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University of Massachusetts Amherst

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**THE LIMITATIONS OF RACIAL DEMOCRACY:
THE POLITICS OF THE CHICAGO URBAN LEAGUE,
1916-1940**

A Dissertation Presented

by

PRESTON HOWARD SMITH, II

**Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 1990

Department of Political Science

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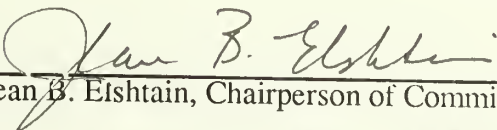
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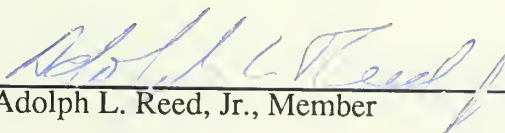
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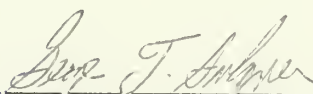
PRESTON HOWARD SMITH, II

Approved as to style and content by:


Jean B. Elshtain, Chairperson of Committee


Nicholas Xenos, Member


Adolph L. Reed, Jr., Member


George T. Sulzner, Department Head
Department of Political Science

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I like to dedicate this dissertation to my grandparents -- Joseph M. and Madalyn S. Smith, Ernest W. and Lillie M. Graham --and to the many black families who came to Chicago looking for a better life.

ABSTRACT

THE LIMITATIONS OF RACIAL DEMOCRACY: THE POLITICS OF THE CHICAGO URBAN LEAGUE, 1916-1940

MAY 1990

PRESTON HOWARD SMITH, II, B.A., HOWARD UNIVERSITY

Ph.D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS

Directed by: Professor Jean B. Elshtain

This study is an examination of the social basis of the Chicago Urban League's politics from its origins to the eve of World War II. The Urban League's origins in Chicago as well as other large Midwestern and Northeastern cities began in the context of the dramatic migration of blacks during World War I. The League is an interracial organization with a black professional staff serving a black clientele. The League sought to mitigate against the hardships caused by the dislocations of internal migration and settlement of black Southerners, i.e., intermittent employment, substandard housing, inadequate and discriminatory relief, etc. The organization did not see itself as a relief dispensing agency for Chicago's Afro-American citizens, but more a coordinating agent that administered (directly or by referral) the basic needs of the newly arrived migrant. While it is hard to argue against the ministrations of black material needs, the process of coordination implied a socialization that needs more explicit examination. The basic thesis of the study is that the Urban League actively sought to "remake" the migrant in the organization's effort to engineer race relations in Chicago.

In Chapter One, I provide a social and intellectual backdrop to origins of the Chicago branch of the National Urban League during the Great Migration and the nascent growth of an administrative state and corporate economy. The League's officials overstated the helplessness of Southern black migrants in order to legitimize its role as interpreter of

interpreter of their needs. Black rank and file needs were defined as requiring the acquisition of practical and social skills for full citizenship in the liberal and competitive North.

In Chapter Two, I discuss the Chicago Urban League's policy on strikebreaking and unionization as an attempt to evaluate their congruence with black workers' interests. What I find is a complex and uneven record with regard to supporting black labor activity during this time period. I found, in fact, that the organizations' efforts to socialize black newcomers both at the workplace and at home was more a testimony to a division of interests. The League sought to organize neighborhoods and communities, and spoke in terms of a unitary black community, masking ambiguous but nonetheless real social divisions.

In Chapter Three, I examine the rationale and methods of race relations engineering, i.e., the management of interracial "contacts" and social boundaries by a interracial elite. The attempt at engineering was a not necessarily a success, but its attempt was anti-democratic in conception and practice. The League as black gatekeepers to the American dream placed particularistic requirements on blacks attempting to gain entry into the mainstream. Therapeutic intervention through social work provided the method to black's peculiar form of Americanization. The omnipresent notion of "adjustment" suggested the manipulation of social policy by black and white social technicians in the name of serving black migrants.

In conclusion, I argue that racial democracy narrowly conceived as racial parity limited the Urban League's social horizons and ignored the real structure of racial inequality in the United States.

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INTRODUCTION

During the late 1960s an important segment of Afro-American society gave voice to a profound disillusionment with American society. Calls for Black Power were frequently mingled with rejection of the "American way of life" on the grounds of its structural inequality in addition to its racial exclusivity. The emerging conventional wisdom at that time was that blacks were not sure that they wanted to integrate into the American mainstream because of the nature of its institutions. Looking back, this moment in Afro-American history seems all too brief. It has been overshadowed by the scramble for "inclusion," "our share," and "racial parity." I contend that racial democracy has meant simply giving blacks their proportionate share of the American pie. The belief that racial parity is possible was held so dearly, that the possibility that American society could not accommodate this wish was not entertained. The Urban League represents an almost century-long effort at advancing the race. The League originated during the Progressive Era characterized as a "seedtime for racial reform" culminating into the civil rights movement (Weiss 1974). It had all the characteristics of a modern bureaucratic organization, specifically, trained professionals who directed the reform efforts, and had an emphasis on social investigation as a precondition to reform. Because of the League's longevity and modern organizational structure, a study of the League's politics would give us some clues about the origins of a dominant approach to black urban problems. There are two premises that were the basis of the Urban League's orientation: (1) the main problem confronting Afro-Americans was their exclusion, based on race, from participating and receiving the benefits of American society; (2) in order to gain entrance into the American mainstream the League had to convince white gatekeepers that blacks were just like them, only they had a different skin color. This claim had to be substantiated, so the League attempted to remake ordinary blacks, especially those who were migrating from the rural South, into acceptable middle-class Americans. The League used the methods of

therapeutic social work—remedial intervention by social experts (Polsky 1983)—to accomplish the acculturation of poor blacks. In a sense the Urban League struck a bargain with white elites. They essentially said that their organization would prepare black people for full citizenship, i.e., acquire middle-class habits. What white business and government elites had to do was to provide access to private and public institutions for blacks when the latter could demonstrate their acceptability. In this context, protest by the League was only engaged in when whites did not hold up their end of the bargain, e.g., Jewish merchants on State Street who were the targets of the “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” jobs campaign in 1930 that the League endorsed. The League basically engaged in a politics of inclusion. They assumed that blacks would follow the path of upward mobility that previous ethnic groups had traveled. Given a fairly rigid opportunity structure, which did not allow wholesale but only selective upward mobility, the League’s politics of inclusion was necessarily a middle-class politics. The League believed that blacks would someday benefit from the ever expanding economy, they just had to be prepared, vocationally and attitudinally, to take their place in society. Only those blacks who were positioned, by various combinations of acquired privilege, hard work, talent and luck, for upward mobility, would be able to benefit from a politics which called for the vertical integration of blacks in American institutions. Not only did the League’s politics limit its gains to “black strivers,” but its exclusive focus on inclusion rendered it unable to forecast the kinds of structural problems the black poor face today.

The League’s approach had two negative consequences for the political agency of the black rank and file. One was their negative stance toward any mass protest politics. The acceptance of blacks seemed to require channeling their discontent into manageable and respectable channels. Any errant political act was considered to have dire consequences on the whole black community, especially, the black middle class (Strickland 1966). The

second depoliticizing consequence, which has not been thoroughly examined, resulted from the League's therapeutic social work approach. This approach had two effects. First, by positing the problems of black migrants (and by extension, any black person not ready to enter the mainstream) as one of "adjustment," political issues became administrative and therapeutic ones.

As has been pointed out in other contexts (Willingham 1975, McClymer 1980), adjustment meant that the individual had to be adjusted to his or her environment, not the other way around. Issues of employment, housing, recreation, and other social services were couched in terms of adjustment by the migrants, but not in terms of their lack of power. Access was denied to blacks because they were not ready to take full advantage of what America had to offer.

After painting a picture of the migrants' helplessness, the second effect of the therapeutic approach was to stress the need for an agent to work on their behalf. The process was considered too overwhelming for the migrant to handle by themselves. Created to manage the adjustment process for black migrants, the Urban League consistently spoke of its work along these lines. The League essentially positioned itself to speak or act on the migrant's behalf, and began to interpret the social needs and interests of the migrants. These interpretations not only reflected the middle-class focus of the League, but the very act of interpreting the migrants' needs usurped a critical function of their political agency. By the League taking up this role they were positioned to meet the self-interest of its members, who presented themselves as experts in the "Negro Problem," which was for whites and longtime black residents of Chicago, the newly arrived "uncouth" black migrants. The organization could base its leadership claim on this expertise, and the administration of black social needs opened up employment for some black professionals, including some League officials.

The following is a study of the depoliticizing consequences of the League's approach to black social problems. In Chapter One, I examine the social background to the

Urban League's founding. I focus specific attention on the character of the black migrants coming to Chicago during the Great Migration and afterwards. I also examine the character of the black community the migrants moved into. In Chapter Two, I look at the League's policy on welfare capitalism, unionization, and strikebreaking. In Chapter Three, I closely examine the League's activities in social welfare, its approach to the social work profession, and its relationship to the political movements in Chicago during the interwar period.

CHAPTER I

“THE GREAT MIGRATION” AND THE SOCIAL ORIGINS OF THE CHICAGO URBAN LEAGUE

In this chapter I will provide the social context in which the Chicago Urban League was founded. I will start by offering some background information about the Great Migration. I will discuss the impact of the Great Migration on the Chicago black community, arguing that the impact on the community's makeup was one of degree rather than kind. I will then discuss the nature of that impact in order to explain why the League emerged in the form in which it did. Last, I will talk about the dominant trends in social reform that helped shape the institutional character of the League as well.

“The Great Migration” and Its Demographic Impact on Chicago

Sources for Out-migration to Chicago

Chicago was a “mecca” to many Southern blacks who had hopes of a better life. Prior to the Great Migration, which was the peak period of migrations between 1916 and 1918, there had been a steady movement of blacks to the city. Between 1890 and 1915 the black population of Chicago increased from less than 15,000 to more than 50,000. Within

an eighteen month period, 50,000 blacks had arrived in Chicago, more than doubling its population (Mandle 1978, 72). During the decade of 1910-20, Chicago increased its black population from 44,103 to 109,458 (Smith 1966, 157-58). Actually, Chicago's black population had increased by 113 percent. This was not as much as Detroit (194 percent) but comparable to New York (114 percent) (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 77-78). At the turn of the century "over 80 percent of Chicago's blacks were born in other states. Forty-three percent came from the Upper South and border states, the largest coming from Kentucky. Tennessee and Missouri were well represented after Kentucky...Alabama, Mississippi and Georgia were areas of origin for over 3,000 black Chicagoans" (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 65). Also, nearly 3,000 blacks came from Ohio and Indiana. "As the terminus of the Illinois Central Railroad, Chicago was the most accessible Northern city for Negroes in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas" (Spear 1967, 129).

More recent past migratory trends held for the "Great Migration" during 1916-18 at least in that blacks tended to migrate "due north" from their place of origin. Of course, this had a lot to do with the fact that the railway lines were the principal form of transportation for the migrants. The big difference between the Great Migration and past trends was the number of new migrants from Deep Southern states such as Mississippi and Louisiana. Despite places of origin the sudden influx of black migrants made Chicago one of seven cities which had a black population of more than 100,000 by the end of the 1920s.

Push Factors in Blacks Migrating to the North

There has been extensive debate on the causes for the enormous movement of blacks from Southern towns, cities and farms. Generally, the debate has been over the factors which pushed blacks into migrating north. The central issue was whether blacks migrated to escape an economic situation of practical servitude or whether it was to leave behind the oppressive social life under Jim Crow. Rural blacks suffered from an especially

subordinate economic status. Their inability to buy property or to secure employment in the New South industries meant that for many blacks the only other alternative was to be trapped in a debt peonage system that kept them tied to the land. The debt peonage system was a major obstacle to black labor mobility out of the plantation economy. Debt was often incurred by blacks when they received seed and implements from the colluding landowner and merchants. Then when it came time for selling one's crops in the market the collusion between the landowner and merchant meant that the sharecropper would never make enough to get out of debt. Another advantage of the share-cropping or tenantry system, for the landowner, was instead of having to pay steady wages to a laborer, he had someone to share the risk when the prices for cotton fell (Scruggs 1971, 76; Mandle 1978, ch. 2; Kennedy [1930]1969, 44-46).

Another factor, particularly relevant cause of black out-migration from the South on the eve of World War I, was the boll weevil infestation which started in the southwest moving north and east. By 1916, the boll weevil had reached as far as Georgia and South Carolina. Adding to the agricultural depression was the heavy rainfalls of that same year caused flooding and intensified the spread of the weevil which thrives during the rainy seasons (Kennedy [1930]1969, 46-7; Scott [1920]1969, 14, 165).

Socially, blacks had become second-class citizens. The caste system which had been expressed through customs now had been formalized into legal segregation. This included in particular disenfranchisement and separate public accommodations. The social etiquette of white supremacy had carried over from the days of slavery. Anyone who violated the written or unwritten rules of segregation risked being attacked by vigilantes with the blessing or outright participation of the authorities. Blacks who had endured the indignities of everyday life under Jim Crow often moved after a race riot or lynching (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 85; Scott [1920]1969, 22, 166-67). Obviously, a reasonably secure everyday existence was sought by those blacks who voted with their feet.

