League’s groundbreaking work in the growing Negro community were home-grown members of the ruling Black Middle Class. This factor is imperative to events that led to the constructed Negro public identity. Armfield stated specifically, and accurately, that social workers of the Urban League organizations were “agents of the Black Middle Class.”<sup>36</sup> Meaning, the controlling forces of the National Urban League at that time were not, and could not be, arriving migrants. Therefore, it was not the voice of the migrant shaping his identity, but another outside agent who did not have a first-hand experience of his struggle, and therefore could not truly identify with his individual goals. By restricting whose agency, influence, and socioeconomic mobility was recognized as the dominant voice of the Negro community to the White mainstream, the Black Middle Class behind the good intentions of the Urban League and the Black Church was able to continue to define, police, and recreate the identity of the Northern Negro for the United States as a whole without the input of the arriving migrant.

Soon thereafter the Black aristocratic men who controlled the Urban League, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and other Negro fraternal organizations including Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs) followed

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<sup>36</sup> Armfield, 24.

suit. Leaders of Chicago's Urban League began to distribute flyers to newly arriving migrants that called them to do the following in order to be viewed as an American citizen:

“...attend to the neatness of my personal appearance on the street or when sitting in front of doorways...refrain from wearing dust caps, bungalow aprons, house clothing and bedroom shoes out of doors...arrange my toilet within doors and not on the front porch...refrain from loud talking or objectionable deportment on street cars and in public places.”<sup>37</sup>

Founders of the newly formed BGLOs, including Eugene Kinckle Jones himself, used the social actions constructed by the Black Church and perpetuated by social advancement groups like the Urban League a step further. Instead of simply reinforcing the qualities of respectability already in wide circulation, they redefined them to include community service and individual examples of success as determined by their separate organizations.<sup>38</sup> Migrants would borrow largely from this sentiment as they created free spaces of their own like the storefront church.

Edwin Rosskam's image of the Chicago storefront church in figure fifteen was taken on an unnamed street of Chicago's Black Belt as part of another Farm Security Administration Project. The large glass window provides the printed names of the pastor and records clerk giving agency within and ownership of that space to Negroes. While the height of the building is not determinable by the dimensions of the image, it can be concluded that it is more than three stories, as it towers over the two story tenement at the far right edge of the photograph. Within the space of the storefront church, arriving

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<sup>37</sup> Farah Jasmine Griffin, *Who Set you Flowin'?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 104.

<sup>38</sup> Gregory Parks, ed., *Black Greek-letter Organizations in the Twenty-First Century: Our Fight Has Just Begun* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2008), 145.

migrants could, and did, worship in the familiar Southern style without criticism from the Black Middle Class. Figure seventeen shows an usher of a different storefront church dressed in all white, singing openly along with the choir to her rear. Contrast to the large, Negro Episcopal churches who song harmonized spirituals in operatic style, attendees to storefront churches were free to worship in any way they felt appropriate. The movement of the Christian Holy Spirit sometimes caused the congregation and the minister himself to yell, dance, and shout in jubilation- a religious experience called shouting. These actions, while completely common in Southern, Negro Churches, were explicitly banned in large, Northern churches controlled by the Black Middle Class. Storefront churches allowed migrants to experience this familiar tradition and claim it as part of their ever-morphing public Negro identity.

Outside of the church, migrants tested exercising their ingenuity in order to gain influence and power in the industrial workplace. Ashby recalls a story of how Negroes in Newark were able to take legitimate control of the Hod Carriers Union, a faction of the Essex County Trades Council. Large numbers of migrants from the South arrived on the Pennsylvania line regularly and before long, the Hod Carrier Union was majority Black.<sup>39</sup> A Negro he only calls Joseph met secretly with the other Black members of the Union and they concocted a plan to take control of the Hod Carriers Union, now one of the most powerful entities of the Trades Council. After running and being elected as the Union's vice president, Joseph was able to learn the structure and slowly vote more Negro members into seats on the governing board. When called to meet with the group one

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<sup>39</sup> Ashby, 116.

afternoon, Ashby was pleasantly shocked: all of the executive board members, with the exclusion of one, were Black.<sup>40</sup> Ashby concluded the section with the following thought: “No white man would ever tell me again about the lack of courage or the lack of intelligence of Negroes in the pursuit of any goal which they set for themselves.”<sup>41</sup> By using their presence in the community and the sheer girth of their population to gain influence within the powerful industrial unions as well as to make alternate communal spaces like the storefront Church free spaces from the control of the Black Middle Class, the new implants took their first steps in cementing innovation and ambition as permanent characteristics of the public identity of the Northern Negro.

### **Section Three: Becoming Northerners**

By the early 1900s, Chicago’s Black Belt was a bustling region of the city’s South Side. Over ten thousand new migrants occupied the same space as established Middle Class Black Chicagoans. Negroes were present and saturated the area, changing the population from a mixture of White ethnic immigrants and Black laborers into a sea of chocolate and caramel faces. As the migrant navigated the shared space of the urban North alongside native-born Whites and ethnic immigrants, his identity began to include a sense of permanency that it lacked as a new arrival. He basked in his newly commanded agency within the Negro community- made possible by the presence of storefront churches and his role in their inception. His innovative skillset expanded, and he was able to not only access avenues of social and financial mobility, he created them

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 118.

as well. Slowly, the ingenuity and perseverance he had possessed all along became traits synonymous with the public identity of the settled, Northern migrant.

Aligning themselves more closely with the racial experiences and limitations of Negroes in the North, settled migrants focused most of their energies on increasing their influence through financial and interpersonal relationships in the dichotic society in which they lived. In the Negro controlled space, many settled migrants sought to infiltrate the social circles of the Black Middle Class. Locating the Black Church as the universal center of each social class, settled migrants planned to enter the tight knit group by attending service at large, established Black Unitarian and Episcopal churches and presenting themselves as entrepreneurs living independently and separate from the industrial system arriving migrants were a part of. Through these actions, settled migrants could gain access to and eventually become pseudo-members of the Black Middle Class. This label provided them access to the power the Black Middle Class still held over arriving migrants as well as would allow them to be viewed as a valuable liaisons between the Negro people and the local, White mainstream.

