

“‘Home People’ and ‘Old Settlers’” (1989)¹
James R. Grossman

Black southerners arriving in Chicago generally knew where to go once they walked out of the train station. Like their counterparts in New York who asked in Pennsylvania Station how to get to Harlem, most black migrants to Chicago upon alighting at the Illinois Central terminal requested directions to the South Side or to State Street. People whose friends, relatives, or townspeople had preceded them sought out specific addresses; those who had no idea where to go were likely to be directed to the South Side. Whites would assume that all blacks “belonged” in the ghetto; blacks would reason that bewildered newcomers might obtain assistance from black institutions while avoiding the danger of straying into hostile white neighborhoods. The logic of such advice suggests the significance—if not the visibility—of Chicago’s color line, as well as the importance of various aspects of community within black Chicago. Shaped by both the circumscribing influences of the white city that surrounded it and the demands of the migrants and “Old Settlers” who inhabited it, the emerging “Black Metropolis” on the South Side divided along lines of class, region, and even age. But it remained a community nevertheless, unified by the implications of racial taxonomies.

In 1910, 78 percent of black Chicagoans lived on the South Side in a narrow strip of land known to whites as the Black Belt. Beginning at the edge of an industrial and warehouse district south of the Loop (Chicago’s central business district), black Chicago stretched southward along State Street for more than thirty blocks, remaining only a few blocks wide except at its northern end. The 1910 census counted 34,335 black residents in this growing ghetto, which was expanding slowly along its southern and eastern boundaries. Another 3,379 black Chicagoans lived on the West Side, while most of the remaining 6,389 lived in smaller enclaves in Englewood, the Near North Side, and scattered other districts. Only 1,427 lived on the city’s North Side. Because of the lingering presence of some whites in black neighborhoods, especially those on the edge of the Black Belt and the smaller enclaves, many black Chicagoans lived in what might loosely be called an integrated setting; but with black people virtually restricted to certain areas of the city, the housing market was actually segregated.

This residential pattern had evolved during the previous quarter century, when Chicago’s black population had increased from 6,480 in 1880 to 44,103 in 1910. As late as 1898, only slightly more than one-fourth of Chicago’s black residents lived in precincts in which blacks constituted a majority of the population; more than 30 percent inhabited precincts at least 95 percent white. Yet black enclaves were already emerging, mainly on the South and near West Sides. Ward statistics understate this concentration of the black population, as blacks often occupied only a small sector in each ward. This consolidating trend accelerated along with black migration. Few white neighborhoods had ever accepted with equanimity the purchase of property by even a “respectable” black family, even before migration reached a level that might have remotely threatened whites with the specter of “invasion.” As the black population began to increase, whites

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became still less likely to tolerate a black neighbor and more actively began to resist black settlement in their neighborhoods.

At the same time, black institutional development contributed to the growing vitality and self-consciousness of the emerging black neighborhoods, making them attractive to blacks who preferred avoiding white people and their prejudices. What one historian of Detroit's black community has called the "push of discrimination" and "the pull of ethnocentrism" combined to impel black newcomers toward the ghettos. Exculsion aside, many migrants sought their first homes in areas populated by other blacks, where they could be more comfortable and find familiar institutions. This dynamic of choice and constraint, heavily influenced by economic factors, resembled the experience of European immigrants to Chicago during this period, but the differences were significant. Unfamiliarity with English made the ethnic neighborhood essential for many Europeans; blacks had no comparable imperative. White immigrants tended to live near workplaces, blacks dispersed in service occupations could not, and when they did obtain industrial employment they were excluded from neighborhoods adjoining Chicago's major industries. European newcomers lived near others of their nationality but usually in an ethnically diverse neighborhood that could hardly be described as a ghetto. Whether middle or working class, black Chicagoans were less likely than members of other ethnic groups to share public space across ethnic but within class boundaries. More than any other group black Chicagoans occupied neighborhoods defined by permanent characteristics. Neither cultural assimilation nor economic mobility promised significantly wider choices.

The color line separated more than residences. State legislation prohibiting racial discrimination in schools, municipal services, and public accommodations was seldom enforced, and except on the streets and in the streetcars, blacks and whites seldom mingled. Black children attended schools with whites, but only because by 1915 the emerging ghetto was still neither compact nor homogeneous enough to enable the Board of Education to draw district lines that would go beyond merely assuring that as few schools as possible would have black students. Municipal institutions often segregated black clients or discriminated in the provision of services. Most voluntary associations and private institutions simply excluded blacks, thrusting on the community the dilemma of accepting segregation or doing without such institutions as the YMCA. On the whole, in 1915 black Chicagoans lived among black neighbors, sent their children to predominantly black schools, and were excluded from most establishments catering to whites.

Blacks occupied a similarly limited place in Chicago's booming economy. Fewer than one black male in twenty—and virtually no black females—worked in an occupation that might be described as managerial, professional, or proprietary; even many of these operated marginal businesses. Most workers were unskilled, and few worked in industry. If Chicago was the "City of the Big Shoulders," with an economic base of heavy industry, construction, and transportation, black workers found themselves relegated to marginal roles. White immigrants from southern and eastern Europe had to accept the worst jobs in the city's industries, but blacks lacked access even to those positions. Sharing the racial attitudes of other Americans, industrialists in Chicago and other northern cities saw no reason to hire blacks when they had thousands of white immigrants to fill their factories. Blacks were considered to be useful as strikebreakers on occasion,

but were generally discharged once the strike ended. Industrial managers drew upon series of commonly held assumptions about work habits and aptitudes of various “races,” and if most Eastern European groups suffered from images that kept them in unskilled positions, at least they were white. Where foremen controlled access to industrial jobs, black workers lacked access to the networks of community and kin that were central to recruitment patterns. Chicago and other northern cities offered mainly service jobs to blacks, and between 1900 and 1910 the number of black servants in Chicago increased by six thousand, nearly half the city’s increase in black population during that period. Men were likely to work as porters, waiters, servants, janitors, or elevator operators; two-thirds of all employed black women in 1910 were either servants or hand laundresses, with most of the others performing some other type of service.

Despite this apparent homogeneity, however, black Chicago like other urban black communities—was divided along class lines. Severely truncated at the top, this class structure rested less on wealth or contemporary white definitions of occupational status (except at the highest levels) than on notions of “refinement” and “respectability” maintained by the upper and middle classes. The few professionals, some with professional connections to the white community, tended to dominate the highest rungs of the ladders, with businessmen close behind. Postal workers, Pullman porters, and servants employed by Chicago’s wealthiest white families and best hotels constituted much of the solid middle class, which at its margins could also include other workers with stable incomes and some education. Stable income was at least as important as accumulated wealth, an uncommon phenomenon in the black community. “Respectability” frequently depended upon property ownership, membership in the appropriate organizations, and leisure habits. Church, club, or lodge activities conferred as well as signified status; symbols of respectability could include affiliation with one of the larger Baptist or African Methodist Episcopal Churches, a YMCA membership, or a Masonic identification card. Upper-class blacks, who considered themselves “refined” rather than merely “respectable,” joined Episcopalian, Presbyterian, or Congregationalist churches, entertained according to specific rules of etiquette, and socialized only within a limited circle of acquaintances.

Until the late nineteenth century, this upper class—largely businessmen with white clientele and professionals who had won the respect of their white colleagues—dominated black Chicago’s leadership and resisted attempts to organize alternative institutions catering to blacks. To do so, they argued, would imply their acceptance of segregation. This elite not only opposed racial segregation in principle, but also feared its likely impact on their own social lives and institutional relationships. Disdaining association with blacks who lacked their refinement, members of this thin upper stratum recognized that segregation would force their social life inward toward the black community, rather than outward as they hoped.