Pull Factors in Blacks Migrating to the North

Like the push factors these causes can be categorized along the economic vs. social axis. Both sets of causes, which often reinforced each other, represented a general motivation for having a better life, whether it was for seeking economic opportunities or more social freedom. Economically, the North appeared to have more opportunities for blacks. These opportunities were not largely in the industrial sector of the Northern labor market. At least, not until the combination of wartime mobilization and the cessation of European immigration caused such a labor shortage as to warrant the recruitment of black labor. The Northern industrial concerns had their labor agents scouring for cheap labor in the railroad depots and centers of towns in the South. These jobs although unskilled did represent better pay than what the migrants had been making in the South. Of course, the increase in wages was often offset by the higher cost of living, especially housing costs. Since the push factors remain relatively stable throughout the Jim Crow era for blacks, the big difference in initiating the Great Migration was the pull factor of new labor demand as a result of wartime mobilization and cessation of immigration (Mandle 1978, chap. 4; Kennedy [1930]1969, 42-44; Scott [1920]1969, 17-18).

As I mentioned above, there was more freedom of movement in the North than in the South. There was not the same kind of deference paid to whites that was required by the Jim Crow system. The North was not without its vestiges of segregation, but it was not as uniformly, nor as consistently, present as it was in the South. Blacks could vote and hold office. This meant that potentially they could have some say in how their taxed monies could be spent on municipal services.

The educational opportunities in the North was a major factor in attracting blacks. Public education in the South, generally, was sub par. Add the grossly inadequate facilities for blacks and a severely shortened school year because of the exigencies of the plantation

economy and you had a poorly educated black populace. Black men and women felt a move to the North would allow better education for their youngsters, enabling them to compete for better jobs. It would provide “the path to a future free from economic dependence and inhuman physical toil” (Scruggs 1971, 78; Henri 1976, 174; Scott [1920]1969, 18-19; Kennedy [1930]1969, 50-51). Perhaps the chief motivation for blacks migrating north which encompasses both economic and socio-political factors was to gain a dignity of man and womanhood (Henri 1976, 56).

The Great Migration Movement

Blacks had looked towards “bettering their condition” ever since emancipation. This meant being in a powerless situation the only real alternative was to move. Blacks had been migrating since emancipation. They migrated primarily to rural areas within states, most of the time within counties as they chased their dream of landownership. In the 1870s, Kansas seemed to provide the best opportunity to realize that dream. That experiment having failed, blacks looked more to the city. During this period blacks contributed significantly to the South’s urbanization. But blacks’ growth rates fell behind whites after 1900 because the latter enjoyed more economic opportunities in Southern cities (Miller 1975, 187). Blacks did increase their urban population by 427,352 during the 1880-90 decade. Although the increase dropped off during the next decade to 293,408, it picked up again in 1900-10 to 442,015 (Smith 1966, 164).

The northward migratory stream, in other words was pretty constant since emancipation. As I discussed above, the structural causes for the sudden increase during World War I were due to the “push” factor of a labor surplus caused by an agricultural depression on the War’s eve and to the “pull” of Northern urban labor market demand. The primacy of labor market surplus in one region and demand in another is consistent with historical patterns of migration in the United States (Marks 1985, 23; Piore 1979, 158-59).

Now that we know the underlying structural causes, we should understand how the movement occurred. How was the information disseminated? What was the reaction of the white South to the loss of its main source of cheap labor? In many accounts of the Great Migration, labor agents and Robert Abbott's *Chicago Defender* have been identified as main agents in stimulating the migration (Scott [1920]1969; Kennedy [1930]1969). Not coincidentally, the white South identified both the labor agents and the *Defender* as targets in their futile attempt to stem blacks' northward trek.

Labor agents were for the most part catalysts to the movement. They played an important role in the early years of the Great Migration. By 1917, the movement had its own momentum (Grossman 1982). Similarly, the *Chicago Defender* played an important role stimulating the movement. Robert Abbott started the paper in 1905. He was originally from Georgia and had attended Hampton Institute. The paper went beyond the limits of Chicago and soon had the largest national circulation of any black newspaper at the time (Otley 1955, 6, 8, 138-39; Chicago Commission on Race Relations [CCRR] 1922, 524). Abbott's editorial policy of castigating the South for its oppressive conditions, and highlighting the advantages of the North was favorably received by Southern black residents who had little outlet for their discontent (Grossman 1982, 33; Henri 1976, 77). Following his editorial policy, Abbott's enthusiastic support for the migration gave it wide public exposure. In fact, Abbott gave the movement an inauguration, titling the phenomenon, "The Great Northern Drive" which officially began on May 15, 1917 (Henri 1976, 65; Kennedy [1930]1969, 55).

For potential migrants, the *Defender* represented a key part of their information network. They could read about conditions in Chicago and in the North in general. Advertisements for jobs were listed in the paper. Also, many migrants looking for job and other information wrote the *Defender* and the Chicago Urban League (Scott 1919a; Scott 1919b). The *Defender* was disseminated through the mail and by Pullman porters as they made stops throughout the South (Grossman 1982, 36).

Perhaps the most influential source of information was that coming from the migrants themselves. After the initial stages, letters were written by relatives and neighbors to the folks back home about how the new opportunities of the North. These letters played a significant role in the migrants' information network. Even when there was some misgivings about conditions in the North, the overall picture was positive (Scott 1919b; Grossman 1982, 51). Also, earlier migrants, visiting home for a family wedding or funeral gave first hand accounts of life in the North (Grossman 1982, 55-59). Many communities covertly organized "migration clubs" with the express purpose of preparing to migrate north (Grossman 1982, 22). These sources of information tended to be more concrete, personal, and trusted than any coming from labor agents or any other outsiders (Grossman 1982, 52-54).

It is difficult to assign relative influence to various sources of information. More than likely, the sources reinforced each other. What is important to be gleaned from this discussion is the active role the migrants took themselves in finding out information, and making an informed decision once they consulted many sources. Blacks had been led into thinking that Kansas was the promised land, and were disappointed. After that experience, they now looked more skeptically at the information (Grossman 1982, 18). Nonetheless, they were involved in rational decision-making. White Southerners who blamed labor agents and/or the *Chicago Defender* assumed that blacks were being influenced by some outside source. They assumed that blacks could not make an informed decision on their own (Grossman 1982, 22). Contemporaries missed the significance of the Great Migration, which was expressed by the active stance Southern blacks took toward their situation. The movement represented Southern blacks' attempt to gain some control over their lives by leaving a situation of powerlessness to one they hoped would allow them to live their life with some security and dignity (Grossman 1982, 66; Henri 1976, x).

Social Profile of Migrants

The purpose of this section is to attempt to get an accurate picture of the black migrants who arrived during the Great Migration. I want to look at the evidence which could shed some light on the reality of the popular conception of the typical migrant to Chicago and other Northern urban areas. The kind of assistance needed by the migrants would be determined by their educational attainment, job skills, and familiarity with an urban lifestyle. By determining the character of the migrants we may be in a better position to assess the appropriateness of the assistance rendered by the Chicago Urban League.

The accounts, at that time, of the typical migrant residing in Chicago is that they were illiterate, ignorant, and generally unfamiliar with modern urban industrial standards of working and living. Is the imagery of the migrant painted by contemporary observers accurate? The problem with getting an accurate picture is the lack of data. Without this data it is difficult to compare the characteristics of the migrants during the war period and those migrants who came previously and after this period (Lieberson 1978, 120). Lieberson feels the difference was expressed by the contrary imagery of manumitted or fugitive slaves (old settlers) and those blacks who were recruited by industrial labor agents and came on their own during World War I (1980, 219).

Geographic Origins

Allan Spear in his classic *Black Chicago* describes the shift in the geographic origins of the black migrants in this way: "The gradual prewar influx from the border states gave way to a sudden, large-scale migration of poorly educated, unskilled Negroes from the most backward areas of the Deep South" (1967, 129). The majority of black migrants going to Chicago were from rural Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 79; J. Hill 1924, 102). Still unclear is what were the typical

characteristics of the black men and women who left their homes for new lives in the North? Clearly, those Afro-American citizens who migrated were not an undifferentiated mass.

Most accounts of the Great Migration corroborate Spear's assumption that blacks largely came from the "most backward regions" of the Deep South (Kennedy [1930]1969, 40; Scott [1920]1969; Spear 1967, 129; Johnson and Campbell 1981, 79; Kusmer 1986, 112; J. Hill 1924, 102). Some recent accounts have described the northward migrations, including the period during World War I and after, as "a two-step process" (Marks 1985; Miller 1975, 190; Henri 1976, viii; Haynes 1924, 303). The two-step process argument asserts that many of the migrants that traveled to Northern cities did so mostly from Southern cities. Moreover, those who left from Southern cities were replaced by migrants from the plantation areas and smaller towns. Of course, if a substantial number of migrants did have an urban experience, then the "double adjustment" to both the North and an urban area was not necessary for a significant portion of migratory pool (Kennedy [1930]1969, 40). Much of the blame for segregative conditions which seem to follow the migrations were placed on the new migrants. The "Old Settlers" (those blacks who were long-term residents in the North) blamed the "maladjustment" of the new migrants as the cause for "race friction" which led to de facto segregation (Chicago League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes [CLUCAN] 1918, 4; Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962, 73-76; Spear 1967, 167-168; Grossman 1982, 203-213). In most recent accounts, scholars have suggested that patterns of racial segregation preceded the swelling of the ghettos after 1915 or claimed that whites' latent hostile attitudes were triggered when the sudden influx of large numbers brought blacks more to the attention of the white community (Lieberson 1978; Gerber 1980; Lewis 1984). For our purpose, the importance of this finding would be to see if the focus on migrants' behavior by black social agencies, like the Urban League, was warranted by the migrant's lack of familiarity with urban standards of conduct.

A Labor Department's survey during the 1916-18 period reported that half the migrants came from towns (U.S.D.L. [1919] 1969; Henri 1976, 69). Of course, the nature of Southern towns could not be characterized as being very urbanized. There was a wide gap between these Southern towns and a city on the scale of a Chicago (Haynes 1924, 273; Grossman 1982, 186). The census material of the period shows little displacement of the Southern urban population, it appears that a two-step process was in effect with migrants moving from plantations and smaller towns to Southern cities. From cities such as Birmingham, Jackson, New Orleans, blacks went to Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland (Miller 1975, 190-1; Scott [1920] 1969). However, since the cities were the central location for railroad travel to the North, it is not clear how many who left from the cities were relatively long-term residents, and how many came to the city only to leave again shortly after their arrival. One scholar thinks at the height of the 1916-17 migration many blacks who came from the rural areas and only stayed in the cities for two to three weeks, sometimes left sooner for the North (Grossman 1982, 186-187).

Additional evidence that a good number of black migrants did come from cities can be inferred from the labor displacement process going on in the decade preceding the Great Migration. The depression that was occurring in the plantation areas in 1915-16 drove many unskilled laborers to the cities where they sought employment opportunities and better services (Rabinowitz 1978). Many large landowners used the devastation of their cotton crop as an opportune time to diversify their product. The diversification process meant the displacement of many unskilled workers because the new crops, or activities such as breeding cattle was less labor intensive (U.S.D.L. [1919] 1969, 21; Marks 1985, Grossman 1982, 85; Washington 1917, 501).

These displaced laborers sought work in the burgeoning industries of the New South. Blacks were excluded from the new textile industries, but were employed by the lumbering, turpentine, and saw mills. These industries were located in towns as opposed to cities, suggesting some industrial experience by migrant blacks. Those blacks, displaced

by the plantation economy's diversification migrated to urban areas and put pressure on the skilled black artisans whose positions were already precarious due to racial exclusion by white craftsmen. Unable to practice one's craft (or pass it on to their sons), meet new industry standards, nor able to compete with the cheaper labor of the displaced rural laborers, these skilled black workers migrated north looking for better opportunities (Marks 1985, 11; Scott [1920] 1969; Rabinowitz 1980, 68-69; Worthman and Green 1971, 54). A report in 1924 on Cleveland claimed that a large percentage of the Southern blacks studied came from Southern cities. Another study of skilled workers found the bulk of them coming from cities (Marks 1985, 10). Although not a majority, clearly a substantial portion of the migrants had an urban experience.

New South cities kept pace with Chicago and other Northern cities in terms of the complexity of the problems blacks faced: employment and union discrimination, increasing residential segregation, inadequate city services, poor housing, etc., (Haynes 1924, 273; Rabinowitz 1978; Miller 1975, 185-87; Scruggs 1971). The main difference is that in the Southern cities *de facto* segregation existed (Grossman 1982, 187). For blacks coming from this experience, regional and cultural differences notwithstanding, Chicago's social problems would not be overwhelming.