The number of Northern born Negroes that made up the Black Middle Class could not compete with the daily influx of arriving migrants. Before long, migrants- both settled and newly arriving-made up the majority of the Black population in Northern cities. As the largest racial and social class, their actions and routines automatically shaped the characteristics of the Northern Negro for the White mainstream without the approval of the Black Middle Class. Settled Negro migrants, being more adjusted to life in the North than the new arrivals, saw an opportunity to exercise their own influence

over the developing definition and identity of the Northern Negro. Drawing on both the BGLO's blueprint of redefining identity specifically for their sub-group as well as the ingenuity they as new arrivals used to develop the storefront churches into free spaces, settled migrants manipulated the insulated region of the Negro community to incorporate an active display of their presence and power within the Northern city. It would be within spaces that they controlled that this new identity would be formed and presented to the mainstream. By taking advantage of the entrepreneurial opportunities they were already seeking, settled migrants intentionally created smaller spaces inside of Negro communities that would: increase their net worth, allow them to infiltrate the powerful social circles of the Black Middle Class, and gain influence within both the Negro and mainstream societies.

Adverse to members of the Black Middle Class who actively sought out opportunities to integrate into the mainstream society, many settled migrants existed contently in racially segregated spaces.<sup>42</sup> To them, these spaces were not isolated from mainstream society, but an incubator that provided access to the upper-class members of the Negro community and entrance into a more influential social circle. Negro communities also provided settled migrants with a physically safe environment free from the ridicule and violence inflicted on them regularly by surrounding White ethnic communities. Having few private spaces in the congestion of the city – as they had been publically deprived of Southern worship practices as well as subjected to social conditioning by the Black Middle Class- their own neighborhoods were the only space

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<sup>42</sup> Griffin, 9.



left where settled migrants possessed enough influence and presence to prosper. In dense ethnic enclaves like Chicago's Black Belt and North Philadelphia's Locust Street, migrants transformed areas they simply inhabited into "safe havens:" areas where they were free to explore new thoughts, and their White oppressors were largely absent or excluded.<sup>43</sup> Borrowing Farah Griffin's definition from her 2010 work *Who set you flowin'*, these safe havens allowed settled, migrants to speak, act, and create freely.<sup>44</sup> Settled migrants simultaneously manufactured new sites of Black American culture, community, and/or history while integrating native traditions of Southern folk culture in order to define the new public identity for the Negro.<sup>45</sup>

A small ad on page seventeen of the *Defender's* 1919 June weekender edition encouraged migrants to invest sums between \$100 and \$1,000.00 to become entrepreneurs; "free yourself from wage slavery. See us," they probed.<sup>46</sup> Suffering under the abuse of limited financial growth and the violent actions of their White ethnic co-workers in the city's meat packing industry, settled migrants took a chance on the opportunity for increased power in the Black community and elevated financial growth within their private lives. Figure eighteen shows the corner of 47<sup>th</sup> Street and State Street; State Street being the home to the South Side's first central business district and the South Side being the hub for Negro residents of every social class. Minus a few patrons and passersby, the street is empty. Multi-leveled brick buildings stretch endlessly in both directions, but only twelve are visible from the photograph's view of the left side of the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> "Real Chances" *Chicago Defender Big Weekend Edition*, June 21, 1919, accessed March 30, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/docview/493333771?accountid=13626>.

street. The rest disappear into the distance, deeper into the southernmost parts of the city. Cars are parked along the edges of clean, wide concrete sidewalks- a facet not present in most of the Black communities that the migrants hailed from. Awnings shaded glass windows that advertised merchandise to consumers. The space is orderly and symmetrical; it is kept, demonstrating the pride and care residents took in being a part of the community. In this safe haven the settled migrant began to embody this title; he established himself as part of the Black community, validating his presence, ambition, and power as permanent characteristics of his public identity through the ownership of a commercial space.

The tangible representation of his presence and power was visible in the large white letters that identify each new establishment. By naming their stores, restaurants, barbershops, and beauty parlors settled migrants announced that this space was occupied, and therefore was not available for outside control. In controlling their business, settled migrants also staked a claim as a permanent entity in the community. The influx of new arrivals caused the expansion of the Black Belt and pushed against the edges of the Irish and Jewish communities, causing them to move further east, west, and even out of the city completely.<sup>47</sup> By owning property- an action that the Black Middle Class had taken years early to cement their own influence in Chicago- settled migrants were able to establish a physical presence in an area where land and space was scarce and therefore

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<sup>47</sup> St. Claire Drake and Horace Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 62.

very valuable. Before long, two-thirds of all of the Black businesses in the Chicago were owned by migrants.<sup>48</sup>

State Street could be a commercial district in any Northern city in the United States during that time. Nothing about it specifically says 'Chicago.' What it does say from the few brown faces along the street, however, is Negro.

### *The Black Metropolis*

In controlling their business, settled migrants were also able to exert influence over the micro-environment of the Negro neighborhood itself. Characterized as a city within a city, many Negro communities took on characteristics of the Black Metropolis. They functioned and identified themselves- triumphs and trials alike- separate from that of the mainstream society. As owners of commercial spaces in the Black Metropolis, settled migrants took advantage of the arriving migrant as an untapped consumer market in order to solidify an increase in his net worth as well as control the ideas that would eventually define the public identity of the Negro.