Between 1900 and 1915 a new leadership emerged in black Chicago, one with an economic and political base in the black community. The emergence of the physical ghetto coincided with widening racial discrimination in Chicago and other northern cities, which forced blacks to make decisions circumscribed by their exclusion from a variety of social and economic institutions. Increasing separation opened new opportunities for business, professional, religious, and political leadership, and by the first decade of the twentieth century, a new middle class had begun to replace an older elite unwilling to

sacrifice integrationist principles and therefore wary of separate black institutions and a ghetto economy.

This new generation of black editors, politicians, business people, and ministers would dominate Chicago's black institutions during the Great Migration and construct the foundation of what by the 1920s would be known as a Black Metropolis. The southern origins of these prominent figures perhaps contributed to their continuing influence on newcomers. Robert Abbott, raised outside Savannah, Georgia, visited Chicago in 1893 as a member of the Hampton (Institute) Quartet performing at the Columbian Exposition. He returned four years later and in 1905 founded the *Chicago Defender*. Louis B. Anderson, born in Petersburg, Virginia, was also drawn to Chicago by the fair; by 1919, he was not only an alderman, but also Mayor William Hale Thompson's floor leader in the City Council. Born in Alabama, Oscar DePriest traveled to Chicago from Kansas in 1889 and worked his way up from a house painter to election as Chicago's first black alderman in 1915. Thirteen years later he would climb even higher, as the first black congressman elected from a northern district. Reverend Archibald J. Carey, like DePriest the child of ex-slaves, came from Georgia in 1898 to serve as pastor of Quinn Chapel, the city's largest African Methodist Episcopal Church. Such notables, provided an image—and a self-image—of a prewar generation of migrants who built institutions, shaped a newly self-conscious black community, and dominated Chicago's growing black middle class.

Adapting Booker T. Washington's doctrines of racial solidarity and self-help to the northern city, these business leaders and politicians deemphasized the fight for integration and dealt with discrimination by creating black institutions. Between 1890 and 1915 they established a bank, a hospital, a YMCA, an infantry regiment, effective political organizations, lodges, clubs, professional baseball teams, social service institutions, newspapers, and a variety of small businesses. The growth of the black community promised to multiply growing political influence and economic activity. Like Abbott, whose newspaper was partly responsible for the popularity of Chicago as a destination for black southerners, Chicago's black politicians and entrepreneurs saw the migrants as a source of votes and customers.

Growth, however, also implied diversity, and neither the "old" nor "new" leadership in black Chicago was prone to tolerate those who did not measure up to their standards. The *Conservator*, Chicago's first black newspaper and the voice of prominent leaders in the late nineteenth century, frequently criticized "the seamy side" of black Chicago during the 1870s and 1880s. The *Defender* picked up the mantle in the twentieth century, with complaints about newcomers and degeneration even before the Great Migration. Both newspapers couched these criticisms within the context of appeals for improvement, providing lessons for proper behavior while chiding lower-class blacks for giving the race a bad image." George Cleveland Hall, a prominent physician and personal friend of Booker T. Washington, typified the attitudes of many of his contemporaries. He served in official capacities in the NAACP as well as the Washingtonian National Negro Business League and later became one of the founders of the Chicago Urban League. In 1904, Hall voiced the attitudes of middle-class black Chicago concerning the need—and yet the impossibility—of maintaining the distance between classes in the black community:

Those of the race who are desirous of improving their general condition are prevented to a great extent by being compelled to live with those of their color who are shiftless, dissolute and immoral....Prejudice of landlords and agents render it almost impossible for [the Negro] to take up his residence in a more select quarter of the city...no matter...how much cultivation and refinement he may possess.

Most black Chicagoans before the Great Migration, however, neither possessed Hall's "cultivation and refinement" nor lived "shiftless, dissolute and immoral" lives. Laboring long days in menial occupations, they returned home tired. Women, especially, spent most of their waking hours working, as they had to combine traditional household chores with other employment. Nearly half of all black women in Chicago in 1910 worked outside the home (compared with slightly more than one-fourth of white women), and among poor families the proportion was even higher. Most of these people had migrated from the South and had found that whatever skills or hopes they carried with them, service occupations provided the only possibility of employment in Chicago. Their leisure activities offered respite from their backbreaking, low-status jobs. Enthusiastic worship and lively nightlife attracted the scorn of much of the middle class, but such activities already were central elements of what St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton would later call "the world of the lower class" in black Chicago. By 1904 (if not earlier), the storefront churches later to be associated with the Great Migration had already begun to appear along State Street. Less spiritually inclined workers found release in petty gambling, the fellowship of the numerous saloons along the State Street "Stroll," or boisterous parties. By 1914, the rent party (later made famous in Harlem) had been improvised to leaven the struggle for subsistence with sociability and relaxation. These comforts drew upon the familiarity and relief of a black world; on the "Stroll," observed a black essayist in 1915, "for a minute or so one forgets the 'Problem.' It has no place here. It is crowded aside by an insistence of good cheer."

As earlier migrants from the South to Chicago, some of these black workers numbered among the letter writers who helped to stimulate the Great Migration. In some cases, they formed the core of the kin and community networks vital to the initial adjustment of newcomers to urban life. Most, however, had not come from the Deep South states which provided the majority of migrants during the war years. On the whole, their relation to the Great Migration and their interactions with the migrants are difficult to discern. The migrants competed with these laborers for the limited supply of working-class housing available to blacks, and this group suffered from the rapid increase in rents which resulted from the impact of migration on the demand for cheap housing in the ghetto during the migration. Differences would also emerge over the issue of unionization in the packinghouses, with newcomers approaching labor organizations more warily. The greatest tensions, however, as well as the major nexus of institutional assistance, lay between the migrants and Chicago's black middle class. Dependent on the growth of the black community, the middle class had more to gain from a migration than did the lower class. But, in its concern for respectability and community image, the middle class also had the most to lose.

It is difficult to determine what kind of reception migrants expected from this community. Most probably anticipated a warm welcome. Much of what they knew about

Chicago had been filtered through sources that emphasized race consciousness and individual and racial accomplishment. Class tensions and divisions within the black community seldom found their way into the *Defender*. Similarly, information from friends and relatives who only recently had arrived in Chicago highlighted instead the contrasts between South and North, rural and urban. Accustomed to middle-class disdain for poorer blacks, informants were unlikely to mention class tensions in letters extolling the wonders of the Windy City. Based on the information at their disposal, black southerners preparing to go to Chicago could logically envision a black community that was self-sufficient, fiercely militant, and eager to assist those of “the Race” in flight from southern oppression. Accordingly, many wrote hopefully to the *Defender*, Chicago Urban League, and Bethlehem Baptist Association for train fare, suitcases, and prearranged employment and housing. Chicago’s black institutional leadership could not provide these resources, but it did offer useful assistance and services. The same network that had stimulated and facilitated migration could now smooth adjustment. As migration increased, the other part of the network--community and kin—would prove most useful to newcomers during their first days in the city.

This informal network helped many migrants to solve their first problem upon arrival—shelter. Earlier migrants, having provided essential information, and sometimes funds, to family and community members who followed them to Chicago, now supplied a different resource, as they helped newcomers find suitable temporary quarters. Frequently, they took friends, relatives, and former townsmen into their homes as lodgers. Women undertook the greatest part of this burden, continuing to play the connective and leadership roles that they had performed as visitors, correspondents, and club organizers. Some of these women did not need the extra rent money; but they felt obliged to assist friends and relatives whom they had encouraged to come North. Newcomers “stopping” at such houses not only secured interim housing, but spent their first few days in Chicago in a familiar social setting. The “lodger evil” frequently decried by reformers, who worried that households with too many adults threatened family morality, was also a crucial adaptive mechanism based on family and community ties. Given the economic strains on the urban black family, lodging could actually enhance family stability by permitting women to earn money while remaining home with their children.