Industrialization in the South, although slow, had contributed to the growth of small cities and towns, all of which contained sizeable black populations. One author found that "older, slow-growing Southern cities" retained more racial intermingling than New South cities (New Orleans, Charleston and Mobile vs. Atlanta and Birmingham). It appears that the level of formal segregation was tied to the complexity of the urban structure (Kusmer 1986, 109-110; Scruggs 1971, 83). Birmingham, for example, a true New South city founded after the Civil War, was more segregated than older and less industrialized cities in the region (Miller 1975). Ever since antebellum times, cities had been difficult locations to maintain social control over the black population because of the latter's anonymity (Takaki 1979, 199; Scruggs 1971, 74). As the New South became

more industrialized and urbanized, segregation by custom had to be replaced by de jure segregation. The antebellum tradition of personal and “reciprocal” ties made segregation by custom particularly effective. It was exactly these personal ties which were being undermined by the abstract, impersonal social relations which emanated from the new industrial roles of manager and “free” labor adopted by former plantation owners and slaves.

Moreover, the new generation of black male youth, who did not have any ties to the antebellum traditions, came of age during the 1880s and 90s, and posed a particular threat to the social order in New South cities. Young blacks had become more restless as they searched for better employment opportunities and called for citizen rights. As well, crime attributed to young black males alarmed the white city fathers. Blacks showed little fear of the police, and in fact, engaged in the practice of wresting away black suspects from the police who had been arrested. Political agitation and the defiance of authority were less controllable than in the countryside. But the rural areas with the activities of the Colored Farmers Alliance was not inactive (Henri 1976, 4-11). White elites pushed through legal segregation with the complicity of the white rank and file to supplant segregation built on personal ties (Rabinowitz 1978). Social distance had to be maintained if physical distance could not in the crowded city (Scruggs 1971, 74-75).

Occupational Distribution of Migrants

What occupations did the migrants have before making the northward trek? And what occupations did they inherit upon their arrival? The data on specific occupations of the migrants is scant since it is difficult to extricate them from the larger black population. We can at least get a sense of the range of occupations and the proportionate numbers of blacks in those occupations.

By 1890, 88 percent of all blacks gainfully employed were either in agriculture or in personal or domestic service (U.S Dept. of Commerce [USDC], 72; Rabinowitz 1980, 63). The majority of workers in the South at this time were in the agricultural field, 62 percent versus 28 percent in domestic and personal service. For their Northern counterparts it was the inverse: 63 percent in domestic and personal service as opposed to 16 percent in agriculture (USDC, 73). Black women drawn into the economy because of the low-wage labor market the men found themselves in, were overwhelmingly in domestic and personal service (Rabinowitz 1980, 63, 76; Worthman and Green 1971, 53). While the proportion of workers in agriculture remained unchanged in the South in 1920, there was a slight increase in the percentage of black workers in the mechanical and manufacturing fields, going from five to nine percent. This figure is a little misleading because two of the industries that blacks participated in, namely mining and lumber industries, were included in the agriculture, forestry, and fishing field in the 1890 census. The percentage in the mechanical and manufacturing fields in the North and West increased from nine to twenty percent (USDC, 73). Despite the North's higher percentage of industrial workers, the overwhelming number of blacks residing in the South meant the majority of the 1.2 million black workers in manufacturing, mining, and transportation were located there (Worthman and Green 1971, 52).

Although the percentage of Southern black workers in the manufacturing field lagged behind their Northern brethren, they contributed greatly to the industrialization of the South. Blacks as unskilled labor "played an important part in the development of all major Southern industries," with the exception of the cotton textile industry (Rabinowitz 1980, 66). Specifically, "Alabama 55 percent of the coal miners and 80 percent of the iron ore miners were Afro-Americans" (Worthman and Green 1971, 52, 53; Rabinowitz 1980, 63). Not surprisingly, blacks had the jobs with "the lowest pay, the most irregular employment, the longest hours, the worst working conditions, and the least status and authority" (Miller 1975, 187; Rabinowitz 1980, 66, 71).

A major reason for the preponderance of blacks in the low-skill labor market was their elimination from higher skilled categories. Blacks dominated many of the skilled crafts during slavery. Soon after Emancipation, whites began to make systematic inroads into the skilled trades. By 1890 though, blacks were still very represented in the skilled trades. At this time they dominated some trades but were excluded from others. Blacks were largely in “barbering, plastering, and brickmaking, while being grossly underrepresented in the higher-paying and more prestigious fields of carpentry, plumbing, printing, and machine operation” (Rabinowitz 1980, 68-69).

Another reason for the diminution of blacks in skilled and semi-skilled jobs was the fact that many of the trades learned by blacks did not prepare them for skilled factory work (Rabinowitz 1980, 68-69). Blacks were excluded from apprenticeships that were controlled by craft unions. Black artisans were displaced by cheaper labor performed by migrant whites as well as by blacks who had recently moved to Southern cities. Finally, black artisans, unable to improve their labor standards nor compete with cheaper unskilled labor decided to migrate north (Worthman and Green 1971, 54).

There was a tiny professional and business class which was growing due to the emergence of “central-city ghettos” after 1880 (Miller 1975, 203). The typical black businessman in the South during this time had been born a slave. They were usually from rural areas, but migrated to cities immediately after the Civil War. These men had little formal education. The areas of business stemmed from personal services that served a primarily black clientele. Their occupations were mostly “liveryman, barber, undertaker, grocer, and caterer” (Rabinowitz 1980, 84).

The greatest obstacle to black business growth was the competition from better equipped white businesses. Although increasing segregation helped, an early “buy black” campaign was organized in Nashville in 1866, in order to implore the black rank and file to patronize the enterprises of the race. Segregation and race patronage certainly helped black banks and insurance companies which increased in the 1890s and early 1900s. Many of

the professionals, lawyers, doctors, and dentists, also followed business pursuits. Of course, most professionals were members of the clergy or schoolteachers (Rabinowitz 1980, 79, 84, 90).

The small group of black business and professional men sat atop the black urban social structure in 1890. This elite had managed to own property and accumulate wealth, and ensured that their offspring got all the advantages, especially higher education. Directly below this elite “was a modest-sized group of regularly employed hardworking petty tradesmen, artisans, and laborers who perhaps owned their homes and enjoyed some comforts of life.” At the bottom, were the masses of unskilled and domestic workers who had little hope of improving their economic prospects (Rabinowitz 1980, 95-96).

What attracted the varied group of black Southerners who migrated to Chicago during the period of 1916 to 1920? It is believed that the “Talented Tenth” migrated disproportionately in the period before the “Great Exodus” in 1917. This may be true, but many businessmen and professionals followed their clients North during the War and afterwards. The bulk of skilled and unskilled laborers from the South sought permanent positions in Northern industry. Still, the great majority of the black rank and file were either unskilled labor or in domestic service, not unlike the situation in the South. The wartime emergency changed all that, increasing the demand for both unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in the steel mills, stockyards, and building trades in Chicago and northern cities in general (J. Hill 1924, 104; Grossman 1982, 236-241).

The Chicago stockyards became the single largest employer of blacks during the Great Migration. “A Negro could always get a job in the stockyards...they could go to the stockyards any day of the week and get a job” (Grossman 1982, 237). The numbers corroborate the conventional wisdom which is conveyed. In 1916, there were roughly 5,000 blacks in the stockyards. Two years later, the number had increased between 10 to 12,000 (Haynes 1919b, 456). The 1920 census was taken after a sharp decline in employment. There had been a strike against the meatpackers. With the decline there were

reportedly 8, 036 black men and 570 black women employed at the stockyards. It was generally believed that almost every migrant had at some time worked in the stockyards (Grossman 1982, 237, 282; Johnson 1926, 323).

The steel industry employed the next largest number of black migrants. Illinois Steel went from employing 35 blacks in 1916 to 1,209 three year later. The U.S. Steel Gary Works, to which many migrants commuted, employed 407 blacks in 1916, 1,072 in 1917, and 1,295 a year later. The 1920 census reported a 4,313 blacks in the steel and iron industries. The number of black workers in the steel industry reflected their increased participation as a result of breaking the 1919 steel strike. Blacks were also employed in food products industries, Pullman Car shops, and steam industries. The great bulk of blacks in these industries were unskilled labor. Migrants could only get semi-skilled and skilled positions in the iron foundries where they had gotten experience before arriving. Most migrants were unfamiliar with “heavy industrial production” except for “those who had worked in Birmingham’s steel mills or in the largest saw mills in the Gulf states.” Migrants’ industrial experience was largely concentrated in meat-packing, steel, and iron industries. If a migrant could not get a job in industry they could either work as a non-industrial unskilled laborers or in the domestic and personal service. Nine thousand black men or one-fifth of black work force worked as laborers in road and street building and repairing; as draymen, teamsters, and expressman. The 11,514 black men worked as porters (not in stores), waiters, servants, janitors, and sextons. By the 1920 census, industrial work, especially for black men, had superseded domestic and personal service as the the most dominant source of black employment (Grossman 1982, 237-238, 241-242, 249; Spear 1967, 151; Johnson 1926, 323).

Female migrants were still concentrated in the domestic and personal service sector—43.9 percent of all employed black women. Chicago was one of the few cities where the portion of black women in the domestic service sector was under 50 percent. About 30 percent of the Negro female breadwinners were reported as servants....” Black

women made some inroads as mail-order clerks, and as semi-skilled workers in the lamp-making, auto cushion, needle trades, slaughtering and meatpacking industries (CCRR 1922, 379). The percentage of black women who did factory work was 12.6 percent. The number was higher during the war as 170 firms hired black women for the first time. The postwar layoffs made it clear that for most employers this was a temporary measure (Grossman 1982, 239).

For the most part the migrant was not disappointed with the employment opportunities they found in the North (Grossman 1982, 239; Spear 1967, 151). "In Chicago, blacks were "represented by larger or smaller numbers in nearly all the principal occupations or occupational groups" except no blacks were employed as a "motorman or street car conductors" (J. Hill 1924, 104). The end result of the Great Migration appeared to be blacks' representation in almost every occupational field, and gradual movement toward having numbers commensurate with their proportion of the larger population.

The Chicago Commission on Race Relations collected family histories of migrants for their report, *The Negro in Chicago*. They found that many migrants had to take jobs that were of lower status than the ones they had at home. They argued that for many adjusting to this lowered status was a large part of their becoming accustomed to Chicago. A community leader could become a part of "the struggling mass of unnoticed workers." It was not uncommon that Southern school teachers were unable to qualify for teaching positions in Chicago because of its higher educational standards. Their only resort was factory work. Newcomers became laborers (most in the Stockyards) upon arrival even though they had been, say furniture display men, stone masons, Cafe proprietors, farmers, plasterers, clergymen, and tinsmith. This sample give us an idea how certain job experiences down South translated into inferior positions in the North (CCRR 1922, 95, 166).

Marital and Family Status

The typical migrant during the Great migration era was a single, young male. The largest number of black urban residents were between the ages of 25 and 29. Henri points out that "...ghetto people were by and large young, ready and able to work hard, unattached, and relatively unencumbered by a slave past" (1976, 94; Kennedy [1930] 1969, 142). Many men did not bring their families to Chicago until they had secured some economic security. There was also a large number of single, unattached women who were attracted by the opportunities in domestic service. (Henri attributes the high proportion of single women to traditional under-counting of black males [1976, 95]). Many of these women who came to the city were taken advantage of by unscrupulous employment agents and questionable lodging houses. They had to prostitute themselves in order to pay for lodging and other services they were led to believe were free. A number of social agencies, including the Urban League, were originally set up in order to prevent this kind of exploitation. These agencies specifically met the needs of these black women without relatives coming to the city, not knowing where to live and how to get gainful employment.

The large number of single adults was reflected in the number of lodgers in the Black Belt (Johnson and Campbell 1981, 78-79; CCRR 1922, 158). The prominence of lodgers in the black community attested to the disproportionately high rents. Many black families were unable to pay the high rents and had to take in lodgers to help make ends meet or put a little money away (Henri 1976, 102; CCRR 1922, 158). Most studies of lodgers did not determine whether they were unattached or relatives of the families with whom they stayed. In the 274 families histories collected by the Chicago Commission on Race Relations included "1,319 persons, of whom 485, or 35 percent, were lodgers, living in 62 percent of the households" (CCRR 1922, 158). Despite the high rate of families with lodgers the Commission's report found the majority of the migrant families fitting the traditional notion of the nuclear family (CCRR 1922, 166). The declining birth rates and

high mortality rates also contributed to a preponderance of young adults in Chicago and other Northern cities (CCRR 1922, 159; Miller 1975, 193, 194; Woofter [1928] 1969, 33-34; Kennedy [1930] 1969, 171).

Educational Status of Migrants

Stanley Lieberson has done some of the most extensive work on the educational status of the black migrant. Because of the available data on literacy and illiteracy rates, Lieberson attempts to use this information to suggest that the new migrants weren't necessarily as ignorant as has been assumed. He remarks that "it is clear that the movement of blacks from the post-bellum South tended to lower the educational level of blacks in the North; in both 1890 and 1900, illiteracy in the North and West was about five percentage points greater than what would have been expected under the conditions in which there was no in-or out- migration during the preceding decade" (1978, 126).

Lieberson finds a small negative impact on the literacy rates in the North from the new migrants. This suggests that, given the inferior educational system in the South, black migrants had to be pretty literate not to drag down the rates significantly, or that previous migrants and long-standing residents did not have substantially high enough rates to be altered a great deal. He summarizes, "migration earlier in this century had essentially no net effect on the level of black educational accomplishment in the North and West" (1978, 127-28).