In figure nineteen, photographer Addison Scurlock captured the migrant owned business, the Underdown Delicatessen. Located in Washington, D.C.'s Northwest Negro community on 14<sup>th</sup> Street and South Street, the image shows the establishment on the ground floor of a sturdy brick building. A wide door allowed for easy delivery of goods and access to the products inside. The family name is cut out of the image but appears on a sign just above the large glass window, giving ownership of this space to Mr.

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<sup>48</sup> Melvin G. Holli and Peter d' A. Jones, ed., *Ethnic Chicago: a multicultural portrait* ( Grand Rapids:Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 337.

Underdown as the proprietor. He and his family are neatly dressed and the storefront is free of debris, another nod to the presence, pride, and financial independence entrepreneurship provided to settled migrants and contributed to the definition of their public identity.

Figure twenty shows the inside of the Underdown deli. Cans of soup, tuna fish, and spices line the back wall on neatly painted wooden shelves, and boxed candy was displayed in the transparent glass case below. Fruits overflow into the inside space, tidily stacked in cloth lined baskets against the display case. The hardwood floor was swept and the walkway was clear, allowing Negro patrons to browse freely in a welcoming, safe environment. As a former migrant and a settled Northern Negro member of the community, Underdown knew which foods and items were valuable to his customers. He sold matching porcelain dishes for more conservative members of society as well as single wrapped chocolate coins for the children of his patrons, all visible in figure twenty. But what distinguishes Underdown as a businessman and a 'friend' to the arriving migrant is his available selection of Southern grown produce that was not grown regionally in or near the District of Columbia. Underdown has peanuts and sweet potatoes on full display for purchase at the entrance of this store, as seen in figure nineteen. Peanuts, a major foodstuff in Georgia, and sweet potatoes, a crop central to recipes in southern Delta states, reminded arriving migrants of home and made Underdown's deli a name whispered among them for products hard to find in their new urban environment. By selling staple crops integral to Southern culture, settled migrant storeowners like Underdown were able take advantage of a new consumer market,

increase their influence within the Black Metropolis, and expand their financial successes.

Similarly, in one neighborhood block of Chicago's Black Belt an arriving migrant could find the Hattiesburg Shaving Parlor, the Florida East Coast Shine Parlor, and Carolina Sea Island Candy Store all within steps of their home on Rhodes Avenue.<sup>49</sup> While no images of these places survived through time, their names conjured up thoughts and smells of home that settled migrants took full advantage of. Settled migrants had turned their experience and knowledge about the desires of arriving migrants into a very profitable medium to achieve social and financial mobility. In turn, they were able to construct safe haven spaces where traits of Northern identity could be cultivated and the dominant narrative about the migrant experience would be developed. In settled migrant restaurants, open markets, barbershops, and beauty salons, arriving migrants gathered around plates of traditional Southern cuisine and shared stories, home remedies, family history, planned trips back to Southern towns, and discussed events and actions that would shape their identity in the North. Since the Southern tradition of informally gathering in large groups was snubbed by employers and the Black Middle Class, settled migrants took full advantage and made their spaces incubators for the developing Northern identity being shaped daily within their establishments by the growing migrant population.

Under their control, safe havens allowed migrants to embrace new customs of the dominant public sphere- like matinees at the local movie house- while continuing to

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<sup>49</sup> Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns* (New York: Random House, 2010), 288.

enjoy familiar activities predominantly practiced in the South without scrutiny. In essence, settled migrants created a site of merger between Southern identity and the manufactured Northern identity. It was also a locale where the drive, innovation, and ambition of the settled Black migrant was most easily seen through the existence of their financially owned commercial space. This was a true demonstration of the settled migrant's impact on the definition of Negro identity in twentieth century America.

### *Movin' On Up, Literally*

Settled migrants who had once lived in close, slum-like quarters and boarding houses near their jobs in the meat packing industry sought more residences that mirrored their new slightly elevated position in society. With housing shortages still very much a problem in the South Side -neighborhoods that had been previously abandoned by the poor Irish immigrants then again by the current Black Middle Class after their initial arrival as seen and previously discussed in figure thirteen were still full beyond capacity- many settled Black migrants used their increased wealth as entrepreneurs to migrate once again into a more developed domicile. By ambitiously moving into a more pristine environment, settled migrants characterized another trait of that would define Negro identity: mobility.

There are over 112 windows on the second and third floors of the twelve visible brick buildings in figure eighteen; each one belonging to a small apartment just above the storefronts. The more than fifty flats within the business district were the fruition migrant financial and social mobility. Settled migrants literally moved up in social class when they moved out of the wooden tenements and into an acceptable residential space, most

times above the storefronts that they owned. By separating themselves from the newest arrivals, migrants were able to demonstrate their elevated social standing in the community as well as their increased wealth. These two combined features coupled with the ownership of storefront property allowed them to exercise more power and influence within the Black Metropolis while simultaneously shaping the definition of the Northern Negro. Because of their ambition, financial growth, and social mobility settled migrants in Chicago, Washington D.C., and other Northern cities had transformed the area from one that they simply inhabited to one that they actively lived in, worked in, and controlled.

*The Long Development Migrant Identity and the New Negro Mentality*

While their increased wealth and social standing had not allowed all settled migrants be accepted into the exclusive, upper echelon of the Black Middle Class, many were still influential members of their community. Having a degree of power, wealth, and influence, migrants believed they had acquired a greater amount of control over their existence in Northern cities and were due the same equal access to resources as their White counterparts. Unfortunately, mainstream society did not agree with them. The lack of access to public resources and societal power equal to that of Whites caused migrant to adopt the radical New Negro mentality and use it to establish their power and presence in the United States as a whole, not just their Negro communities.