Migrants arriving without such contacts, or whose friends either lacked the resources to help them or had themselves come to Chicago too recently to be useful as guides, had to rely on more formal channels in their initial search for housing. Some, especially women concerned about their vulnerability “in a large city by self among strangers,” as one New Orleans woman put it, wrote ahead inquiring about housing or live-in domestic work. Generally even those whose request was as simple as that of Hattie Smith of Georgia, who wished to board in “a nice place,” could not get an institution to work out an arrangement in advance. Newcomers who had believed rumors about agencies on State Street that would provide homes and furniture were equally disappointed. There were, however, agencies that could help migrants find temporary shelter. This could be critical for migrants who arrived penniless, or, like Edwina Brown and a Mrs. Holly, were stranded at the train station when the people they expected to meet them failed to appear. These young women, like many others in their predicament, were sent by Travelers Aid representatives to the black YWCA branch. Many young

men, arriving destitute after riding freight trains north, ended up in a courtroom, where at least one judge—Daniel P. Trude—regularly referred them to the Chicago Urban League.

Although it distributed thousands of cards inviting any “Stranger in the City” to visit its office “if you want a place to live,” the League did not operate any housing facilities. But it could provide institutional assistance by referring homeless migrants to appropriate institutions or offering them its “certified lodging list.” During the 1916-17 crest of migration, for example, it could send indigent men and women to Walters AME Zion Church, which stayed open day and night to “succor those of our people” who had recently arrived. Single people who had some funds but were alone in the city and reluctant to seek a private lodging house might be sent to such agencies as the YMCA, YWCA, Phyllis Wheatley Home, Club Home for Colored Girls, or Julia Johnson Home for Working Girls, most of which were established after 1910 in response to needs created by migration.

It was fortunate that there were some black institutions to which migrants could turn in their search for interim lodging arrangements upon arrival, as they were denied access to the standard alternatives available to other newcomers to Chicago. Most lodging houses in the city, including the Salvation Army’s Reliance Hotel, YMCA Hotel, Christian Industrial League, Dawes Hotel, and probably the Municipal Lodging Houses, turned blacks from their doors, despite stated policies of accepting anyone who could pay except “inebriated” applicants. Even those hotels sufficiently nonexclusive to accept the patronage of “quiet” drunks, rejected blacks. Indeed, these institutions, like the Travelers Aid Society, could avoid dealing with blacks by referring them to the Urban League, using that organization—which defined itself as a “clearinghouse” for social service work among blacks—as a dumping ground for an undesirable clientele.

Even black institutions, however, accepted transients only on an emergency basis, and few alternatives beckoned to newcomers. Single people might stop at one of black Chicago’s hotels, such as the Pullman, which offered a range of accommodations at fifty cents to one dollar per day. At C. K. Smith’s, all but the most impoverished migrants could afford the fifteen to twenty cent charge for a bed for the night. By 1917, a migrant in search of more comfortable quarters could secure a room at the Idlewild Hotel with steam heat and hot water, at weekly rates of four dollars “and up.” Although the number of hotels catering to blacks increased from six in 1917 to eleven in 1921, these establishments could not satisfy the demand. The Chicago Commission on Race Relations reported that between 1915 and 1920, “hundreds of unattached men and women” roamed the streets of Chicago’s black neighborhoods until well after midnight looking for rooms.

Thus, those who could not rely on old acquaintances or other connections to provide temporary shelter had to conduct a seemingly futile search for housing. The greatest wave of migration during 1917 and 1918 coincided with a virtual halt in new housing construction in Chicago, exacerbating a shortage shaped by the dual housing market. A summer 1917 survey of realtors supplying housing for blacks counted 664 applicants for the 97 listed units. Only 50 of the hopefuls found accommodations. The situation did not improve; in July 1920, the *Defender* lamented an unprecedented “home famine.” New arrivals quickly recognized that they would have to begin their new lives with less space and less privacy than they had envisioned. The Brown family, although less hard pressed financially than most migrants, squeezed three adults and one child into

a single room during their first few weeks in Chicago. In 1917 such rooms cost approximately three dollars per week, four to five times the rates in Mississippi towns, and were nearly always regarded as temporary. Renting by the week, a family could continue its search for more desirable quarters and move at any time.

If housing constituted one measurement of “bettering one’s condition,” Chicago was at best a flawed Promised Land. Migrants moved into houses and apartments in some of the city’s most deteriorated neighborhoods. Among Chicago’s decaying inner districts—many of which had been marked for extinction as residence areas by the city’s planners—only those inhabited by blacks showed population increases between 1910 and 1920. But Chicago did seem to offer many migrants—especially those who arrived before 1919—better homes than they had left behind in the South. Although many newcomers never escaped the dilapidated dwellings located west of State Street, others somehow managed to secure more space, if only temporarily. Even the ramshackle houses on some of the worst blocks were, if nothing else, frequently quite roomy, especially relative to what had been available in the South. In some cases, however, migrants had to close off rooms to reduce heating costs in drafty old frame houses. A more popular alternative was to take in lodgers, which while easing the adjustment process by perpetuating kinship or community ties, could also cause overcrowding and tension.

Observers disagreed as to the extent of overcrowding in the South Side ghetto, partly because few could agree on a meaningful standard. Generally, white reformers considered one room per person a reasonable ratio and agreed that two people per room represented crowding. The city’s largely unenforced legal minimum for sleeping room specified a parsimonious four hundred cubic feet for adults and two hundred for children. By any yardstick, however, Chicago housing compared favorably with the southern dwellings occupied by blacks. Migrants from towns or farms in the South had probably lived in crude cabins of perhaps three or four rooms. In such homes it was not unusual for as many as five members of a family to sleep in a single room. Traveling through Mississippi in 1917, Charles Johnson found “a stock accommodation: a two room cabin for a family in which they cook, sleep, eat and rear their children.” A survey of North Carolina rural housing found cabins of three rooms—or smaller—that left inhabitants open to the vicissitudes of even the relatively mild climate. “Hot in the summer...[and]...almost impossible to heat” in the winter, these homes invariably had leaks that left floors damp after storms. If many migrants ended up in Chicago flats without hot running water, even cold tap water had been unavailable in their southern homes, which had probably lacked plumbing or sewerage connections. The housing available to black newcomers to Chicago ranked among the worst in the city, but utilities that were routine in Chicago had been a luxury in plantation cabins and even in many southern towns. A Floridian who was “not particular about the electric lights” could hardly have been aware before leaving the South that in Chicago a dangling light bulb characterized even the dingy “kitchenette.” Although migrants would soon grow dissatisfied with their substandard housing, most found homes that seemed better than what they had left behind in the South.

Although most migrants moved frequently after locating in Chicago, their ability to improve their housing facilities was limited. The small black ghetto expanded rapidly in 1917, but resistance soon formed along its eastern and western borders. The ghetto

expanded mainly to the south during the war, but it did so slowly and along a narrow corridor. Because landlords could extract higher—and rapidly increasing—rents from blacks excluded from the city’s general housing market, recently “opened” blocks frequently commanded rates beyond the financial resources of most migrants. Black Chicagoans who moved into more expensive homes left behind buildings to be filled by newcomers; but this process did not create nearly enough vacancies to meet the demand. By 1919, despite a surplus of housing in other parts of Chicago, including working-class neighborhoods west of the ghetto, a severe housing shortage plagued black Chicago. This crisis contributed to the outbreak of the bloody race riot that year.