Lieberson in fact suggests that there was more selective migration occurring than previously thought. He claims that "the first great wave of black movement from South to North was extremely selective among adults, drawing heavily not merely from the younger ages but particularly from the better-educated component within each age and sex category." It can be assumed that "the better educated young adults of the South" left the South for better opportunities in the North during the post-World War I decades (131).

“Hence, based on the data available here, it is extremely unlikely that any deterioration in the position of blacks in the North could be attributed to the changing quality of the black migration stream.... In short, the new migrants had a minimal impact” (136). Lieberman’s finding will be helpful in challenging the notion that the personal characteristics of the black Southern migrants had caused increased “racial friction” which resulted in more segregation.

An earlier study anticipates Lieberman’s more extensive findings. This study reports the illiteracy rate amongst blacks in Chicago going from 8 percent in 1900 to 4 percent in 1920 with the population increasing to over 100,000 as a result of constant migration (Miller 1975, 191). Both the Lieberman (1978) and Miller (1975) findings are significant given contemporary accounts of migrant children’s “retardation” in Chicago public schools (CCRR 1922, 258, 615; Kennedy [1930] 1969, 198; Woofter [1928] 1969, 184).

Social Background and Worldview of the Migrants

As I mentioned above the Afro-Americans that migrated to the North during the period being discussed were described in contemporary and later accounts as rural “untutored” peasants (Kennedy [1930] 1969; Woofter [1928] 1969; CCRR 1922; Scott [1920] 1969; Haynes 1918, 115; Spear 1967; Johnson and Campbell 1981). Other accounts have stressed the social differentiation of the migrants who came to Chicago and other Northern urban centers. One contemporary account made a distinction between “straight” and “really” migrants. The “straight” migrant was someone who came directly to a Northern city from a plantation or rural community. It was assumed that this type of migrant was “wholly unacquainted with the complicated social and economic life of the congested community in which he finds himself.” The “really” migrant originally came from a rural area but spent some time in the cities within statelines (Thomas 1924, 71). Of

course, the latter type further corroborates the existence of a two-step migration process discussed above.

Another contemporary account (Haynes 1924) is more specific about the social backgrounds of the various migrants. The first group was made up of “floaters” and similarly unattached young men “easily attracted away from Southern towns and cities by the stories of easy work at high wages and by free transportation....” Haynes (1924) mentions that this group was the most numerous in the early years of the migration (1916-17). The second group consisted of detached single women looking for work opportunities especially in domestic service. The third group was men with unskilled or semiskilled work experience, either bringing their families, soon married, or sent for their families. The fourth group were women and their children, who were left behind came to the city for better economic and educational opportunities. Haynes saw another shift after 1919 after reports of the successful adjustments of their friends and relatives, he claimed whole families, neighborhoods, and church congregations uprooted and headed north (1924, 303; 1918, 116). There is little reason to doubt that the new migrants were both “the worthless, ignorant, semi-criminal and criminal classes, as well as the self-respecting, hard-working people who sought a better life for themselves and their children” (Henri 1976, 93-94; Scott [1920] 1969, 184).

As we discuss the many causes for the movement of hundreds of thousands of black people from the South to the urban North, we should not lose sight of the men and women who at great risk and peril took a major step to better their lives. This action took initiative, planning, sacrifice, and having access to resources, however meager. Many had to sell their land and possessions in order to make the trek. Others took a loan from an employer up North to which they would have to work off in the form of a labor contract. Whatever it took, for some the bottom line was that they wanted and tried to change their life chances by migrating north.

Many have argued that these new migrants and the hardships they faced in the North provided the preconditions for the growth of racial consciousness in Chicago and other Northern urban centers. Florette Henri (1976) insists that the radicalism of the Colored Farmers Alliance had a profound effect on the consciousness of black farmers and tenants. For many the promise of land redistribution during Reconstruction was still a lingering memory. Henri has argued that the experience of those blacks who participated in populist politics caused them to resist, or at least not to accept, Jim Crow which was becoming a reality in the South (1976, 4-11). Whether the migrants had engaged in Populist politics or not, it was clear that they viewed the North as a place where “a man is a man” (Scott 1919a, 298).

“Bettering one’s condition” sums up the hopes and expectations of the landless laborers of their new home (see Scott 1919a; Scott 1919b; CCRR 1922, 97-103). One potential migrant wrote, “[w]e are not particular about the electric lights and all i [sic] want is fairly good wages and steady work.” (Scott 1919a, 292). A letter writer from Charleston requested information about the “conditions and chances for the advancement of the Negro in the north” (296). A young man wrote T. Arnold Hill of the Chicago Urban League asking how he could “better [his] conditions in the business world.” (299) A fairly common sentiment was expressed by a man from Hamlet, North Carolina, saying he would “accept any kind of work with living wages, on tobacco farm or factory.” (310) A young woman from New Orleans described herself as “honest and neat and refined with a fairly good education.” She wrote: “I would like a position where I could live on places because its very trying for a good girl to be out in a large city by self among strangers is why I would like a good home with good people.” (317) These letters give us a litte sense of the hopes and expectations of those black people who wanted to come North.

Giving up the nineteenth-century dream of independent land ownership, blacks got caught up into the reorganization of American society from a predominantly rural, agricultural one to an urban, industrial society that had been going on since the Civil War.

In modern American society the assumption that the masses were dependent on wages and not on independently generated wealth became the norm. When owning land proved largely illusory, the masses sought better opportunities for a living wage in the industries up North. Essentially, the American Dream of upward mobility had been closed off by Jim Crow in the South. The move North represented a chance at having what all Americans supposedly had—equal opportunity (Grossman 1982, 97). Haynes reported that “[t]he mind of the masses of the Negro people received the impression that all kinds and types of work might at some time be open to them.” (1917, 305). These men and women were not simply passive objects swept up in the tides of social forces but were active agents searching for some control over their lives which not possible in the American South.

In the previous section I have argued that the migrants had a more diverse social background that had been previously believed. The significance of this discussion is it gives us a critical way of looking at historical accounts of the typical black “peasant” who migrated from the South. James Grossman, in his exhaustive study of the black migration to Chicago, concludes that the migrants came from the rural areas of the Deep South. He argued, based on the contemporary material, that the migrants, for the most part, were unskilled and semi-literate (1982, 242, 187; CCRR 1922, 94; USDL [1919] 1969, 19; Chicago Urban League [CUL] 1918, 9; Haynes 1918, 115). Peter Gottlieb who has done a recent history of the black migration to Pittsburgh concurred that blacks came mainly from the rural areas. Gottlieb pointed out that many tenant farmers worked in industry during the slack seasons of the cotton cultivation. He claimed that many young people started out first working during the slack seasons, but when it came time for them to go on their own, many chose the industrial or domestic work they had some experience doing. Also, the contacts made at these work locations provided information about other opportunities which eventually for many led them to the urban North (1987, 29, 26, 28). During the migration of 1916-1917 most black migrants from Chicago did come from the

plantation areas in the Black Belt of Alabama and Mississippi delta. But it is unlikely that they came straight off the farms (Gottlieb 1987, 30). At any rate it appears that the normal pattern of staged migration was speeded up because of the exceptional circumstances during the world war. The push factor of labor displacement in agriculture would occur again causing the Urban League to comment in 1938 that the migrants in the South had not spent time in border cities in preparation for coming North suggesting it was the usual pattern (Chicago Urban League 1938, 6).

The reason for the dominant image of the newcomer to Chicago, even after the Great Migration, had to do with the Northern blacks' rejection of the migrants' Southern, rural culture. It was assumed that since the migrants were predominantly from the plantation areas, and therefore lacked formal schooling, that they were ignorant and unfamiliar with Northern urban conditions. The assumption of rural migrants' ignorance not only came from the lack of formal schooling (and high illiteracy rates), but also their exploitation by plantation landowners. Many black migrants knew they were being exploited given the fact that the cited poor wages and little legal recourse as reasons for leaving the South. But knowing did not make much practical difference since the juridical power in the hands of the landowners and merchant elite made changing their situation virtually impossible. At any rate this assumption of ignorance had two consequences. First, certain kinds of information regarding job possibilities, locations with reasonable rents, and procedures for eliciting public aid were helpful, and agencies, including the Urban League, should be given credit for making these services available to the new migrant. Many migrants also depended on kin networks to aid them in their search for jobs and housing (Grossman 1982, 192, 62; Gottlieb 1987; Miles 1975). Secondly, the assumption of the migrants' "backwardness" meant the Northern black community would organize its efforts to socialize the newcomer to black elite standards of behavior. For the black social agencies in Chicago "practical assistance" included admonishing the migrants to give up their Southern way of life. The disparity between admonition and assistance

was probably brought into bolder relief with the migrants who had solid working and middle-class backgrounds from Southern cities. I argue that this confusion is indicative of an inability to distinguish between assistance and class tutelage, and, moreover, this was typical of such black middle class institutions like the Urban League, YMCA, and the *Chicago Defender*. To apprehend better the blurred lines of service we will look at the impact of the Great Migration on the institutional structure of the Chicago black community.

The Impact of the Great Migration on Chicago Black Community

In this section I will evaluate the impact of wartime migration on the internal structure of the black community; its external relationships with Chicago's white community; and on the ideology of race advancement.

Physical Characteristics of the Black Community

Chicago's black ghetto did not originate with the Great Migration. When blacks arrived in Chicago they entered an already developed black community. The black community had its own institutional structure, internal class relations, and a spectrum of ideologies about the future of the race (Spear 1967, ix). The internal development of the community resulted from emerging racial segregation in the city. Before 1900 there were few predominantly black neighborhoods, blacks were fairly well distributed throughout the South Side. But by 1900, the famous "Black Belt" unquestionably existed. It "was thirty-one blocks long and four blocks wide, extending from Harrison Street on the north to Thirty-ninth Street on the south, between Wabash and Wentworth avenues" (CCRR 1922,

140). In addition to the Black Belt, blacks lived in enclaves on the South Side and in other parts of the city (in middle and upper class communities in Hyde Park, Woodlawn, Englewood, and Morgan Park [Spear 1967,14]).

When black migrants did come in mass during the wartime period they basically expanded already defined areas of black residence, i.e., the South Side Black Belt. Blacks pushed southward and as far east as Cottage Grove Avenue (*Chicago Defender*, May 30, 1914 in Spear 1967, 17). Even before the great infusion of migrants, the Black Belt “was slowly expanding to accomodate the growing population.” Still, Italians were more segregated than blacks as late as 1910. This all changed by 1915: the Black Belt went from having 50 percent of all Afro-Americans residents in 1900 to 90 percent in 1920 (CCRR 1922, 140; Spear 1967, 15; Frazier 1929, 71).

Chicago had out-of-state migration rates less than most Western cities but higher than comparable Midwestern urban areas (Detroit, Cleveland). As I mentioned above, most of these people came from border states such as Kentucky and Tennessee prior to wartime migration. It was the constant influx of migrants into these black neighborhoods that caused overcrowding and subsequent deterioration. This overcrowding coupled with an upward mobility orientation caused the more affluent blacks to search for more comfortable dwellings elsewhere. It was this push into predominantly white areas, i.e., Hyde Park, that caused substantial racial tension and outright interracial conflict. Black migrants’ reasons for settling amongst their own were similar to those of white immigrants groups, e.g., a comfortable familiarity in a relatively strange environment (Frazier 1931, 77; Grossman 1982, 214). The crucial difference in the patterns of settlement was that when blacks were economically able to move they, unlike immigrant whites, faced constraints which prevented them from moving into the more desirable neighborhoods.

Occupational Structure of the Black Community

Black men and women were dependent on employment opportunities emanating from the white community, not unlike their situation in the South. Two chief differences from the employment structure in the South was the increase in wages (or wages versus shares if they were croppers or tenants), and the lack of supervision by the employer in the time after work (I will argue that there was more supervision but of a different kind later in this chapter) [Spear 1967, 156-157]. As I have indicated, employment opportunities were especially influential in attracting blacks from the South.

Blacks were by and large concentrated in the personal service sector of the labor market before the period of 1916-1918. These jobs included waiters, porters, janitors, laundresses, maids, etc. Blacks were so ubiquitous in these jobs that they became regarded as "Negro jobs." Different levels of personal service to whites represented corresponding class statuses in the pre-1915 black community. For example, porters were considered a higher class than janitors. This hierarchy is the product of the following three factors: compensation which resulted from the importance whites put on the service rendered; the kind of contact with whites and the class of whites serviced; the cleanliness of the task as well as its sartorial requirements. Even the businesses that blacks had at this time depended on services to wealthy whites. For instance, two of the more frequent kind of businesses run by blacks was barbering and catering. Even the few professional blacks, e.g., doctors, lawyers, bookkeepers, who represent the bulk of the black community leadership had white clientele. In other words, one constant factor in the pre-war black occupational structure was its almost complete dependence on white patronage.