The term New Negro originated from Booker T. Washington's 1890 text *A New Negro for a New Century*, and was not as far from Washington's goal of an improving one's position through economic means and education as migrants of the time would

have liked to believe. Having recently abandoned Washington's direction for the race because it limited their ability to achieve real financial growth, power, or equal access to public resources, settled migrants embraced this new 'New Negro' mentality and a desire for an immediate end to racism; racism being the ultimate collective action that migrants felt was blocking them from achieving wealth, power, and access to public resources. They gained insight about the movement through the same channels that drove their migration North: the Black Press. World War I had caused a stark transformation NAACP's *Crisis* magazine and in the message to its Negro readership. Du Bois, who first advocated a unity amongst Negroes and Whites as soldiers fighting injustices overseas, soon spoke viciously in favor of immediate social change. While the migrants were not the driving force of the New Negro Movement itself, they did consent to its direction; largely because of the former migrants at the helm of the movement who were newly accepted as members of the Black Middle Class. Furthermore, settled migrants encouraged their arriving migrants and patrons to do the same on the grassroots level. The New Negro mentality incorporated the ideas of militancy and urgency for social change in the United States. It sought to define the Negro for himself; a definition created separately from their interaction with or through the opinion of the White mainstream.<sup>50</sup> By taking an active part in this movement, migrants believed that they could and would singlehandedly rid themselves of racism and, therefore, gain greater access to the all of the benefits of citizenship in the United States. Alain Locke would later repackage the term after hundreds of migrants were injured and killed in racial clashes during the

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<sup>50</sup> Barbara Foley, *Spectres of 1919: Class and Nation in the Making of the New Negro* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 17.



summer of 1919. This debut of the term in the 1920s allowed new scholars- many of them also migrants- to choose which segments of their new definition to accent and combine with components championed by Washington. Thus, a character trait essential to becoming a Black Northerner was the acceptance of the new 'New Negro' mentality.

*Presence without Access Equals Protest*

On July 27, 1919, the Chicago Police Department dredged Lake Michigan and pulled seventeen year old Eugene Williams' lifeless body onto South Side's 29<sup>th</sup> Street White beach. He had been struck in the head by rock as he and four other Negro boys floated on a makeshift raft that had accidentally crossed into the segregated waters of 29<sup>th</sup> Street Beach. His death, combined with a separate squabble between Negroes and White Chicagoans over beach usage on 29<sup>th</sup> Street that had taken place earlier that day – a single incident that was representative of a reoccurring problem Negroes faced in nearly all Northern cities, including Chicago: access limitations to the best available public resources and housing – led to one of the last of thirty-four racially charged revolutions that would occur in the United States that summer. The deliberate and physical reaction to the unwanted, White ethnic presence in the Negro community was the first physical demonstration of the New Negro mentality by migrants. The infiltration of their community by the surrounding Jewish and Irish immigrants forced Black migrants to act on their newly adopted militant attitude and defend themselves against further oppressive actions and their inability to access public resources.

The struggle to maintain the physical boundaries of each community was a very real part of the migrant experience. It was a battle for agency between Blacks and White

ethnics that was actively waged on a daily basis. As members of Chicago's Black Belt community, migrant youths scuffled regularly with Irish and Jewish immigrants as both groups crossed invisible boundaries that marked racial territories day after day as each group navigated the city. Stones were thrown at Negro migrants as they crossed through Irish neighborhoods.<sup>51</sup> The adjacent Irish community of Bridgeport had organizations like the Hamburg Athletic Club- whose members included the future city mayor Richard Daley- patrol its borders and physically assault trespassers, often Negro migrants, passing through.<sup>52</sup>

The Chicago Historical Society acquired the photograph in figure twenty-one of the violence between the races in Chicago that followed shortly after the death of Eugene Williams. Taken in the Black Belt's business district on the corner of State Street and 36<sup>th</sup> Place, the image shows more than 100 Negro men within the protection of their neighborhood. At least what used to be the protection of their neighborhood. The invasion of the Negro-controlled spaces during the summer of 1919 by White ethnics took place in a number of Northern cities that year, and the regions with the densest Negro population, like Chicago, were forced to confront resistance to their control over their communal space head on. Adverse to the labor agents who had entered Black communities to usher a new labor force into cities, White ethnics resented the presence of the Negro and the territory he had claimed. Like Whites in Washington, DC and Philadelphia who also clashed with their large Negro communities that summer, the Irish

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<sup>51</sup> Cameron McWhirter, *Red Summer: The Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2011) 127.

<sup>52</sup> Adam Cohen and Elizabeth Taylor, *American Pharaoh: Mayor Richard J. Daley — His Battle for Chicago and the Nation* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2000), 30.

and Jews of Chicago wanted their space returned. In Chicago specifically, groups like the Hamburg Athletic Club had been gearing up for a racial confrontation for weeks.<sup>53</sup> It was these groups with racially charged underpinnings that ultimately were to blame for the 537 Blacks that would be injured in Chicago during the eight days of civil unrest.

Journalist Cameron McWhirter used two images including the one in figure twenty-two to demonstrate the lack of power Negroes had over Chicago's South Side in his 2003 work *Red Summer*. He chronicles the 1919 protest from an integrationist perspective. His images portrayed Negroes as oppressed victims with little control in Chicago's South Side, including their own safety, yet his facts display otherwise. While his photos demonstrate a lack of power in the space- all of the ones he includes in the pictorial insert show Blacks as powerless- McWhirter's textual interpretation proves just the opposite. Even in the midst of the unsafe events of the summer protests, figure twenty-one refutes McWhirter's claims and displays the presence and power of Negroes that existed in the Black Belt. In an effort to prove that the Negroes' public identity traits of presence and growing societal power were recognized by the White mainstream as well as to counter the one-sided visual representation this image presents about the reaction to racial tensions during the summer of 1919, this image warrants further investigation. As seen in McWhirter's photograph in figure twenty-two, Blacks that were killed in the Black Belt during the uprising of 1919 often met that fate because the White gangs outnumbered the victim. In McWhirter's image, there are more than seven White ethnics beating mercilessly on the lone Negro victim, perpetuating an inaccurate portrayal