The interaction of discrimination and rapidly rising demand for housing not only fueled racial tensions and frustrated migrants’ hopes of progressively improving their living conditions; it also structured the physical environment of blacks already resident in Chicago and contributed to their concerns over the impact of the Great Migration. Although most black Chicagoans recognized that the exodus from the South and the entrance into the industrial economy represented a step forward for black America, they were not necessarily eager to see the newcomers become their neighbors. Some of these Old Settlers tried to avoid the social consequences of the Great Migration by fleeing from neighborhoods affordable to newcomers. Housing discrimination, however, left most of the city inaccessible even to the few blacks whose incomes should have provided a wide range of alternatives.

Although only a few hundred Old Settlers tried to escape the impact of the Great Migration by fleeing to Morgan Park, their reaction to the migrants suggests anxieties not uncommon among middle-class black Chicagoans. More frequently, they tried to insulate themselves by moving further south along the narrow strip that defined the gradually expanding South Side Black Belt. But the migrants inevitably followed. What was the middle-class edge of the South Side ghetto in 1917 had become a central part of that district by 1920. High rents and large houses in such areas inhibited, but could not prevent, their gradual transformation. Newcomers unable to afford large houses but wanting extra space or income frequently rented these buildings and took in lodgers. In addition, landlords—black and white—learned that they could increase profits by dividing a comfortable four-room flat into four “kitchenettes” by installing a gas burner in each room and renting to poor families by the week. Although newcomers tended to cluster in the older neighborhood west of State Street and north of Thirty-fifty Street, and the proportion of migrants decreased as one moved south, no black neighborhood lacked a significant number of migrants. Caught in the vise of the dual housing market, the middle class could not escape. One black professional man, who moved from Thirty-seventh Street to Fifty-first Street trying to keep ahead of the newcomers, complained in 1927 that “the same class of Negroes who ran us away from Thirty-seventh Street are moving out there. They creep along slowly like a disease.”

Few middle-class black Chicagoans, however, would have gone so far as to liken the migrants to an army of infectious germs. Most received the newcomers ambivalently. “They didn’t seem to open-arm welcome them,” recalled one black Chicagoan, “but they seemed to welcome them.” Although the *Defender*, Urban League, and other major institutions in black Chicago had encouraged the exodus from the South and virtually invited black southerners to relocate in their city, the men and women who dominated these institutions also perceived a potential threat in the influx. Fearful that the migrants,

with their rural southern manners, would disrupt the community and embarrass the race middle-class black Chicago tried to protect its respectability by instructing newcomers in acceptable forms of behavior. Many migrants, in turn, sought to maintain their self-respect and way of life by forming their own institutions—mainly churches—and networks of associations. And many, especially the younger men and women who constituted the bulk of the newcomers, adapted too easily to urban life, noisily crowding the streets, night clubs, dance halls, and “cafes,” to the chagrin of the more staid Old Settlers.

Whether more concerned about the welfare or the behavior of southerners new to their community, black Chicagoans could draw on only a limited fund of existing institutional resources to deal with problems posed by the influx. Even before the Great Migration, the *Defender* had justifiably rebuked the city’s black leadership for insufficient attention to the development of social service and welfare organizations. The community did raise funds for the Phyllis Wheatley Association’s home for stranded women, the Jane Dent Home for Aged and Infirm Colored People, Provident Hospital, the black YMCA, and two settlement houses, but few of these institutions existed primarily to serve the poor. One of the settlement houses, Frederick Douglass Center, according to one of its founders in 1906 was “not organized to do slum work in what may be called the black belt of Chicago, but to be a center of wholesome influences,” where middle-class whites and blacks might become acquainted. The Wendell Phillips Settlement on the West Side, along with two attempts by churches to organize settlement activities, focused more sharply on the poor. But the small Phillips Settlement struggled to stay open; the Trinity Church Mission expired when its founder, Reverend Richard R. Wright, left the city a few years after its founding in 1905; and much of Institutional AME Church’s settlement program lasted only a decade longer. Most social welfare institutions dependent mainly on black support struggled along on marginal budgets. Among these, only the Negro Fellowship League and the Phyllis Wheatley Association specifically oriented their activities toward newcomers.

The Wheatley Association, founded in 1896 as a women’s club, changed orientation in 1906 to aid female migrants. Its home for stranded newcomers grew out of a concern that respectable black women arriving in Chicago often encountered difficulty in finding appropriate jobs or housing and “were going astray by being led unawares into disreputable homes, entertainment and employment.” Emphasizing its home’s “culture” and “refined” atmosphere, and able to assist only a few women at any given time, the Wheatley Association embraced a narrow clientele.

The Negro Fellowship League embodied a greater ambition. Created in 1910 by Ida B. Wells-Barnett, the League maintained a lodging house, an employment agency, and a reading room with southern as well as northern newspapers. In 1917 the organization stationed a representative at the Illinois Central depot to give “proper information and protection” to migrants, but Travelers Aid and the Chicago Urban League quickly pushed the Fellowship League out of this role. The lodging house, whose fifteen-cent per night fee made it affordable to most newcomers, if not to the “man farthest down” whom Wells-Barnett sought to reach, had closed in 1913, and the Fellowship League itself expired in 1920. Unable to attract contributions or interest among the “leading colored citizens,” Wells-Barnett argued that these worthies disdained rubbing shoulders with the redcaps, elevator operators, rag-pickers, and State Street

“elements” whom she defined as her clientele. This was no doubt true. But given her marginal place in Chicago’s less confrontational black leadership, her feminism and refusal to take a back seat to male leadership, and her apparently abrasive personality, other factors contributed at least as much to the Fellowship League’s demise. Probably most important, as Wells-Barnett later recognized when she criticized middle-class black leaders for their greater interest in organizations with closer ties to whites than her Fellowship League had cultivated, was competition from institutions with greater access to white resources. The establishment of first the black YMCA, and then the Urban League, diverted the funds available from white philanthropists and black businessmen.

From its inception in 1911, the YMCA branch constructed explicitly for black Chicagoans was a source of considerable pride to large segments of the black community. The *Defender*, never reluctant to exaggerate, likened its founding to the Emancipation Proclamation and placed its chief benefactors—Julius Rosenwald of Sears, Roebuck and banker Nathan W. Harris—alongside John Brown, Charles Sumner, and Abraham Lincoln in its pantheon of white allies. Opposed by some of the old-line leadership as a segregated institution, the Wabash YMCA attracted criticism from others as elitist. The *Chicago Whip* charged it with catering primarily to the “black Blue Stockings or better styled cod fish aristocracy of the race.” More pointedly, Wells-Barnett argued that its steep membership fees prevented it from “reaching the boys or men who were farthest down and out.” A “full senior” membership did, in fact, cost ten dollars, but a “social senior” member could use many of the building’s facilities for only two dollars per year in 1915. Moreover, Armour & Company, and probably other stockyards firms as well, paid membership fees for their employees after one year of service. Published membership figures fluctuated, and the organization probably inflated them. In 1913 it claimed 2,000 members; two years later its executive director privately set the number at 1,000; in 1919 the *Defender* reported 1,961; and only one year later, it had fallen to 675. By 1921 it had climbed to 1,411. Few southern migrants stayed in its dormitories, and those who did tended to resemble the “leaders of the Mobile Young Men’s Progressive Club” who made the Wabash YMCA “their headquarters” when they arrived in Chicago in 1917. Even this group, however, included stockyards workers. Laborers also participated in glee clubs, baseball leagues, and other leisure activities designed to compete with the temptations of State Street. Implicitly through its wholesome recreational programs and explicitly through meetings that often accompanied such programs, the Wabash YMCA provided a podium for white industrialists and black middle-class leaders who wished to address a small minority of newcomers who could be enticed through its doors.