Another prominent factor was the lack of black participation in the industrial labor market. Different reasons have been given for this phenomenon. One reason cited by employers and observers at the time was the lack of industrial skills and work habits held by the migrants. Although there was merit to this argument for migrants with agricultural

backgrounds, there wasn't any inherent inability to learning both skills and work habits (in fact, this is one of the main areas that the Urban League movement sought to focus on for improving the status of the black migrants). White migrants came with similar deficiencies. Moreover, in certain New South industrial cities, i.e., Birmingham, black labor participation in the steel and coal mining industry was disproportionate to the numbers of blacks in the population. But the most persuasive reason was the racial segmentation of the labor market. Industrial work was not considered "Negro jobs." Blacks were only allowed in manufacturing employment either as strikebreakers or when white immigrant labor was not available, e.g., during World War I. Labor unions at the time reinforced this racial segmentation by refusing to allow blacks into apprenticeship programs or, if they did gain employment, by not letting them into the union. Employers often cited whites' refusal to work with and for blacks as their reasons for not hiring blacks.

Blacks' main participation in the industry in Chicago came as a result of being recruited as strikebreakers. In the 1904 stockyard strike and 1905 teamsters strike, employers imported black labor from the South (Spear 1967, 37-41; Wright 1905, 70-73; Spero and Harris [1931] 1969, 267; Tuttle [1970] 1982, 119-120). Often those recruited blacks were unaware of the situation before they arrived in the city. (There is the scene in the film *Matawan* where a black recruited with some others to break a strike questioned why the group was not being let out in town.) On at least one occasion the black workers turned around when confronted with the news that they were being brought in to break a strike (Spear 1967, 38). It was more the rule than the exception that there were few permanent gains made once the strikes were settled (Spear 1967, 38, 40). The result was that black participation in the steel and meat packing industries before 1916 got restricted, and when blacks were hired it was during strikes and then only as unskilled laborers.

The main difference that the wartime period made in the occupational structure of the black community was to increase the number of blacks in entry level positions in the steel and meat packing industries (see pp. 14-15). It is reasonable to believe that the

migrants made up the bulk of the increase in industrial employment because the Old Settlers dominated the service positions (Grossman 1982, 239). The difference was so striking as to cause one author to remark that “[t]he migration gave birth to a black proletariat in Chicago” (Spear 1967, 155). Once the recession of 1920 came, there were massive layoffs of black workers and things were practically back to business as usual. Yes, blacks did gain a foothold in industry, but they remained by and large at the entry level with little hope of either advancement or job security. This is a significant difference from the experiences of Southern, Central, and Eastern European immigrant who began coming to Chicago in the 1880s (Lieberson 1980; Barrett 1987). They were able to move up in industry to higher skill levels and supervisory positions. And their sons and daughters were eligible for white collar employment, which was usually not the case for blacks. In fact their success in upward mobility provided an implicit model for the League to follow and compare themselves to (CLUCAN 1917).

Another significant factor in the changes of the black occupational structure was the growth of black businesses and professions serving the black community. The Great Migration had brought an increase of 50,000 blacks who were concentrated in the ghettos of the South and West Sides. These new migrants, who were employed regularly and making relatively good wages for the first time, could afford new consumer products and services. Migrants also started their own businesses. Some businessmen and professionals had migrated North to follow their clients to Chicago. By 1919, they owned two-thirds of all black businesses (Grossman 1982, 214; Haynes 1918, 116; Frazier 1929, 73).

Black businesses were still concentrated in the areas of providing services. This occurred for two reasons: Firstly, most of the work experience of blacks, had been in the service areas as opposed to manufacturing and trade. Secondly, service establishments typically required a smaller outlay of capital than did stores or factories (Spear 1967, 112). Also, it was only the services that whites did not feel comfortable giving to black clients

where a black business could successfully compete (barbering, saloons, restaurants vs. clothing or hardware [Spear 1967, 112]).

Another area that some blacks ventured into was real estate. Jesse Binga, perhaps the most prominent black businessmen, made his fortune in real estate. Binga, a former Pullman porter, was able to establish a bank in 1908 from the profits of his real estate business. Binga's real estate business served an upper middle-class black clientele who sought to move out of the ghetto. His bank provided capital to black businesses that had difficulty securing loans from white banks. Later Oscar DePriest, the first black Congressman from Chicago since Reconstruction, also made his fortune in real estate. Other areas of business were publishing and cosmetics, the most well known among the former being Robert S. Abbott, editor and publisher of the *Chicago Defender*. Anthony Overton, a lawyer and former municipal judge from Kansas City, established a cosmetic firm for black women, a bank and a life insurance company (Frazier 1929, 72; Spear 1967, 112).

Institutional Structure of the Black Community

As I mentioned above, there were well-delineated areas of black residence in Chicago before 1916. Because of the constant migration that occurred in this period, exacerbating such social problems afflicting black people as poverty and overcrowded housing, there was a need for some social remedy. Before the war, the main institution that sought to deal with the social problems of the black poor was the church.

The churches have the longest history of financial independence from whites. One way of identifying the class background of blacks in Chicago was to look at their church affiliation. The black middle and stable working-classes attended traditional churches such as the Olivet Baptist Church and Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church (Frazier 1929, 71). The black elite often sought the least demonstrative of the

Protestant denominations, i.e., Methodist, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, etc. Some of these churches preached the social gospel. In other words, there was a significant amount of attention on standards of practical living. Perhaps the best example of this enterprise was the Institutional Church and social settlement. This church was founded in 1900 by Reverdy Ransom and he was succeeded by Archibald Carey. Allan Spear described its activities as follows:

Institutional operated a day nursery, a kindergarten, a mothers' club, an employment bureau, a print shop, and a fully equipped gymnasium; it offered a complete slate of club activities and classes in sewing, cooking, and music; its Forum featured lectures by leading white and Negro figures; and its facilities were always available for concerts, meetings, and other civic functions (1967, 95).

During the wartime migration many migrant blacks rejected the churches of the long-term residents and formed other churches under the Baptist denomination. Another alternative sought by recent migrants was to establish storefront churches, mostly of the Holiness and Pentecostal variety (Spear 1967, 174-179, 91-97; Grossman 1982, 215).

As far as secular institutions are concerned, Provident Hospital established in 1891, "was Chicago's first Negro civic institution" (Spear 1967, 97). Provident was started chiefly by Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, well known for performing the first open heart surgery. His motivation came largely from the difficulties black physicians had in getting internships and staff appointments. He got together a group of his black and white colleagues to establish the first interracial hospital in the United States. "Unlike any other hospital in the city, Provident would receive Negroes on an equal basis and provide opportunities for Negro doctors and nurses." (Spear 1967, 97-98).

Another civic institution was the Wabash Avenue Young Men's Christian Association established in 1913 with the help of philanthropists, Cyrus McCormick and Julius Rosenwald. Social betterment efforts for black women were led by the National Association of Colored Women. This black middle-class women's organization was

established in 1896, which culminated many efforts of the black women's club movement to gain some momentum during the 1890's. Two of the most prominent leaders of the national movement, Fannie Barrier Williams and Ida Wells-Barnet were based in Chicago (Duster 1970). "By the turn of the century, the city had over a half dozen women's clubs, which...operated kindergartens, mothers' clubs, sewing schools, day nurseries, employment bureaus, parent-teacher associations, and a penny savings bank" (F.B. Williams in Spear 1967, 102). These clubs also sponsored welfare institutions like the Phyllis Wheatley Home for Girls, which opened in 1896. The home "provided living accommodations, social facilities, and an employment bureau for single Negro girls who migrated to Chicago and found themselves excluded from the YWCA and similar white organizations." (Spear 1967, 102). For the most part these institutions were patterned after the similar white institutions and the social settlement movement. It was because white institutions discriminated against blacks that almost parallel institutions had to be established in order to service blacks.

Although the black churches had started the first social settlements amongst blacks, the first secular social settlement—the Frederick Douglass Center—was started by Celia Parker Woolley, a white woman with an abolitionist background, in 1905. There was some question because of the nature of the activities, i.e., interracial teas, and its location in a middle-class, interracial neighborhood, about the Center's effectiveness amongst poor blacks. Julius Taylor, editor of a black local newspaper, *Broad Ax*, criticized the Center's activities as having not "the slightest benefit to the great mass of Afro-Americans." He characterized the preponderance of interracial teas as turning the Center into a "mutual admiration society." Moreover, he was critical of Ms. Woolley's reference to blacks as "you people," and for not having any blacks in positions of responsibility at the Center (*Broad Ax*, June 23, 30, July 7, 1906 in Spear 1967, 105; also Duster 1970). In 1908, the Wendell Phillips Settlement (as it was called after 1911) was established on the West Side

and staffed exclusively by black social workers (Spear 1967, 105; see 105-6 for unsuccessful attempts at establishing social settlements on the South Side).

Most of the attempts to attend to the social needs of the black population, with its constant influx of Southern migrants, failed. It appears that the kinds of activities sponsored by various organizations or agencies did not appeal to ordinary blacks in the community. The bulk of the activities had a middle-class appeal. So the great proportion of social needs of the black masses went unattended. This phenomenon was attested to by a contemporary investigator who reported in 1915, “a large district—the heart of the [second] ward—scarcely feels their influence” (City of Chicago, Dept. of Public Welfare, *Preliminary Report of Bureau Of Social Surveys* 1915, p. 5 in Spear 1967, 106).

Late 1916, during the wartime migration period, the Chicago Urban League was founded. The Chicago Urban League did not seek to replace the traditional service providers, such as the churches, social settlements or YMCA, but only to coordinate and make more efficient the efforts of other agencies. The interest in coordination and efficiency was one of the imperatives that emerged in social reform during the Progressive Era. Another trend that emerged was the professionalization of social work. No longer would charity work be dominated by the voluntarist efforts of churches and women’s clubs. Organizations run by professional social workers whose methods were “scientifically” based began to dominate. The arrival of the Chicago Urban League represented the dominance of a professional, bureaucratic organization in charity or welfare work in the black community.

The League was created in response to the onslaught of black migrants and their adjustment needs. The League reflected a shift away from traditional organizations (carry over from the rural South), such as the churches and social clubs, to more professional organizations to deal specifically with the problems of urbanization (Spear 1967, 110; Grossman 1982, 204-205; R. Thomas 1976, 101-102). In the next section of this chapter

I will explore more fully the social context of the League's origins and its response to articulated urban problems.

The Nature of Race Relations in Chicago

Until recently, the dominant argument regarding the status of Northern race relations has been to draw a contrast between relatively fluid relations to more rigid ones with the development of the massive black ghettos. The evidence cited for the fluid relations between the races is the ending of formal segregation in the areas of public accommodations and education which represented an advance in black's social freedom. In other words, Woodward ([1955] 1974) argued that at a time when the post-bellum South was instituting disenfranchisement and legal segregation the North was overturning its formal segregation and ensuring voting rights. Other evidence that Woodward brings to bear is that the contact between the races was more amiable and respectful than what was to follow. The question arises, then, how does one account for the rigidity in race relations typified by the rise in racial conflict in the early 20th century (Woodward [1955] 1974)?

Many contemporary observers and later scholars felt that it was the sudden influx of unadjusted Southern rural black migrants which caused the racial antipathy. Their presence caused a competition for jobs and housing with the white working class. As the argument goes, when the white working class ascended to political power—both through labor unions and electoral machines—they were able to effectively close out blacks from both job security and more comfortable dwellings. Added to this argument is the belief by the black elite that in fact the new migrants, because of their behavior, exacerbated racial tension; that these newcomers, by their lack of decorum, brought too much attention to themselves and caused racial harm to fall on all the race (CLUCAN 1918, 4; Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962, 73-76). The black middle class felt affected in two ways. In general, they knew that racism prevented most whites from distinguishing between “respectable” blacks and those

from the “worthless” class (Haynes 1913b, 111; Baker [1908] 1964; DuBois [1899] 1967; Ovington [1911] 1969). So when newspapers reported provocatively on a crime committed by blacks (especially if it was rape or murder) the whole race became culpable. In the event there was an outright race riot, rampaging whites would not stop to inquire whether this particular black person was responsible or an upstanding member of the community, they would just harm them. For example, Charles S. Johnson, author of *The Negro in Chicago*, was shot at outside the Urban League headquarters (CCRR 1922, 9-17).

In particular, the influx of black Southerners had caused overcrowding and subsequent deterioration of those predominantly black neighborhoods. The black elite found it increasingly difficult to find suitable housing. Restrictions that had not existed before in places such as Hyde Park began to emerge. In fact, there were efforts (including bombs and restrictive covenants) to remove long-standing black residents of certain neighborhoods (Philpott 1978; Grossman 1982, 202). I argue that the black elite’s concern over the problems caused by black migrants’ presence in the city, converged with white Progressives’ alarm over the threat to social order in Chicago (Taylor 1917; T. Hill 1919a; Diner 1970, 407; Philpott 1978, 298). These compatible concerns provided the ideological context for both sets of elites to join together in founding and supporting an organization like the Urban League, whose chief purpose was to manage racial contacts in all spheres of society.

In most accounts the blame for racial conflict in Chicago and other Northern urban industrial centers rests on the black poor and white working class. In terms of the Chicago Race Riot of 1919, the Irish youth gangs with political connections, especially “Ragen’s Colts,” were given much responsibility for the aggravated violence perpetuated against blacks (CCRR 1922, 11-17; Tuttle [1970] 1982, 32-33, 54-55). Some have argued that it was their close contact through competition over scarce goods that caused this conflict. For example, it is not surprising to learn that Ragen’s Colts stemmed from Stockyards district

bordering on the east side of the Black Belt. Due to the hostility from this area blacks were forced to expand east. This particular area, 39th to 55th streets, from Michigan Avenue to the lake was considered a “contested area,” meaning blacks and whites were fighting over what group will settle there (CCRR 1922, 8; Grossman 1982, 193). This conflict between black and white working classes is said to have ended the fluidity of race relations.