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 35.

of Negroes as powerlessly being abused by the dominant class. While Irish immigrants did enter the Negro-controlled space and terrorized residents, they were met equally with physical opposition. Gangs of Blacks attacked Whites who found themselves stuck in the Black Belt alone.<sup>54</sup> Women carried razors in their shirts and shoes for protection as they traveled to and from work through dangerous riot zones.<sup>55</sup> Migrants marched and demanded Whites accused of harming Negroes to be turned over to their authority for any punishment that they saw fit.<sup>56</sup> Negroes were far from the powerless. In textual support, however, McWhirter gives a more accurate account of the events, including the information previously stated above. Reflecting again on the effects the misreading of objects can have on the dominant narrative, the reading of this object should encourage the audience to question the possessor of power. More specifically, what is revealed about the agency and power of Negroes in the Black Belt when so many White ethnics felt the need to be present in the face of danger against a single Black man.

More so, figure twenty-one shows Negroes standing in front of Binga State Bank. By 1919, migrant Jesse Binga had settled in Chicago and was a prominent banker and real estate agent. Binga owned many of the buildings along State Street as well as a number of residential properties. He specialized in block busting which allowed migrants and members of the Black Middle Class to purchase buildings in the South Side, giving them permanency, power, and physical presence within the community as well as a tangible demonstration of their wealth and elevated social standing. The image of Binga State Bank in the background is a stoic reminder to the Jewish and Irish trespassers that

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>55</sup> McWhirter, 123

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 134.

entered Black Belt community as well as the residents who lived there the that Negro race was present, powerful, and influential within that space. Similar to figure eighteen, Black businesses lined both sides of State Street in figure twenty-one; professional monikers framed second floor windows announcing to the neighborhood Black doctors controlled the space. Most importantly, Negroes in figure twenty-one were the overwhelming majority. They were not huddled in tight clustered groups for protection; they stood erect and loosely gathered, conversing seriously about the preceding events and hypothesizing about those to come. Even while the pendulum of power swung between all and none, the Negroes in Chicago continued to present themselves as active members of the society and agents in reinforcing the New Negro mentality as a part of the identity of the Northern Negro.

While the ideals of the New Negro Movement had simmered below the surface of American culture for years before exploding in physical protests on the streets of Northern cities in 1919, it was the global events of the first World War and the uprising of proletariat classes in Russia that encouraged Negroes take immediate action in creating their identity in the United States. When the Department of War called for soldiers to fight in Europe, the Negro race reluctantly answered that call. Negro leadership of the day encouraged Blacks to embed themselves into the fabric of the United States as military patriots. Much to the behest of radical journalists who called for civilians of color to dodge the draft because winning the war abroad would not bring a rectified situation at home, southern Blacks with newly earned college educations joined Northern migrants to serve in the United States military. Du Bois and his supporters thought that

this socio-political ploy would further cement the need for Blacks to be treated as societal equals as well as discredit the physical limitations of the race being explored by the scientific community:

“...Let us, while this war lasts, forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our own white fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy. We make no ordinary sacrifice, but we make it gladly and willingly with our eyes lifted to the hills”<sup>57</sup>

As predicted by journalists, World War I's end brought no equality for returning Negro soldiers. Lynching, which had been steadily on the rise since the end of Reconstruction in the 1880s, was still rampant throughout the American South. Donned in khaki and navy blue uniforms with metals affixed for bravery and gallantry under fire, Black soldiers returned home to hostile Klansmen whose nooses served as a physical reminder that they were no longer in Europe, and their place was behind the White man and woman. The lack of social change after World War I and the elevated tensions between the races caused Southern born soldiers to abandon Washington's accommodationist view of race relations, head north, and embrace the New Negro mentality.

Soldiers abroad and migrants at home had added readings from the NAACP's *Crisis* and the new socialist journal the *Messenger* to their repertoire of race papers. Migrant and scholar Asa Phillip Randolph used his robust rhetoric to urge Negroes that the time had come to abandon the advice of the Blacks like Washington and Du Bois alike. The world was changing and they must demand change as well if they were to

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<sup>57</sup> Mark Ellis, “W. E. B. Du Bois and the Formation of Black Opinion in World War I: A Commentary on “The Damnable Dilemma,” *The Journal of American History* 81 (March 1995), accessed April 7, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2081650>.

eliminate racism and gain equal access to public resources. Political cartoons like those in figures twenty-three and twenty-four appeared in the Randolph's *Messenger*. As editors, Randolph and Chandler Owen placed these images mid-journal on pages sixteen and seventeen to reinforce the theme of McKay's poem "If We Must Die" that was reprinted on the first page of the issue. Janitor, railroad waiter, and esteemed poet Claude McKay scribbled the prose that would become "If We Must Die" while employed as a dining car waiter on the Pennsylvania Railroad during the summer of 1919.<sup>58</sup> He read about the uprisings, riots, and violent racial protests in Northern cities from the *Defender* before the bundles of contraband were thrown from the rear of trains passing through the South to be distributed to local Blacks. From there, McKay's very private political views exploded into the sonnet-like exposé that appeared first in *The Liberator's* July edition. His poem would be championed as a public sentiment of the New Negro mentality, making it easier for settled migrant entrepreneurs to recruit their patrons to the cause.

Released shortly after the summer's racial protests in September of 1919 and neither credited nor signed by the artist responsible for their creation, the cartoons' message to readers was clear: the views and ideology that currently governed the actions of the Negro race, while acceptable to Whites, were no longer acceptable to Blacks. It was time for a forced change and an active role in defining the image of the Negro for the United States and the global community.