The centerpiece of both black and white efforts to assist and influence the newcomers was the Chicago Urban League, which provided the bulk of the services most important to recent migrants. Established five years after its parent organization’s founding in 1911, the Chicago chapter immediately focused on the “adjustment or assimilation” of the city’s black migrants. Countless migrants knew of the organization; publicity in the *Defender* had given it a reputation as “the society in Chicago that cares for colored emigrants,” and it received thousands of letters from black southerners preparing to migrate northward. Within eight months after its office opened in March 1917, seven thousand individuals had received some form of assistance. By 1919, the League could count more than twenty thousand people passing through its doors (not

including repeat visits) in a twelve-month period, and statistics for the following year indicate that nearly half had “been in the city less than six months.” Most of these clients were looking for work, and more than half of the applicants were placed each year, with the proportion higher during the war. In the areas of employment, housing, social work, and relief, the Urban League quickly emerged as the leading social agency in the black community.

The League could accomplish as much as it did largely because of its ability to attract contributions from white philanthropists and employers, due in part to its extensive connections to Chicago’s white social service establishment. But considering the narrow economic base of black Chicago, which had a miniscule business and professional class, the black contribution was meaningful. Although blacks provided only 10 percent of the League’s 1917 budget of three thousand dollars, three-fourths of all contributions came from the 155 black men and women who gave small donations. By 1919, blacks were able to raise three thousand dollars themselves, and more than twice that amount the following year, when they provided 17 percent of the total budget. That hundreds of blacks gave between one and ten dollars to the League suggests that people who had little gave what they could. In a community in which post-office employees were considered solidly middle class, and the social arbiter was a clerk for the Pullman company, this represented no small commitment.

If many of the middle-class social clubs and their members continued to ignore the poor except for occasional contributions to charity and frequent moralizing about respectability, the Great Migration did stimulate social welfare on the part of black Chicagoans. Considering the limited financial resources of Chicago’s black institutions and the widespread poverty in the community even before the influx of newcomers, black Chicago demonstrated a considerable commitment to aiding new arrivals. The Wheatley Home expanded its facilities and its fundraising (although it still found itself unable to accommodate all those it wished to help), and a variety of smaller, similar homes for women were established. The Wendell Phillips Settlement expanded its program, although its slim budget continued to limit its reach. It and two women’s clubs established day nurseries for black working women and their children, a service apparently not even contemplated in black Chicago until the Great Migration. A few of the larger churches sustained substantial programs which included limited assistance in finding homes and jobs. These and scattered other congregations also provided direct assistance to the poor, sometimes extending aid to nonmembers. The Wabash YMCA and a newly established black branch of the YWCA helped a small number of newcomers find homes and jobs. During the hard times after World War I, churches, clubs, businessmen, and other organizations all tried to cope with the rapidly expanding need for social services, relief, and temporary shelter. Much of this activity was coordinated by the Urban League. With most white charitable organizations and social institutions unwilling to accept black clients and even some municipal facilities inhospitable, Chicago’s black community assembled its meager resources to assist the newcomers.

Chicago’s black establishment encouraged and assisted migrants partly out of sheer self-interest. Politicians, businessmen, and newspaper publishers recognize that the newcomers represented voters, customers, readers, and a potential population boom which could swell the prestige of black Chicago both in the city and in black America. Editor Robert Abbott foresaw the *Defender’s* influence growing along with the exodus it

spearheaded and the community it represented. Indeed, by 1918, the *Defender* was able to sell 137 display advertisements, an increase of 93 percent over the premigration figure three years earlier. But this self-interest transcended the personal ambitions of individual politicians and entrepreneurs; it included a racial component. The *Defender* voiced the hopes of much of black Chicago's business community and political leadership when it emphasized the progress that the migration could bring to the race. Cognizant of the direction of the American economy, Abbott proclaimed that participation in the industrial sector of the economy constituted the linchpin of success for any ethnic group in the United States. "Our entrance into factories, workshops and every other industry open to man places us on an entirely different footing," the editor declared; "We become a factor in the economy to be reckoned with." The relationship between individual accomplishments, community prosperity and power, and racial progress placed the migrants at center stage.

This optimism put a great burden on the newcomers. "IF YOU DO WELL YOU WILL SERVE NOT ONLY YOURSELF BUT THE ENTIRE RACE," the Urban League told them. Conversely, failure would discredit the race; "respectable" black Chicagoans recognized that even if they could avoid living among migrants they would still be associated with them. If some Old Settlers reacted like the "Old Philadelphians" who "secretly hoped that whites would recognize that they were different from the southerners and treat them accordingly," most more realistically appreciated the importance of race as a category central to white social attitudes. Like German Jews who in the late nineteenth century feared that the influx of their coreligionists from eastern Europe would endanger their marginal but substantial foothold in genteel Chicago, black Old Settlers considered themselves vulnerable to stereotyped images dominated by visibly outlandish newcomers. It was essential to organize the community to handle the problem before it grew so large as to overshadow the community's respectable core. "We are our brother's keeper, whether we like it or not," the *Defender* reminded its readers. "It is our duty, if resolved to a selfish duty, to guide the hand of a less experienced one, especially when one misstep weakens our chance for climbing." The socialization of the migrants represented a "trial" for the race, and Chicago's black leadership was not about to permit the test to proceed without its intervention.

Chicago's black middle-class residents assumed that the migrants had to be guided and controlled from the moment they stepped from the train. Mechanisms of social control in the South—church, lodge, gossip, and established customs—were weaker in Chicago, according to one Urban League official, and the migrants were thus more susceptible to dissolution and "disorganization." Ida B. Wells-Barnett lamented that migrants were first attracted to State Street, where "not a single uplifting influence" competed with the saloons, poolrooms, and cabarets. The attractions of State Street and the old vice district at the northern end of the Black Belt threatened the migrants' moral fiber and sobriety as well as the reputation of the community. For if the newcomers fell easily into degeneracy as many Old Settlers feared—and whites expected—they would reflect poorly upon the race. They also would be unable to serve as efficient industrial workers or respectable citizens. By inculcating restraint, the Old Settlers hoped to protect the migrants' souls and pocketbooks, while preserving the community's honor.

The Urban League and the *Defender*, assisted by the YMCA, the larger churches, and a corps of volunteers, fashioned a variety of initiatives designed to help—and

pressure—the newcomers to adjust, not only to industrial work, but to urban life, northern racial patterns, and behavior that would enhance the reputation of blacks in the larger (white) community. The *Defender* repeatedly published exhaustive lists of “do’s and don’t’s,” calling attention to examples of unacceptable behavior:

- Don’t use vile language in public places.
- Don’t act discourteously to other people in public places.
- Don’t allow yourself to be drawn into street brawls.
- Don’t use liberty as a license to do as you please.
- Don’t take the part of law breakers, be they men, women, or children.
- Don’t make yourself a public nuisance.
- Don’t encourage gamblers, disreputable women or men to ply their business any time or place.
- Don’t congregate in crowds on the streets to the disadvantage of others passing along.
- Don’t live in unsanitary houses, or sleep in rooms without proper ventilation.
- Don’t violate city ordinances, relative to health conditions.
- Don’t allow children to beg on the streets.
- Don’t allow boys to steal from or assault peddlers....
- Don’t be a beer can rusher or permit children to do such service.
- Don’t abuse or violate the confidence of those who give you employment.
- Don’t leave your job when you have a few dollars in your pocket....