Assertion of the fluidity of race relations has, however, been challenged. David Gerber (1980) questions the amity of race relations during the late 19th century. He claims that Woodward’s indicators, and those of race relations historiographers in general, are too narrow (236). The eradication of formal segregation, particularly in the political sphere, was important but not the only area which affected blacks’ life chances. Gerber argues that in the economic sphere things had not improved at all. There was chronic under-employment and great restrictions on the kinds of employment blacks could seek (see above p. 23). He goes so far as to suggest that the “racial ameliorative trend” was allowed to affect “the public sphere of interracial contacts” but did not alter the larger inequalitarian system of economic subordination and political powerlessness. Gerber argues that changes in the public sphere allowed the appearance of racial liberalism, with the highly visible and more attentive black elite having access to patronage without altering the reality of black subordination. His chief finding is that, unlike immigrant whites, being upwardly mobile was a *prerequisite* for rather than a *consequence* of, political patronage for blacks.

Stanley Lieberson (1980) concurs with Gerber that there appeared to be more continuity between the apparently amiable late 19th century period and the more strident early 20th century period once you look at a broader set of indicators. He points out the difficulty experienced by blacks in becoming upwardly mobile had less to do with the characteristics of new black migrants than with the racially exclusionary opportunity structure. As I have discussed above (see pp. 17-18), Lieberson has argued that the educational and literacy levels between the Northern black resident and the newcomers are much closer than had been originally assumed. He finds that blacks were more attentive to

educational opportunities than Southern, Eastern, and Central European immigrants who were more concerned with their children working at an earlier age (172; Grossman 1982). He argues that it was the “feedback mechanism” of little occupational reward for educational attainment that discouraged blacks’ educational aspirations, and therefore, achievement. At any rate, both authors find more continuity between the “fluid” and conflictual periods and base their arguments on continuing economic subordination of blacks by whites.

Who was responsible for the limitation of black economic opportunities? Let me say at this time that the “close contact” thesis is persuasive. In other words, since white workers were in direct competition with the black masses over jobs and housing, they would be the most adversely affected by black advancement. So white workers, through unions and the political machines, were in a position to thwart the efforts of blacks’ advancement through union and residential discrimination, and disproportionate distribution of city services (Wilson 1978). But the structure of the labor market and municipal administration was not solely determined by the white rank and file and their leaders. For example, when Northern industries needed cheap labor during the war, major capitalists and the federal government combined to facilitate the migration of black unskilled workers (USDL [1919] 1969). This was not in the main interests of the white workers who wanted to keep wages high. Once the employers make the decision to hire blacks as cheap labor, white workers can exclude them from the unions or attempt to organize them like they did in the stockyards right after the war. The American social order depends on the immediate social group to constrain the most recent arrival, the group perceived as most threatening to the former’s tenuous gains.

The white middle class played a significant role in establishing residential restrictions in places like Hyde Park. In their roles as reformers, the underlying motives behind such bettering of conditions for immigrant whites as well as migrant blacks is a mixture, at best, of altruism and a fear of social disorder, which perhaps unintendedly,

buttressing the subordination of these two groups (Wiebe 1967; Davis 1967; Diner 1980; Philpott 1978). The important point to consider is the continuity between the late 19th and early 20th century in terms of the persistence of black subordination and the fact that subordination resulted not from the behavior or lack of preparation of the black migrants. The chief indicator of consistent black subordination was blacks' disproportionate location in an unsteady, low-wage labor market. Blacks were restricted to personal services and unskilled labor by white industrialists' desire for cheap labor, and white workers, fearing blacks would drag down wage rates, excluded blacks from unions and apprenticeship programs. Blacks were in place in the North at the same time whites from Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe were immigrating to Chicago. They started off with as good, if not better educational attainments. Immigrant whites were not any more experience industrially initially than those early black residents. Racial discrimination is the only plausible reason for the lack of upward mobility experienced by blacks compared to immigrant whites (Lieberson 1980, 219, 364, 347, 365; Bodnar, Simon and Weber 1982).

Ideologies and Practices of Race Advancement

There was a shift in ideologies of race advancement before and after the Great Migration. In the period before the war, black leadership tended to believe in strict integration. In other words, if whites were not going to uphold the principle of racial integration that emerged from the experience of Abolitionism, then blacks would. Provident Hospital is a prime example of this racial integration with regards to institutions initiated by blacks. Instead of having a hospital staffed solely by blacks serving a predominantly black clientele, Provident's staff had to include some white physicians and served everyone regardless of race. The irony in this kind of reasoning is that for racist whites the mere fact that blacks were part of the institution caused them not to utilize the services (unless there was no other choice) making the clientele largely black. But the black

elite of that time, with its abolitionist background, had clamored for real integration in society, and felt that the institutions that they had a hand in creating must reflect that principle of integration.

With the arrival of tens of thousands of black migrants to Chicago during World War I, the preconditions for some community self-sufficiency existed. The composition of the elite shifted from professionals who largely depended on white patronage to businessmen, professionals, and politicians who depended on new black patronage. So there appeared to be a shift from complete integrationism to some voluntary separatism. The ultimate goal of entrance into the mainstream had not changed, only the path had, from complete immersion to a staged entrance from a more independent black base. But this “independence” was overexaggerated because of the perception of new possibilities represented by the dramatic increase in population and its concentration in defined geographical areas. In both the areas of business and politics, blacks’ efforts were still circumscribed by structures that forced dependence on white elites. As I mentioned above, black businesses were restricted to personal services, therefore they were not really able to employ many of their race. They did provide some services that blacks could not get from whites. In politics, the percentage of patronage that blacks did receive was far below their percentage of the voting population (Katznelson [1971]1976, 103; Gerber 1980).

We need to place the changing positions of the Chicago black elite in the context of the famous debate between Booker T. Washington’s “accommodationism” and W.E.B. DuBois’s “protest” as the route for black Americans to take in attaining full American citizenship. Washington advocated blacks acquiring property as the way towards economic independence and eventual attainment of political rights. DuBois countered pointing out that Southern blacks who had become prosperous were no more immune from white persecution than indigent blacks. He argued that without legal recourse blacks economic gains would always be vulnerable to Southern exploitation. As far as the Washington-DuBois debate is concerned, the elite did not seem to come down strictly on one or the

other side ideologically. This perhaps suggest that the way in which the debate has been dichotomized (civil rights, integration vs. economic achievement, racial self-sufficiency) may not be the important point of departure, at least for Northern black leaders. One author sees the black elite ideology in the Northern cities reflective of the ascendancy of the DuBois camp over Washington's (Henri 1976). I do not know if she has considered the regional nature of this change. Where the new black elite might embrace a self-help ideology which had been associated with Booker T. Washington, but was held by DuBois as well, they clearly rejected Washington's accommodationism and his repudiation of politics (DuBois [1899] 1967). The old and new elite both spoke out against any incursions on the civil rights of blacks. They also spoke out on any slight or insult that blacks might have felt in what was called "indignation" meetings.

One observer notes the entrance of socialism into the black ideological spectrum after World War I. The previous "liberal wing" represented by DuBois, Monroe Trotter, and William Pickens moves over to the center where, according to our observer, "[t]he majority of intelligent and active Negro leaders belong to this class." Again the League proves anomalous in this set-up. The League's program advocates "industry" and "thrift" which was associated with the Robert Moton-led "Right or Conservative Wing." It also embraces "economic opportunity, better housing, sanitary and recreational facilities" believed to be a part of the "Centre." We can safely say that it did not share the "social transformation" characteristic of the "Radical Group or Left Wing" apparently patterned after A. Phillip Randolph, Chandler Owen, and the rest of the Messenger Crowd (H. Jones 1920, 256-259).

One could argue that the discontinuity of the elites seen by Allan Spear (1967) in his study of Black Chicago (using the racist framework established by August Meier) may be overplayed. When you look outside of the black community and make comparisons with other groups, i.e., the Jews, or with larger ideologies of adjustment and advancement in the American social system, you see more continuity. We also see the class nature of

that ideology. It has been argued that the areas to which the elite attended were the areas in which they had some leverage, i.e., legislation, legal decisions (Bunche 1939, 546). It has also been argued that these areas represent the specific upward mobility needs of the black middle class (Lewis 1984). David Lewis (1984) finds parallels between the Afro-American and Jewish elites' assimilationist ideologies. Both groups sought to assimilate into the American cultural mainstream. In order to accomplish that goal, both groups felt the need to control or at least manage their unassimilated groups, e.g., recent Southern rural black migrants and Jews from the ghettos of Eastern and Central Europe respectively. It was felt by both elites that the behavior of each new group would jeopardize their ability to enter the mainstream (and by extension all blacks and Jews once they reach the plateau of cultural refinement or at least respectability). This explains the force behind the anxiety over black migrants' public deportment. It suggests a different class agenda for the Talented Tenth than for the black masses. As a result of the growth of racial consciousness in the postwar period, the concentration on visible legislative and court case victories was meant to keep the masses feeling something was being done for the race while substantive changes in life chances for them were not changing. Thus, without altering the black masses' economic or political subordination, they were not in a good position to take advantage of these gains. (Lewis, 1984; Gerber, 1980; Stein 1986).

In this section, I have tried to show what impact the Great Migration had on the institutional structure, external relations, and ideologies of race advancement in the black community. I have argued that there was less of an impact than had once been perceived. In fact there was more continuity before and after the Great Migration than was once thought. This continuity was experienced both in the conditions of the black masses and in the approached taken by the elite to alleviate those dire conditions. The Great Migration's impact was more a question of degree as opposed to a difference in kind.

Social Origins of the Chicago Urban League

Social Context

The demographic and social impact of the Great Migration had set the context for the founding of the Chicago Urban League. I have tried to show in the previous sections how the Great Migration exacerbated already existing tensions (both intra- and interracial) and led to a call for the existence of an entity to manage those relations and to attend to the social needs of the black community. In the areas of housing, employment, education, recreation, and welfare, blacks were not receiving their proportionate share of the public goods. Despite a burgeoning black political submachine these social needs went largely unmet. Clearly, the sudden influx of 50,000 blacks, mostly from rural areas in the South in the span of three years would cause stress and strain on the Black Belt whose boundaries had become fairly rigid. But what were the approaches to alleviate that stress and strain? What was the social and ideological context which governed those approaches? These are the questions I hope to answer in this section.

There were calls from the more “responsible” elements in Chicago to do something about this “crisis.” If you couldn’t oppose the Armours, Swifts or the Pullmans in their desire to attract cheap labor from the South to fill the labor void, then you had to resort to somehow managing this massive influx. The Chicago Urban League, as part of the Urban League movement across the country, was founded specifically to manage the migration process. Its focus was to help with the “adjustment” of the migrants to their new environment. The purpose of this assistance was two-fold. First, it was to make sure that the new migrants had places to stay and some kind of gainful employment. Secondly, it was a kind of tutelage, instructing the newcomers on new modes of behavior. Blacks were

constantly instructed to show appropriate deportment in public. It was thought that attention to offensive behavior would minimize the “race friction” between the newcomers and whites who they had contact with at the workplace and recreational areas (CLUCAN 1918, 4). The League’s and other black social agencies’ interest in adjustment was, not only, for the concern of new migrants’ needs, but also, for their desire for them to become productive citizens and not a part of the “undesirables” that would jeopardize the progress the race had made thus far. In other words, what underlaid the ministrations of the Chicago Urban League and the Urban League movement was a concern that unadjusted black poor would create enough friction to bring down indiscriminate oppression on all black people regardless of class.

The Urban League Movement

The National Urban League [NUL] was founded in October, 1911 as a consolidation of three agencies which had worked on the various aspects of black urban problems. The first organization was the National League for the Protection of Colored Women [NLPCW] founded in the summer of 1905 by Frances A. Kellor, a white settlement worker in New York. She had just completed an investigation on the practices of employment agencies. What she found were some horror stories of how black women migrants had been mistreated. Miss Kellor’s study chronicled well-known practices of unscrupulous “agents” exploiting women, and it had the effect of galvanizing widespread public support to remedy the situation (Strickland 1966, 9).

Also in 1905, another participating organization got off the ground—the Committee for Improving Industrial Conditions of the Negro [CIICN] in New York. This organization’s driving force was William L. Bulkley. Bulkley was the first black to earn a doctorate at Columbia University. He became the only black principal of a integrated public elementary school in New York City. From his position Bulkley could see that the

needs of black children were not being fully met by the public school. He opened the school for night classes and as a recreation center to prevent idleness among the youth and to better prepare them for the work world. The white supporters of CIICN were philanthropists who had backed industrial schools in the South for blacks, namely Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes. There was less influence from white social workers than the NLPCW. It was this general lack of influence of social workers and the unwillingness to train black social workers that led to the third organization to be founded (Strickland 1966, 10-11).