The 'Old Crowd Negro' image was shown in the first panel. Accepted spokesmen for the Negro race- Du Bois, Washington, and a character quoting scripture that

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<sup>58</sup> Claude McKay, *A Long Way Home* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1946), 30.

represented the voice of the Black Church - appeared in formal dress, modeling the neat, clean, and respectable exteriors that the Black bourgeois continued to police to new immigrants arriving daily into Northern cities. Their mouths were drawn large, but their speech is short and staunch; the choice of words from the characters were purposeful and ceremonial, mimicking the oratory style of Frederick Douglass and Philadelphian James Forten, Negro abolitionists from yesteryear. The artist drew the 'Old Crowd' closest to the Statue of Liberty. Though in front of her, the characters' proximity to the image of freedom align their docile actions with the expected behavior of the Negro race from White mainstream. Only two Negroes represent the general population and they appear small, faceless, and clearly beaten. Afraid of the White mob that hovers over them with clubs and burning torches on the left side of the image, the Negro people lay helplessly on the ground; not reaching towards the leaders for assistance for the effect of their assistance is visible throughout the scene. While the Black Church and Washington appear furthest from the common Negroes, it is Du Bois who sits within reach. His foot is inches from his brethren, seeming to imply that of the three he has the most in touch with the view of the average Negro in America.

The artist organizes the second image in figure twenty-four similarly to the first. He placed the antagonists on the left and those being attacked on the right. The Negro in this image is also faceless, but unlike in the first he is upright, his United States army-issued hat blowing in the wind. The artist makes a bold and controversial statement that aligns with the New Negro mentality in his claim that the New Negro will drive the White mobs out of America himself, as Blacks had demonstrated themselves capable of



doing in the racial protests that had occurred in Texas, Washington, D.C., and Chicago during the summer of 1919. Using the singular Negro at the center of the image, the artist applauded the average Negro migrant in the driving the direction of the New Negro movement. The quote just below the door of the vehicle was yet another embrace of the New Negro mentality. New Negroes did not wait for the White controlled government to protect them; they simply took matters of their safety and progress into their own hands. A nod to the unity amongst oppressed people across the globe and aligning themselves with the Russian proletariat workers of the Bolshevik Revolution, the artist also depicts the death of higher ranked, German officers at the hands of the New Negro. Other faceless White characters, American Southerners from their dress, are also drawn running into the distance. Unlike the abused Negroes in figure twenty-three, the New Negro in figure twenty-four possessed power of which he acquired on his own. By claiming and actively defending himself against White attackers, the image represented the New Negro as an active participant in urgently crafting a Negro identity independent of White influence. The cartoon also contrasted the actions and goals of the 'Old Crowd,' who dictated instructions of respectability to the masses while ignoring their actual condition, to the 'New Crowd Negro,' who elevated the race and used their actions as examples to support the cause of eliminating racism and advocating equal access to financial success for all citizens of the United States. Additionally, unlike the population of Negroes in the first image who were separate and disconnected yet experiencing the same oppressive result at the hands of the White mobs, the migrants in Texas, Washington, and Chicago were united in attacking the German and American 'Hun,' doing what the United States'

government refused to do: protect the Black communities and ensuring their fourteenth amendment right as citizens to be free, prosperous, and happy.

As the migrant navigated the shared space of the urban North his sense of permanency, power, and influence became synonymous with his existence as a Northern migrant. His identity was directly related to the growth and prosperity of the community he was a part of and actively shaped on a daily basis. Using his innovative skillset he was able to not only command and gain access to avenues of social and financial mobility, he learned to protect himself from instances where his status could be reversed. Slowly, the identity of the migrant solidified to include perseverance, mobility, ambition, and ingenuity. It was apparent to society that migrants who had fought for democracy overseas and within their own communal spaces were not going to simply revert back to citizens living in an undemocratic state. Negroes had a new attitude; they were New Northern Negroes.

## **Conclusion**

In response to a published article from the White clergymen of Alabama, Dr. Martin Luther King proclaimed that Negroes in the United States had reached their breaking point with mainstream society's refusal to grant them equal access to public resources.

“There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of injustice...I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> “Martin Luther King’s Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” accessed April 28, 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/04/martin-luther-kings-letter-from-birmingham-jail/274668>.

King's response to the Southern clergy specifically, and the American mainstream in general echoed, the silent migration of the Negro people more than fifty years earlier. By simply abandoning their oppressive environment, migrants took the first steps in acquiring the societal influence and power needed to make King's proclamation possible. While King himself did not descend from migrants, his supporters did. The tradition of new Negro urgency for social change that was fostered in the North drove King's followers to stand beside him as he called for an immediate end to social injustices in the 1960s.

Through the reading of the previously noted twenty four objects the identity of the Northern migrant can be defined as innovative, ambitious, and determined. As sharecroppers they used their ingenuity to protect themselves from physical and society abuses until no other opportunities were available. At that point, they transformed into pre-migrants and ambitiously sought exile in Northern cities. At the encouragement of the Black Press and labor agents sent to pull them North with the promise of financial mobility, pre-migrants became transient individuals. As they became acclimated to the Northern space and the new social classes that controlled it, migrants again tapped into their innovative spirit to create spaces in the storefront church void of societal pressures. The success of those spaces allowed them as settled migrants to use their permanency and presence in the Black metropolis to take advantage of the opportunity for financial growth that the arriving migrants presented. Simultaneously, the settled migrants were able to achieve their original goal as pre-migrants for advanced social and financial

mobility as well as demonstrate their presence and power within their community, city, and the United States at large.

Like King and his followers, migrants spent decades fighting for presence in mainstream society. While migrants did not gain full and equal access to public resources until their twilight years in the 1970s, without the foundational characteristics of the Northern Negro migrant there would be no mobility in the movement at all. Participants of the modern civil rights movements stood on the backs of their Northern migrant ancestors, and their ancestors like Saar's Monument to the Great Northern Migration stood tall.

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## Appendix



*Figure One*<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> “Thoughts on August’s Critical Mass by Oboi Reed and Eboni Senai Hawkins,” accessed April 27, 2013, <http://gridchicago.com/2012/thoughts-on-last-months-south-side-ride-critical-mass-route/>.