The Urban League, through such activities as “Strangers Meetings,” leafleting, and door-to-door visits, advised newcomers on their duties as citizens: cleanliness, sobriety, thrift, efficiency, and respectable, restrained behavior in public places. Under the League’s auspices, for example, hundreds of club women visited the homes of migrants in 1917, offering “messages emphasizing the necessity of being orderly citizens, efficient working-men and good housekeepers.” Perhaps expressing greater confidence to a white audience than he would privately among others of his race and class, Dr. George Cleveland Hall predicted that newcomers would “rapidly adjust themselves to their changed surroundings if they are reached by the proper people and get the right tip.” Under the tutelage of the respectable citizens of black Chicago, migrants were to become urbanized, northernized, and indistinguishable from others of their race. At the very least, they would learn to be as inconspicuous as possible.

This campaign exposed cultural conflicts generated by tensions along lines of age, class, and region. “Respectability,” the badge of middle-class status in black Chicago, defined the standards to which migrants were held, and manifestations of southern culture—clothes, food, accent—drew both attention and reproof. So also did boisterous leisure activities undeniably urban and not specific to any region. The middle-class sensibilities of the men and women who spoke for black Chicago’s newspapers, Urban League, clubs, and churches resembled those of settlement house reformers and others who sought to compete with streets, saloons, and other loci of popular culture for the souls and leisure hours of lower-class youth.

Mostly young men and women, the newcomers indulged in forms of public behavior characteristic of young urbanites, frequently antagonizing churchgoers with

their apparent repudiation of conventional morality and attraction to the “gay life.” They hung out on street corners, threw loud parties, dressed in the latest risqué fashions, and enjoyed the bright lights of the city’s night life. Like the black alderman who wanted to “forbid loitering on street corners,” community leaders objected to the tendency of young men and women to converse loudly, in language not entirely within the bounds of genteel respectability. Spending evenings in dance halls, and “dancing in a rareback fashion entirely too close to her partner to be anything other than VULGAR,” aroused the *Defender’s* ire as quickly as wearing tight or “abbreviated clothes.” Young blacks could make a better impression on whites and improve themselves by partaking in the “wholesome recreation” available in community centers, churches, and the YMCA and YWCA.” The propensity toward less acceptable forms of leisure activity probably had little to do with regional origins, but the conclusion that migrants were a large part of the “youth problem” was not unreasonable. The migrants were, on the whole, considerably younger than the adult black population already living in Chicago. Moreover, young blacks in Chicago were likely to be migrants, while older blacks were likely to have arrived before 1910. Four-fifths of all black Chicagoans in 1920 between ages twenty and thirty-four had arrived in the city since 1910, while less than half of those older than forty-five were newcomers. The importance of bright lights and leisure opportunities had been central to migrants’ image of Chicago as a “freer” environment than the rural or small town South. It seemed logical to the older, settled residents that recent arrivals would be particularly susceptible to the temptations of city life because of their unfamiliarity with its dangers and their supposedly undeveloped sense of self-discipline.

Much of what offended and embarrassed those concerned with maintaining standards, however, was identifiably southern. The Deep South origins of the wartime era migrants distinguished them not only from native Chicagoans, but also from those who had arrived earlier, usually from the Upper South. The differences were obvious to black Chicagoans: there was no mistaking the regional provenance of streetside barbecue stands and such icons as watermelon and head rags. Old Settlers grew particularly upset when newcomers publicly displayed their southern backgrounds. Both the *Defender* and the *Whip* castigated women who were “frequently seen in their boudoir caps, house slippers and aprons around the corner in the grocery store,” or who appeared in public wearing a head rag. “We are not in the Southland and there is no mark of servitude that must be placed on a man or woman of color in these climes,” the *Defender* informed migrants who wore overalls and aprons downtown, on streetcars, and to places of amusement. An Urban League leaflet was equally stern, demanding that the migrants pledge “I WILL REFRAIN from wearing dust caps, bungalow aprons, house clothing and bedroom shoes out of doors.”

To an extent, these lectures represented more than mere condescending admonitions. Many migrants did indeed to adjust to different standards of dress and cleanliness in public, because in the South whites expected blacks to be dirty and poorly attired. Women who distressed Ida B. Wells-Barnett by coming to employment offices wearing “boudoir caps” had merely dressed as their former employers in the South would have expected. To travel to work wearing anything but work clothes could brand a black southerner as “uppity.” In Chicago, Old Settlers told that same worker that public appearance should not reveal one’s work activity because “servitude” was no longer assumed. Even the seemingly straightforward issue of rudeness on streetcars was related

to southern culture and involved a form of adjustment on the part of migrants. Southern blacks were not by nature rude, W. E. B. Du Bois explained, but had learned that any politeness toward a white woman could easily result in “the most outrageous misconstruction.” Indifference, bordering on sullen hostility, was a safer attitude on streetcars in the South. Old Settlers hoped to teach the migrants how to earn the respect of whites, as opposed to the southern imperative of alleviating whites’ fears of the “uppity nigger.”

Unlike socially secure settlement-house workers, who valued the folk music, art, and material culture of their European immigrant clients, Chicago’s black middle class could see little redeeming value in southern black folk culture. Symbolizing the dependency and degradation of blacks in the rural South, it had no place in the modern northern city and only confirmed white stereotypes, thereby tarnishing the image that Chicago’s black community wished to project. Although the image of the “golden age” of race relations before the migrants arrived, as later recalled by some Old Settlers, represented a view distorted by time and open conflict, black Chicagoans had worked long and hard to attain what civil rights they had won. Many feared that the already tenuous racial peace in Chicago would dissolve as whites reacted against crude peasants unaccustomed to the proper exercise of those rights. Kathryn Johnson, the associate editor of the *Half-Century*, a black middle-class women’s magazine published in Chicago, feared “an aggravation of the segregation problem which has been so prevalent with us since Mr. Wilson became president. Many of those who are coming will be imprudent and will take their newly found liberty for license.” A member of one of “the first colored families in Chicago” worried about what “to do with all of these Negroes from the South coming in here? They look terrible. They sit down on the street car beside white people and I am sure that there is going to be trouble.” When trouble came, in the form of a race riot in 1919, many longtime residents blamed the migrants. One native Chicagoan insisted in 1927 that until the Great Migration “we had been accepted as equals.” Even the *Defender*, the champion of the exodus, commented (inaccurately) that “there was absolutely no friction until the advent of a handful of undesirables who ‘felt their oats’ and cut loose upon the slightest provocation.”

It was not that the Old Settlers objected to the migrants exercising such rights as sitting where they pleased on streetcars. Indeed, many Old Settlers feared that southerners supposedly accustomed to meekly submitting to whites would fail to assert their rights and thereby indicate that blacks were by nature docile. Migrants had to learn the crucial distinction between exercising rights and what the *Defender* called “bad deportment,” which reflected poorly on the race. Social class and “respectability” lay at the heart of the issue. Civil rights aside, for example, stockyards workers were instructed not to sit next to “women who are elegantly attired,” especially if the laborers had not changed their clothes and washed before leaving work. The *Searchlight*, another black newspaper, agreed, accusing migrants of “forcing on us here in Chicago a condition similar to the one down South” by boarding the streetcars after work still wearing dirty dresses and overalls. Newcomers were also censured for loud talking, rudeness to conductors, and other streetcar conduct that showed “low breeding.” Neither Chicago’s black newspapers nor the Urban League ever tired of lecturing the migrants on proper streetcar manners. On the streetcars, migrants were most likely to be seen by middle-class whites, whose respect the black bourgeoisie were fighting so hard to win.