In 1910, the Committee on Urban Conditions Among Negroes [CUCAN] in New York was established following discussions held by George Edmund Haynes, Frances Kellor, and Ruth Standish Baldwin (who was the widow of William H. Baldwin, president of Long Island Railroad and Trustee of Tuskegee Institute). Haynes did his dissertation at Columbia on the economic conditions of blacks in New York. He felt the necessity of a broader approach to the urban conditions of blacks. Specifically, he felt that trained black social workers would be the best way of administering to the needs of the black poor. This committee sought to both conduct scientific investigations into the social and economic conditions of blacks and to coordinate the numerous agencies working on the behalf of blacks.

The dual effort of investigation and coordination expressed dominant trends in the social work profession and in Progressive social reform generally. At this time the emphasis was on basing practical reform on knowledge supposedly attained through the scientific method. It was the emphasis on efficiency through scientific investigation and coordination of existing efforts that was expressed most completely by CUCAN which shaped the organization that resulted from the combination of all three agencies—NLPCW, CIICN, and CUCAN—under the name of the National League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes (it later became known as the National Urban League) [Simms 1961, 45; Strickland 1966, 11].

Before World War I, the National Urban League was mainly a New York-based organization. The NUL professionals saw the period of wartime migration and subsequent call for their services as a propitious time to expand. Eugene Kinckle Jones, who had become associate director under Haynes as executive director, and L. Hollingsworth Wood, the president of the NUL board, went to Chicago to try and convince influential people to support a branch of the League in Chicago. Chicago was particularly attractive to NUL professionals because it could serve as a model for the Midwest much in the way the NUL served for the East. Jones made several trips in 1916, working with a core group of supporters, those persons influential in the social reform movement in Chicago at that time.

The Founding of the Chicago Urban League

Perhaps the person most in favor of establishing a branch in Chicago was “Sophonisba P. Breckinridge, [who was] a member of the faculties of the University of Chicago and the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, [and] had been a member of the National Urban League’s board of directors for several years.” (Strickland 1966, 27). Miss Breckinridge, as dean of the School of Civics and Philanthropy, was well known in social reform and social work circles, particularly for interest in the welfare of black migrants (Spear 1967, 103). Her co-worker at the University of Chicago and the School of Civics, Edith Abbott played a significant role in Breckinridge’s circle. Amelia Sears who was at the time superintendent of the Juvenile Protective Association, and Celia Parker Woolley, the founder of the Frederick Douglass Center, were also among this group. On the periphery of Breckinridge’s circle was Judge Edward Osgood, who was active in the NAACP, Judge Julian Mack, active in “Jewish welfare movement,” Robert E. Park, Sociology professor at the University of Chicago, and Horace Bridges, leader of the Chicago Ethical Society. Park and Bridges were the League’s first and second presidents

respectively (Strickland 1966, 27; Diner 1970, 406). Most of the white supporters came “from the ranks of the social workers and their friends” (Strickland 1966, 27).

As far as blacks were concerned, the two most influential persons were George Cleveland Hall and Robert S. Abbott. Hall was a physician on staff at Provident Hospital. He had been active in just about every “betterment” black organization during that period. He was close to Booker T. Washington and met philanthropist Julius Rosenwald through him. For his efforts in helping to establish the Chicago branch he became the second member of the National Board from Chicago. (Strickland 1966, 28).

Robert Abbott was well known as the editor and publisher of the *Chicago Defender*. We mentioned above the instrumental role played by this organ in communicating the opportunities available in the North and encouraging the Great Migration as an expression of an exodus to “freedom.” Abbott utilized the *Defender* to encourage support in the black community for the establishment of the Chicago Urban League. After meeting Jones on his second visit in January, 1916, Abbott “opened both his news columns and editorial page to Urban League publicity” (Strickland 1966, 28). Other black supporters who where less well known outside of Chicago [with] “the possible exception of Albert B. George, an attorney who became Chicago’s first Negro municipal judge, ...were approached primarily because of their organizational connections.” Out of these groups come the founding of the Chicago Urban League on December 11, 1916 (Strickland 1966, 28-29; see 29-30 for the names of participants in the founding meeting; Diner 1970, 406; Spear 1967, 169-170).

The Early Years of the Chicago Urban League

T. Arnold Hill, the national organizer for the League, had been present at the founding meeting. The National League had intended for Hill to serve as acting secretary for a month, but his term kept getting extended for months at a time. Hill ended up staying

in that post for eight years. He had a similar background to Eugene Kinckle Jones. Both were sons of professional fathers from Richmond, Virginia. They both attended Wayland Academy and Virginia Union University, though not in the same years. Hill's activities in the early years were concentrated mainly in establishing ties to black and white elites in order to gain both moral and financial support for the League.

Early funding for the League came from Julius Rosenwald after he was convinced of the seriousness of the founding members of the board (Strickland 1966, 32). Julius Rosenwald was a noted philanthropist for blacks and a member of the social reformers' community (Diner 1980). William C. Graves, Rosenwald's secretary, sat on the League's board of directors, as if to protect Rosenwald's social investment. As an incentive for the League to raise more money, especially from blacks, he agreed to give one-third of what the League raised. Rosenwald continued his contribution until the end of the 1920s (Strickland 1966).

Hill spent the rest of his time convincing the heads of other black social welfare organizations of the intent of the League to do research and coordinate already existing efforts rather than supplant certain groups. Of course, the League was perceived as a threat because it competed successfully for the same philanthropist funds that other organizations were competing for (Strickland 1966, 35). The CUL had secured office space from Mrs. Woolley at the Frederick Douglass Center, located at 3032 South Wabash Avenue (the same location that some blacks had earlier complained of as being too remote from the center of the black community; but perhaps apropos for an interracial organization such as the League [Strickland 1966, 39]).

The Chicago Urban League initially mirrored the national organization in philosophy and methods. But it wasn't long before this branch had to deal with the specific issues confronting the Chicago black community. In its early years of 1917 and 1918, there was relative prosperity in the black community because the war had caused extensive black labor demand. But as the war drew to a close there was considerable

apprehension as to the potential for racial conflict over jobs and housing as servicemen returned and industry cut back.

Robert E. Park formulated the basic philosophy undergirding the early efforts of the League. Park, as secretary to Booker T. Washington, and later, on the faculty of the University of Chicago, had spent a considerable amount of time investigating the “Negro Problem.” He was considered an expert on black problems. He likened blacks’ need for adjustment to that of immigrant whites with the added burden of racial discrimination making that adjustment more difficult. He believed that the purpose of the League was to turn the liability of racial prejudice into an asset by channeling that negative energy in constructive ways (CLUCAN 1917, 3-4; Strickland 1966, 40).

Park saw three tasks for the Chicago Urban League: first, by its research activities it would provide “rather primitive” black social agencies with “a body of authentic fact” to increase the effectiveness of their work; second, the League was to act as a “liaison agent” between blacks and the city’s welfare agencies. They would be able to inform these entities as to the best way to meet the needs of the black migrants; third, it would evaluate blacks’ needs, and based on that evaluation, would then advise blacks to go to the appropriate agency. At bottom, Park felt that the key to accomplishing these tasks was to conduct ongoing research into the social and economic conditions in which blacks live. (CLUCAN 1917, 5; E. Jones 1923, 4).

The League stressed “research, coordinated social services, and industrial relations” in its first couple of years. In July, 1917, Charles S. Johnson, a graduate student at the University of Chicago, was hired through a grant from that institution to coordinate the League’s research efforts. The League acquired information both by collecting any information on the Negro, and by conducting original investigations. One of the first investigations they started was into the conduct of black juvenile delinquents received by the authorities. The information from the report spurred further inquiry into the conduct of court officials against blacks (Strickland 1966, 42-43; CLUCAN 1917).

The League sought not to provide direct services to black migrants but wanted to act as a “clearing house” for those services (Strickland 1966, 44; Spear 1967, 169). Spear describes the functions of the League as, “[B]y far the most important organization to respond to the problems of the migration years...” (Spear 1967, 169). Most of what the CUL did in the area of welfare work amongst migrants was to provide some assistance in finding suitable dwellings. The war had caused a moratorium on homebuilding so the great influx of migrants spurred tremendous overcrowding and a seller’s market. In this area the League was mostly limited to aiding the migrants in finding better housing. More significantly, the League provided a framework for various volunteers, mostly from the churches and the women’s clubs, to inculcate bourgeois values amongst the migrants all under the guise of “adjustment.” “A community worker was employed to go into the churches attended by migrants and instruct the communicants in thrift, civic pride, personal hygiene, deportment, and other civic virtues. This worker also visited the homes of the newcomers with her ‘practical message,’ which called ‘a spade a spade’ in order to touch ‘the heart of the careless, indifferent and troublesome man and woman’” (CLUCAN 1918, 9-10; Strickland 1966, 45). Here is an example of the League’s role in “disciplining the masses.” This function was considered necessary, so that the progress the race had made thus far would not be jeopardized by the migrant’s offensive behavior.

This orientation of maintaining order by inculcating middle-class values and standards of behavior was not exclusive to the Urban League. You can find the same orientation in other social welfare organizations in both the white and black community (McClymer 1980; Katz 1986; Polsky 1983). It is only that the overarching and influential role that the League played, beginning with the Great Migration, in working with the black migrants and poor that makes its case particularly distinctive (CCRR 1922; Spear 1967, 169). It was not only in the areas of social welfare that you found this orientation but also in the area for which the Chicago Urban League became best known—industrial relations (Strickland 1966, 47; Spear 1967, 172).

The League sought to overcome the obstacles that had been traditionally put into place against blacks' labor mobility. I have discussed many of the obstacles above. Let me just summarize them: (1) the need to both upgrade black migrant skills and to inculcate them with industrial habits such as working long hours doing routine work (I might add that during this period Taylorism instituted management techniques that atomized tasks in the efforts at separating manual from mental labor for the purposes of managerial control of the production process); (2) persuading employers who had not previously employed blacks before to hire them for the first time. This meant countering all the myths about the inability of blacks to do skilled industrial work. The crucial lesson taught the first black employees was that the race's ability to gain employment with that firm rested on their attitude and performance; (3) convince organize labor not to exclude blacks from the unions. I will treat this aspect of the Chicago Urban League's work more extensively in the next chapter. My purpose here is to point out how the League was basically captured by the interests of the employers. Because the League sought to break down barriers at various jobs, it meant making sure that the workers it referred to the skeptical employers were not inefficient or incorrigible in any way. As Strickland points out, the CUL could serve both black workers and the employers during the wartime mobilization, but afterwards it was more difficult to serve two masters. The League's orientation toward making the migrant suitable for employment really worked in the interest of the employer (Strickland 1966, 48; Spear 1966, 173). According to Strickland (1966) it was in the area of industrial relations that the contradiction in the Chicago Urban League between representing the interests of the black rank and file and their financial dependence on Chicago's white business elite was exhibited (Strickland 1966, 67; Spear 1967, 173).

Ideological Context of the Chicago Urban League's Origins

I mentioned above that the Urban League movement to which the Chicago branch belonged was consistent with dominant trends in Progressive social reforms. These trends can be described as: (1) an orientation toward social control. In other words, a middle class orientation aimed to bring order and unity when it feared chaos. In the transition from the control and familiarity of small town American life to the impersonality and perceived disorder of the growing metropolis, many middle-class reformers sought to restore order (Wiebe 1967); (2) to professionalize social work by turning what had earlier been voluntary work by the upper classes into a domain of people specifically trained to administer to the masses (Bender 1982). This professionalism was to be based on training with "scientific" methods (Katz 1986); (3) the importance of scientifically based knowledge to inform one's reform activity, defined as ascertaining the facts beforehand thus enabling reforms to be more practical and efficient; (4) there was an emphasis on efficiency. There was quite a bit of concern over waste through duplication of effort. This concern called for a focus on coordination to ward against duplication. Also, having "scientific" information aided more efficient operations, or so it was asserted.

The Chicago Urban League's philosophy and activities fit within the ideological universe of Progressive social reform. The specific expression of the League's social philosophy can be captured in the term "adjustment." The notion of adjustment was meant to convey either individuals, e.g., black rural migrants, adapting to a new set of conditions, and/or the rearranging of conditions. The former notion entails remediation. The individual is expected to change their habits, behavior, etc., in order to get along, "to make it," or assimilate into established institutions. The League, aiding this adjustment process, employed therapeutic techniques, in order to get the individual to become "normal." The executive secretary of the National Urban League described the purpose of social work "being to restore as nearly as possible to the normal, persons who have congenitally or

through accident, become handicapped” (E. Jones [1928] 1978, 458). The latter notion entailed League officials negotiating employers and government officials in the *name* of the rank and file, and in the interests of everyone involved. Adjustment implies a neutral, disinterested, and rational process. “[T]he League is a factor in the adjustment of conditions among the colored people—a position which is predicated upon the harmonious co-operation of all respected welfare agencies” (CLUCAN 1918, 8). It also implies experts rearranging institutional practices. In the process, politics—the passionate, contested encounter over power and interests—is denatured. Employment, housing, social services, and the process of the migrant’s adjustment is treated administratively not politically.

In the context of the League’s ideology, adjustment is not the opposite of change. The League did not want the status quo. The status quo meant racial differentials in all phases of American life. The League wanted change, it just wanted to manage it. As race relations engineers, it sought to manage the process of racial change which they were confident would occur. I argue that what we have to recognize is the apparent conflict over constituents within the context of the League’s approach to racial advancement. The League understood its role as turning what they saw as rural peasants into efficient, loyal industrial workers. In turn, the League expected the Chicago business elite to employ these new citizens and eventually give them the same wages and working conditions as their white counterparts.