*Figure Two*<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Richard Wright, *Twelve Million Black Voices*, (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 39.



Figure Three<sup>62</sup>

<sup>62</sup> “2 Million Needed: Plenty of Work in North; Railroads Still Short of Men; Must Come From South,” *The Chicago Defender Big Weekend Edition*, October 14, 1916, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/docview/493339825?accountid=13626>.







Figure Five<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup> “MoMa The Collection Jacob Lawrence *The labor agent who had been sent South by Northern industry was a very familiar person in the Negro counties, 1940-41*,” accessed April 16, 2013, [http://www.moma.org/collection/browse\\_results.php?criteria=O:AD:E:3418&page\\_number=6&template\\_id=1&sort\\_order=1](http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?criteria=O:AD:E:3418&page_number=6&template_id=1&sort_order=1).





*Figure Six*<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> "Migration Man packing suitcase," accessed April 20, 2013, [http://g-ecx.images-amazon.com/images/G/01/kindle/merch/rh/Migrant-Man-Packing-Suitcase\\_320b.gff](http://g-ecx.images-amazon.com/images/G/01/kindle/merch/rh/Migrant-Man-Packing-Suitcase_320b.gff).



*Figure Seven*<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> "Biography Search Display," accessed April 22, 2013, <http://www.daahp.wayne.edu/biographiesDisplay.php?id=57>.



*Figure Eight*<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> "Photo Gallery. Fatal Flood. American Experience. WGBH. PBS," accessed April 12, 2013, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/photo-gallery/flood/>.



*Figure Nine*<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> “General map of the Pennsylvania Railroad and its connections,” accessed April 19, 2013, <http://www.loc.gov/item/98688766> .

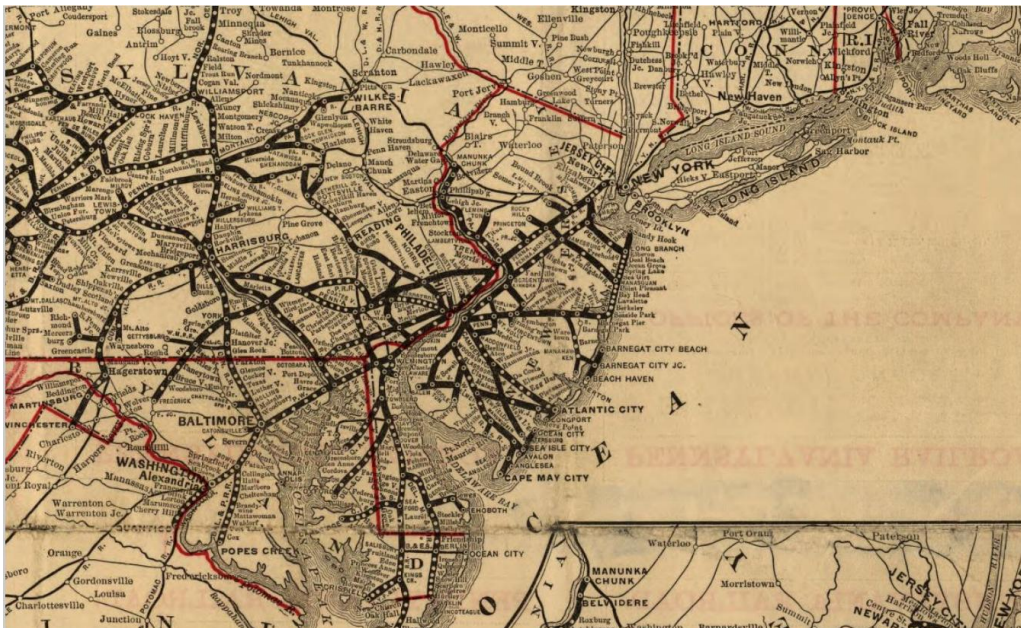
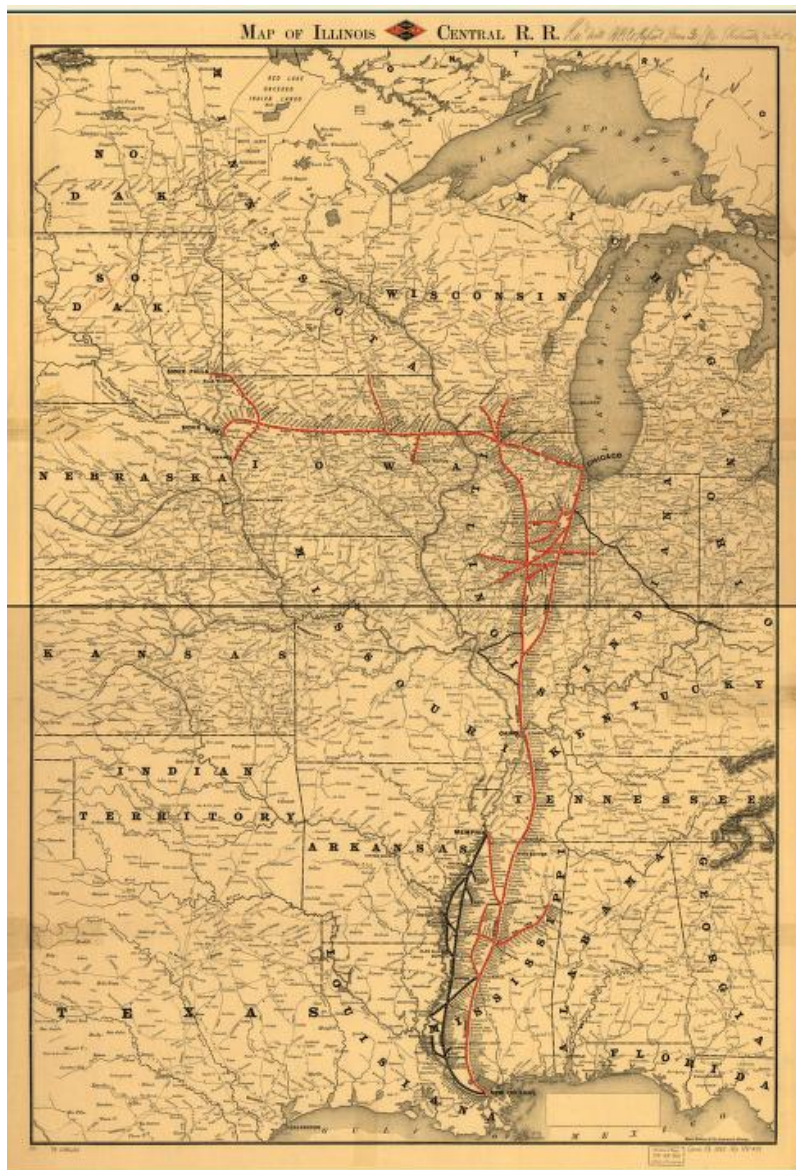