Not all of the Old Settlers' criticisms and lectures grew out of their fears that the newcomers would embarrass the black community or jeopardize the economic benefits promised by the cash generated by new industrial jobs. Unlike their white immigrant counterparts, middle-class black Chicagoans could not move so far away as to encounter the less refined newcomers only when attending churches that remained in the old neighborhood. Even those citizens who lived in the "best" black neighborhoods usually still lived in the ghetto and conducted much of their business, religious, associational, and leisure activities among the migrants. Old Settlers disliked this constant contact considering the transplanted southerners dirty crude and generally unpleasant. This distaste went beyond a class division, with many middle-class migrants failing to win acceptance. It was difficult to cease being southern sufficiently to meet standards set by the northern bourgeoisie. One club which accepted a number of newcomers regretted its liberality when new members suggested that the club sell chitterlings to raise money. Longtime working-class residents drew distinctions between serving in respectable white homes and toiling in factories. Although Chicago's black establishment promoted black employment in the packinghouses, steel mills, and other industries, some prominent members of the community deemed certain service work more respectable. Even those longtime residents too poor to keep moving south ahead of the migrants disdained mingling with their "crude neighbors" from the South. Migrants could not measure up to the standards of behavior demanded by the Old Settlers, unless they not only left their overalls and dirt at the plant, but also jettisoned all remnants of their background. Hostility toward, most things southern thus came to symbolize and exacerbate class tensions within black Chicago, but also drew upon notions about "respectability" that crossed class lines.

The reactions of migrants to these messages varied, especially according to class. Middle-class migrants sought acceptance into Chicago's black bourgeoisie and shared its attitudes toward street life, boisterous behavior, and the trappings of lower-class life. They no more wished to be associated with southern rural culture than did the Old Settlers. At least one newcomer worried not only about what her new neighbors might think, but also made certain that "friends back home" would not open their weekly *Defender* and discover her name among those reprimanded for unacceptable behavior.

Other newcomers, however, found the lessons condescending and either unnecessary, unwelcome, or impractical. Many had heard it all before; the Chicago Urban League's sermons on thrift, hygiene, and work habits differed little from the message emanating from Tuskegee. In Chicago, however, women encountered increased pressure to attend to the proper care of their homes. Many, especially those from rural areas, were in fact unaccustomed to the imperatives and standards of urban housekeeping. But the problem had less to do with race or geographic origins than with class. As one investigator discovered during the winter of 1919-20, working-class black women were as concerned as their white counterparts about "good housekeeping." Working-class women in general found it difficult to live up to standards set by middle-class women living in homes with proper plumbing facilities, more time for housework, and perhaps even a maid. More likely than whites to work outside the home, black women had even less time than whites facing similar obstacles. Residents of slums described by one investigator as plagued more by "bad repair" rather than the alleged "filth," recognized that admonitions could easily blame the victim. In any case, cleanliness was nobody's

monopoly. The Mississippi woman who wrote home, “Honey, I got a bath tub” needed no instruction on the virtues of washing.

Misdirected criticism extended beyond the home. Black stockyards workers were, on the whole, more conscientious than their white coworkers about showering and changing clothes before heading home. Most white workers, of course, lived near the packinghouses and did not have to ride the streetcar, where black workers—unable to eradicate the stockyards stench—attracted criticism for carrying home the aroma from their workplaces. Similar reproofs about disorderly conduct on streetcars led one newcomer from Mississippi to complain that “the whites act just as disorderly on cars as the Negroes....Nothing is ever said.”

Migrants most actively resisted attempts to change aspects of their everyday life. Despite the pleas of Old Settlers to “give us more grand opera and less plantation melodies,” the migrants did not leave their cultural baggage at the train station. “It’s no difficult task to get people out of the South,” the *Chicago Whip* remarked, “but you have a job on your hands when you attempt to get the South out of them.” Although they brought with them fewer “plantation melodies” than their fearful neighbors imagined, migrants did carry to Chicago a form of music equally disliked by many Old Settlers—the boogie-woogie, which probably had its origins in the Mississippi Delta and was closely related to southern revival music. Newcomers also continued to sing southern blues and work songs. One recently arrived huckster probably infuriated many staid Chicagoans with his products as well as his tone:

Water-mel-lone, jes’ like from down home; rosten’ ears, tatoes-tatoes-tatoes; nice ripe toma-toes; tommy-tommy-tomatoes; o-o-o-ochree and dry ingyuns.

Continuing to sing, sell, eat, and dress as they had “back home,” migrants retained cultural ties with the South. Many sustained these links by occasionally visiting kinsmen who had stayed behind. It was a relief to have left behind that region’s oppression, but even years after coming North, many migrants retained a certain ambivalence about what came to be called “down home.” Richard Wright, even before leaving the South, recognized what Chicago’s Old Settlers would reluctantly learn: “I knew that I could never really leave the South, for my feelings had already been formed by the South, for there had been slowly instilled into my personality and consciousness, black though I was, the culture of the South.”

Along with retaining some of their southern customs, migrants also established their own institutions in Chicago. Many southern business and professional people followed members of their community to Chicago, hoping to retain their patronage. By 1919, approximately two-thirds of all black-owned businesses in Chicago were operated by what the *Whip* called “newcomers” and an Urban League spokesman called “migrants.” Appealing to the newcomers’ affinity for “down home” cooking, Ira Guy and R. L. Mason opened the Southern Home Cooking and Southern Lunch Room restaurants, while another establishment advertised “Good Things to Eat: Southern Cooking.” Other businesses, such as Robert Horton’s Hattiesburg Shaving Parlor, appealed to more specific loyalties. Even newcomers from regions sending relatively few migrants to Chicago could find continued identification with their southern roots, at the Florida East Coast Shine Parlor or the Carolina Sea Island Candy Store.

Such establishments sometimes formed the core of a neighborhood dominated by migrants from a particular area. Horton's Hattiesburg Shaving Parlor, for example, lay in the middle of a colony of more than 150 families from Hattiesburg and its environs. Also located in this five-block stretch along Rhodes Avenue were the Mississippi Coal and Wood Company and other small businesses owned by Mississippians. "We people from Mississippi stick together—I guess it's because they made us stick together down there," explained one woman from Meridian. Another former Mississippian, referring to a different enclave, later recalled that her family had lived for eleven years in a "rough and rowdy" section of Federal Street, because "they were home people you know and we thought we could feel protected living near them." By living among fellow southerners, migrants could ease their adjustment to urban life, while sustaining familiar relationships and habits.

Migrants also created more formal institutions that brought them together with others from their former homes. By 1921, newcomers from at least nine southern states could join clubs comprising natives of their home state. Many of these clubs met regularly or held social affairs. Frequently dominated by men and women who had migrated to Chicago before the Great Migration, the clubs also sometimes served as sources of organized support for black politicians, many of whom were among those earlier migrants. They also informed migrants of the location of business and professional men from their home state and urged "home loyalty." Although some clubs, such as the Tennessee Home League, which invited "all Tennesseans" to its meetings, professed to welcome all newcomers from the appropriate state, most resembled the Arkansas Club, which set "respectability" as the "prime requisite" of membership. "We don't want it so that just any old Tom, Dick, and Harry can get in," explained one member. To those who did join, the state clubs both perpetuated loyalties to one's birthplace and helped to integrate the newcomer into black Chicago's social and political life.