Figure Ten<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.





*Figure Eleven*<sup>70</sup>

<sup>70</sup> "Map of Illinois Central R.R.," accessed April 19, 2013, <http://www.loc.gov/item/98688682>.

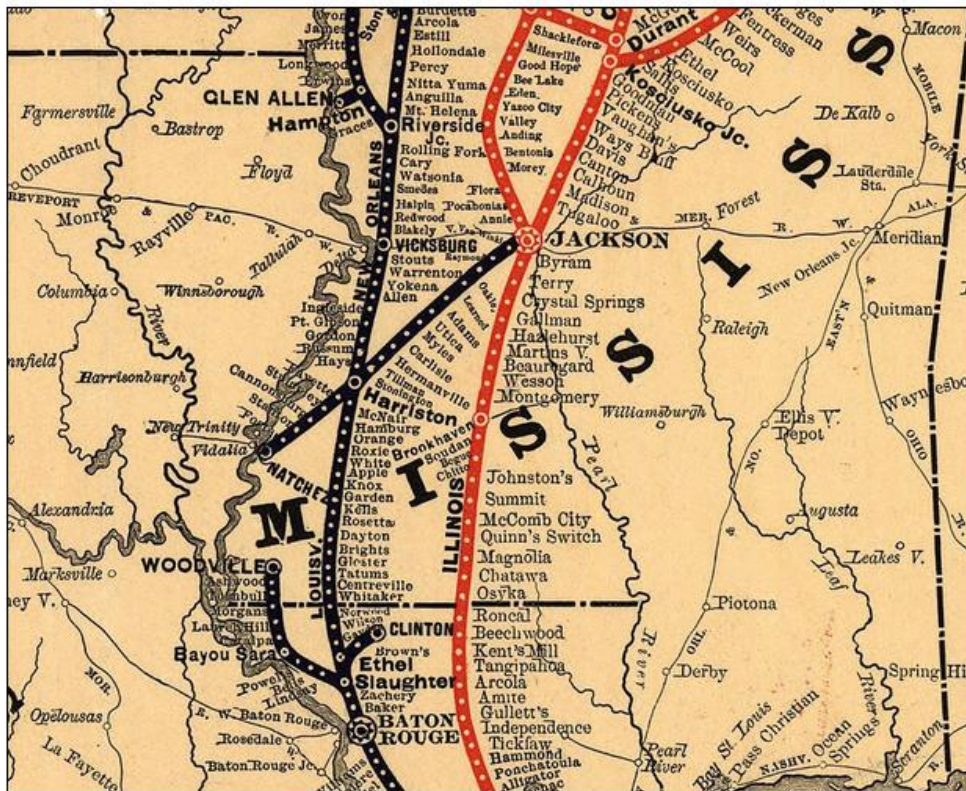


Figure Twelve<sup>71</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.



*Figure Thirteen*<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Wright, 91.





*Figure Fourteen*<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> "AAME," accessed January 26, 2013, <http://www.inmotionaame.org/gallery/detail.cfm?migration=8&topic=99&id=465491&type=image&metadata=show&page=4>.



*Figure Fifteen*<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Storefront church and lunch wagon, Black Belt, Chicago, Illinois, accessed April 23, 2013, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa1997015813/PP/>.



*Figure Sixteen*<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> "I Ride the Harlem Line...pennsylvania railroad," accessed April 25, 2013, <http://www.iritetheharlemline.com/tag/pennsylvania-railroad/>.



*Figure Seventeen*<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> “Harlem Document (Storefront Church). Center for Creative Photography Digital Collections,” accessed April 25, 2013, <http://ccp.uair.arizona.edu/item/29037>.



*Figure Eighteen*<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> “Explore. DuSable to Obama: Chicago’s Black Metropolis- WTTW,” accessed February 17, 2013, <http://www.wttw.com/main.taf?p=76,4,2,1&content=bingas-bank-real-estate>.





Figure Nineteen<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Marable Manning and Leith Mullings, *Freedom: A Photographic History of the African American Struggle* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2005), 72.



*Figure Twenty*<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 73.



*Figure Twenty-One*<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negro: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 16.





*Figure Twenty-Two*<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Cameron McWhirter, *Red Summer: The Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2011), 150.



Figure Twenty-Three<sup>82</sup>

<sup>82</sup>“The Old Negro. The New Negro and the Black Image: From Booker T. Washington to Alain Locke,” accessed April 2, 2013, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1917beyond/essays/oldcrowd.htm>.



Figure Twenty-Four<sup>83</sup>

<sup>83</sup> "The New Negro and the Black Image: From Booker T. Washington to Alain Locke," accessed April 2, 2013, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1917beyond/essays/newcrowd.htm>.