The most important institutions founded by the migrants were their churches. At first, the city's established black churches exerted special efforts to recruit newcomers, and thousands of migrants readily accepted the invitations. During 1917-18, each week's *Defender* carried messages from churches claiming that "newcomers are welcome," "strangers welcome," or "everyone is welcome and made to feel at home." Some of the larger churches, led by Olivet Baptist and Institutional AME, viewed the newcomers as a challenge to their expanded programs, which included such services as employment bureaus, housing directories, and day nurseries. Others offered guidance, dynamic preaching, or "good singing." The migrants responded enthusiastically. Olivet, which soon claimed to be the largest Baptist church in the world, added more than five thousand new members between 1916 and 1919. Arriving from Alabama in 1922, Mary Fluornoy went to Olivet her "first week here. We couldn't get in. We'd have to stand up. I don't care how early we'd go, you wouldn't get in." Smaller congregations grew as well. Walters AME Zion more than tripled its membership in three years, counting 351 newcomers by 1919. Such increases were not unusual, as men and women coming from towns and rural areas where ministers passed through only once or twice each month to preach in crude buildings were impressed even with Chicago's more modest institutions."

The enthusiasm, however, was often temporary. Many migrants felt distinctly uncomfortable in Chicago's churches, because of both the size of some congregations and the style of worship acceptable to their ministers and laity. Migrants, especially those

from the rural South, were accustomed to services accompanied by improvisational singing, “shouting,” and other forms of active participation and demonstrative enthusiasm. These men and women reacted coolly to the intellectual sermons of such ministers as Reverend William Braddan of Berean Baptist Church, who refused to hold revivals and prohibited standing in his church during services. Even at such places as Walters AME Zion, where migrants apparently worshipped as they pleased, they could hardly be unaware that the pastor, Reverend W. A. Blackwell, considered “singing, shouting and talking being the most useless ways of proving Christianity.” Most Chicago ministers permitted traditional “enthusiasm,” and many of the most respected among them even matched southern preachers at driving a congregation to an emotional pitch. But these ministers generally did so only as a concession to some of the older members of the congregation and as an attempt to appeal as widely as possible; they also devoted a part of the service to a more sober sermon, which some migrants found uninspiring. One woman, who had joined Olivet when she arrived in Chicago, later recalled that she “couldn’t understand the pastor and the words he used.” She soon realized that “I couldn’t sing their way. The songs was proud-like.” She left to join a smaller church. Indeed, in most of the major churches, the majority of Old Settlers considered “the old time religion” preferred by this woman and many other migrants to be outdated, unrefined, and embarrassing. One group of migrants from rural Alabama and Georgia told an interviewer in 1917 that they needed a church “where they can sing without appearing strange, and where they can hear somebody else pray besides themselves.” A newcomer from Slidell, Louisiana, felt similarly uncomfortable at Pilgrim Baptist Church, because “nobody said nothing aloud but there were whispers all over the place.” Religious practice in such an atmosphere was not the communal experience that many southerners expected on Sunday mornings.

Migrants not only objected to the general atmosphere and style of worship characteristic of Chicago’s “old line” churches, but also found that they did not receive the individual recognition to which they were accustomed. One woman left the first church she joined because it was “too large—it don’t see the small people....The preacher wouldn’t know me, might could call my name in the book, but he wouldn’t know me otherwise. Why, at home whenever I didn’t come to Sunday School they would always come and see what was the matter.” This experience especially offended men and women who had been influential members of their churches back home. In response, some chose to organize their own congregations, frequently joining with former townsmen or other dissatisfied migrants seeking an alternative. A church founded by a small group of migrants provided an additional link to their southern backgrounds and to other newcomers. Some churches comprised mainly men and women who had worshipped together in the South and had either come North with their pastor or had sent for him after they arrived. Others, like Christ Temple Mission, which called itself a “Branch of Christ Temple Church, Jackson, Miss.,” reconstituted themselves under new ministers. In some cases migrants finally managed to establish a struggling storefront church by finding a minister from their home state who could augment the membership by attracting others from a different part of that state. In this way, Monumental Baptist Church grew from a small “prayer band” into an “Alabama” church. Generally launched as storefronts (as most of the established churches had been earlier), many of these churches eventually grew to rival older institutions.

This process of joining churches, splitting off, and starting new institutions was part of the adjustment process for many newcomers. By first entering large churches, newcomers could receive assistance in finding jobs and homes, meet other southerners, and perhaps glean useful information from announcements during services. Eventually migrants could decide whether to leave the large church for a more intimate congregation or try a different—but established—church. Chicago offered a seemingly endless variety, not only of denominations but of styles and sizes. A migrant could choose from among large churches like South Park Methodist Episcopal which had been organized by fifty Mississippians before the exodus and had grown to twenty-five hundred by 1919; any of the “old line” churches dominated by middle-class Old Settlers and featuring intellectual sermons on topics of social and political relevance; small churches such as St. John AME, which promised “old time religion”; revival tents; “rescue missions” offering services every night; and eclectic sects like the Church of the New Jerusalem, where the pastor “preached from a deck of cards.” On the whole, migrants tended to stick with traditional denominations, although by 1919, twenty Holiness storefront churches presaged a trend which would increase that sect’s membership to one-fifth of all black churchgoers within the next decade. Many migrants probably moved around a great deal, becoming what some ministers scornfully called “church tramps.” One woman later recalled that “[Although I] was raised Baptist, when I came here I didn’t like their services so I went from church to church, but they was all the same.” Another migrant went from the Come and See Baptist Church to the Hope Well Baptist Church, and finally gave up and organized the New Galilee Baptist Church.

This kind of shopping around would have been impossible for most migrants before they came to Chicago. Rural villages and towns in the South generally supported at most one church of any given denomination; considering the importance of the church to community life, the limitation was significant. In Chicago options were circumscribed by attitudes of Old Settlers, but migrants exercised considerable discretion over which church community they joined. Experimentation not only facilitated their adaptation to urban Chicago, but was in itself a form of adaptation.

As a mode of adaptation to the new environment, choosing a church—or starting a new one—symbolized the hopes of many migrants. Migration not only had increased the number of available options; those options included the chance to adjust to the urban North while still retaining aspects of one’s southern cultural heritage. In addition, many could realistically look forward to “bettering their condition” either by joining a more prestigious church or by organizing and leading a new congregation. And all this took place within institutions controlled by blacks, relatively insulated from oppressive race relations. “I goes every Sunday and Wednesday nights to prayer meeting,” remarked one migrant who belonged to Olivet Baptist Church, “just to thank God that he let me live to go to a place of worship like that, a place where my people worship and ain’t pestered by the white men.”

It is not surprising that a migrant might express in such a manner one aspect of the church’s importance in her life. Olivet was dominated by Old Settlers—although not the elite of black Chicago—but it was still a black institution. Indeed, religious life in black Chicago suggests the complexity of the relationships between migrants and the city’s established black community. If many migrants felt alienated from Chicago’s black religious institutions, others remained within the large churches. The hostility that existed

in individual churches along lines of class and geographic origin was partially bridged by the fact of membership in a single institution and the leadership of the minister. The divisions both within and between churches existed alongside a significant degree of cohesion based upon identification as part of Chicago's black community and its institutions. Although the fissures were significant, they were neither as deep nor as wide as the gap separating white and black. Migrants found a black community that seemed snobbish and condescending at times; but nevertheless the established community and the migrants shared one thing which set them all off from the rest of Chicago—race.