CHAPTER II

LABOR, WELFARE CAPITALISM, AND THE SOCIALIZATION OF THE BLACK WORKER IN CHICAGO

In trying to understand the politics of the Chicago Urban League (CUL) we have to delineate what and whose interests it served. Arvarh Strickland, in his history of the League, argued that it served the interests of the white industrial elite and black workers. Because of the League's dependence on local capital's contributions, it often served white capital's interests more than black workers' interests. In his formulation Strickland left out an important set of interests—that of the black elite which were officers, board members, and the attentive public of the Chicago Urban League (Strickland 1966, 48).

James Grossman (1982) includes the interests of the Old Settlers among the three masters that the League serves. Although Grossman insightfully includes the black elite, he fails to adequately situate the Chicago Urban League in both the class makeup of the post-1915 Chicago black community and in the ideological continuum that encompasses that black leadership stratum at that time (Grossman 1982, 277).

In this chapter, I will examine the Chicago Urban League's labor policy. I will look at the League's activities in finding employment for Afro-Americans. I will pay particular attention to the League's involvement in welfare capitalism and its attempts to socialize black workers both at the workplace and in their communities.

Lastly, I will attempt to apprehend the League's policy toward organized labor. Scholars in the past have attempted to characterize the Urban League's politics by its

actions regarding unionization of black workers. The League is either charged with being opportunistic or pragmatic depending on the scholar's sense of whether the League had little choice given union discrimination (Myrdal [1944] 1962, 2: 840-841; Weiss 1974, 214-15) or, alternatively, that the League could have promoted an indigenous organization of black workers (Bunche 1939, 544; 1940, 267-271; Spero and Harris [1931] 1969, 140-41; Cayton and Mitchell 1939, 404, 406-408). I will argue that by examining the League's efforts at socializing black workers as well as its policy on strikebreaking, we will be better able to characterize the League's politics.

The New Black Elite and the Chicago Urban League

Now I will explicate the League's ideological perspective with reference to the constitution of the Afro-American elite in Chicago during the interwar period. By examining the framework by which the League determined the interests of the organization and the "Race," we will have a better handle on understanding the League's politics.

As I have already shown, the origins of the CUL occurred during the Great Migration with the chief impetus coming from labor demands of Chicago industries. The cessation of European immigration and wartime mobilization combined to create a vast need for cheap, unskilled black labor. The League was founded in an effort to ensure the management of racial contacts, particularly in the industrial sphere, because it was felt that the inculcation of proper behavior in black migrants would minimize "race friction." At the same time the employment of large numbers of black migrants in industries augmented the development of separate institutions in Chicago's Afro-American community, which had started since the turn of the century (Spear 1967, 134, 181). This sudden increase in the ranks of wage earning blacks, coupled with growing white racial hostility, which made the use of certain services untenable, combined to redouble the efforts of black businessmen

and professionals to work on the institutional development of the black community (Trotter 1985, 28).

The Chicago Urban League was founded in the context of the development of a new elite in the black community. This elite was chiefly made up of businessmen and professionals. It differed from the Old Settlers in their dependence on new black workers' earnings rather than ties to influential whites. Now this division was by no means neat. For example, even though black politicians could utilize the increased black votes they still remained tied to William Thompson's machine (Katznelson [1971] 1976, 101-102; Kilson 1971, 186-188; Bunche 1929; Gosnell [1935] 1967). Even so the League's almost complete dependence on white capital's funds rendered them anomalous amongst their elite peers. The League was not unaware of the contradiction of having white benefactors and black clients.¹ Of course, the League was also dependent on the upwardly mobile black workers using its services. Therefore it had to be careful not to follow policies that would alienate this constituency. An important difference between the League and other black professionals was that, as a social welfare agency, it did not charge for its services.

The League professionals, either as social welfare executives or social workers, were a part of the black "upper class" (Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962, 2:529). While their white counterparts made up the white middle class, the lack of industrial magnates amongst blacks allowed more professionals to be part of the upper class. As social workers attempted to gain the professional respectability of, say, doctors or lawyers, the executives were considered part of the elite as "race leaders."

As part of the new elite, the League's ideology was to reflect a new emphasis on racial solidarity and self-help. But the Urban League's self-conscious interracialism also proved anomalous. The participation of white businessmen and professionals as board members, but not as officials or clients, suggested two things. One, it was an admission that "white folks were still ahead" (to paraphrase Louis Armstrong, who had migrated to Chicago from New Orleans in 1922 [Grossman 1982]). In other words, blacks were not

considered to be on the same level of development as a race as whites, therefore blacks could benefit from their knowledge and resources (E. Jones 1923, 5; Haynes 1919d, 698; CLUCAN1918, 11). Second, to the extent that the League's officials were all Afro-American, there was a belief in black led self-help (Foster 1929, 99).² Frankly, it also provided one of the few outlets for social work employment for aspiring blacks. The League believed in the ultimate integration of blacks into the American mainstream as many of the new elite believed. For many the development of a "Black Metropolis" was seen as a temporary waystation to the realization of the American dream. Although the League would settle for a segregated "opportunity" (which was an opportunity nonetheless), its ultimate goal was complete integration of Afro-Americans into American institutions and full citizenship rights (CLUCAN 1918, 11; Foster 1929, 99; The City Club 1920, 48).

As some authors have indicated, the lines between the old elite's preference for integration and the new elite's belief in separate institutional development are blurred, making these distinctions, at times, unhelpful (Spear 1967, 54; Trotter 1985, 80). The League and the actors in and around exemplify both beliefs. Robert S. Abbott, a founder of the country's largest black newspaper, was a founding board member of the Chicago Urban League. He promoted black businesses and exhorted the masses into supporting their own institutions. Despite this belief in internal development he never shrank from criticizing racial discrimination in the pages of the *Defender*. George Cleveland Hall, another founding board member, and more active than Abbott in the major issues confronting the League, was on the medical staff at Provident Hospital. Provident, despite its interracial staff, serviced a pre-dominantly black clientele. Hall was involved in founding both a branch of Booker T. Washington's National Business League and a Chicago branch of the NAACP. Apparently, Hall did not view as a contradiction his support for the branches of organizations which were tied to opposite wings of the ideological struggle for race advancement during this period. They both rejected Washington's accommodationism as outdated and misplaced in the urban North. Perhaps

these leaders of the new elite did not see a contradiction because both “ideologies” (perhaps, more accurately termed goals and strategies) presupposed the Talented Tenth ideology, or elite-led racial reform.

DuBois’ notion of the Talented Tenth was that the talented members of the race should take the lead in advancing the race. That the “better elements” of each race should promote better understanding between the races (and implicitly control the unassimilated groups within each race). The very nature and structure of the Urban League and other “interracial organizations” was built upon the principle of biracial elite collaboration on race relations (Foster 1929, 99; T. Hill 1919a, 238; Haynes 1919d, 698; The City Club 1919, 76; Bunche 1939, 544). This assumption of middle-class leadership underlies both strains of thought, whether the goal is internal development or external penetration into the mainstream. The masses are asked to support and develop black institutions, which are mostly businesses, the idea being that black working class support would provide sufficient capital accumulation for some individuals to eventually start large enterprises similar to whites, and this, in turn, would provide employment for black workers. Given the history of American capitalist development, this longstanding dream has proved as illusory as it has proved irremovable from the imagination of the black petty bourgeoisie (Bunche 1939, 541-543; L. Miller 1931, 240; Frazier 1928-29, 81-82; A. Harris [1936] 1970; Stein 1986, 59-60, 255-56).

Also, compelling was the notion that the elite would pave the way for the rank and file toward greater integration. By their greater professional success and attainment of cultural refinement they would “prove” that the race could be equals with whites, justifying their inclusion into mainstream institutions (and eventually, the masses as they developed). The elite met the Talented Tenth ideology not only by being aloof “role models,” which suited the interests and style of the Old Settlers, but by actively molding and shaping the black working class in their image, making them more acceptable to white institutions and to themselves. Black middle-class orientation, both as a model of behavior, and as a

definition of interests, proved constant in the succession of the new elite from the old. The Chicago Urban League, like its parent body, embodied the Talented Tenth ideology. For instance, its leader in the early years, T. Arnold Hill, represented a Talented Tenth pedigree—second generation college, son of a professional father (Lewis 1984, 549). Most significant was the belief in black elite-led race advancement (Lewis 1984, 549, 556-58, 560; E. Jones 1923, 4; CLUCAN 1918, 11; Foster 1929, 99).

For the moment I would like to illustrate the League's Talented Tenth derived ideology and show how its ideology promoted its class interests in an area of main concern—industrial relations. It is difficult during this period and in this area to distinguish between black elite and working-class interests because the overwhelming racism of the time forced the two together in a fragile unity (Trotter, 1985, xi). The promotion of equal economic opportunity met the interests of both. For the migrants it was a major reason they fled to the North. The ideal represented a foundation of full citizenship and "freedom." For the elite, wage-earning workers meant more patronage, but more importantly, it represented their vision of racial democracy, i.e., parity. In other words, complete integration for the elite meant mirroring the white-class structure with them on top. They promoted the development of an upperclass of successful businessmen and professionals, a middle class of white-collar employees and steady wage-earners, and a lower class of the working and non-working poor, but clearly within the confines of what existed on the other side of the veil.³

Ralph Bunche, a prominent black political scientist, took the Urban League to task for its middle-class orientation. He argued that "...basically the policy of the Urban League is not a policy of labor organization or of working class unity. It is a policy thoroughly middle class in its orientation and perspective, which is interested only in getting jobs for Negroes" (Bunche 1940, 270). Bunche points out that the League never really organized or engaged either the black or white rank and file but chose to deal with white employers

and trade union leaders. Therefore they were unable to influence black workers or to represent their best interests (Bunche 1940, 265-266).

When discussing this middle-class orientation, Bunche, like his predecessors, suggests it is a result of the dominance of white businessmen on the board. He writes: “[t]he interracial and business class structure of the directing boards of the Urban League locals have often made it impossible for the work of the League to be as soundly liberal as the local executive secretaries might often wish it to be.” Bunche is also critical of “the timidity and middle-class conservatism” of the black board members (1940, 270). While I do not want to minimize the conservative influence of these boards, I would like to illustrate the limited vision that the League professionals brought to their work.

This vision was exemplified in Eugene Kinckle Jones’ response to Bunche’s criticisms. Jones argued that neither the Urban League nor anyone else other than the “workers themselves” should organize them. Furthermore, “it has never announced that its program is to organize Negro labor” (Jones to Myrdal, August 8, 1940 in Myrdal [1944] 1962, 2:1408). While I have no argument with Jones’ position, it doesn’t adequately reflect the orientation of the League up to that time. Whereas the League did not “organize” black workers per se, they carried some of the same functions of a union. The League presented the grievances of black workers to management (Barnett 1929, 83; Strickland 1966, 69-70; Grossman 1982, 361-62).

In a more organized fashion, the Workers’ Councils, which were established by the League in the thirties, sought “to set up a form of organization in which workers, without the interference of outsiders, may meet to discuss their mutual problems and learn ways of facing them” (Granger 1935, 144). When the Workers’ Councils were being set up in one city, E. Franklin Frazier, who was invited, complained because there were no workers in attendance, only professionals like himself (E. Franklin Frazier to Gunnar Myrdal, September 2, 1942 in Myrdal [1944] 1962, 841). Were the League’s efforts simply a stopgap measure until black workers organized themselves or found adequate

representation in the labor movement? Or did they believe that middle-class professionals could best represent workers' interests, despite Jones' disclaimer?

Jones' comments raise other questions about how self-conscious the League was about diverging class interests in the black community and whether the League represented all or some interests. If the workers should organize themselves, what would be gained in Jones' view? What was inadequate about the middle-class representation of black workers' interests? Until Jones had been pushed on the point of working class representation, most indications were that the League represented either unitary interests, i.e., equal opportunity at a time of labor market racial segmentation (Trotter 1985, 65), and/or acted as a neutral body which could service any and all interests in the black community. A.L. Foster, second executive secretary of the Chicago Urban League, spells out this latter function for his organization by saying, "[a]ll classes of colored people look upon the League as a place where wise and honest advice and counsel may be secured for them" (1929, 98). By 1938, the Chicago League stated its purpose as "to protect the interests of [the] Negro citizen. Anything which concerns the Negro is the concern of the Urban League" (Chicago Urban League [CUL] 1938, 2).

I believe the League thought that as a scientific, social service organization it could represent all interests in the black community. They also believed that the development of the race as a whole, socially and economically, was the unitary interest of the black community. It is unclear to me whether they recognized the implicit middle-class cultured model that underlaid their work and represented the ideal. For them being "cultured" or "respectable" was not restricted to any one class. Or striving to be middle-class was such an unquestioned norm that until the turbulent thirties it was not brought into question for the League (E. Jones 1923, 4-5; Jones to Myrdal, August 8, 1940 in Myrdal [1944] 1962, 2:1408; CLUCAN 1918, 11).

The Role of the Chicago Urban League in the Proletarianization of Black Workers

The proletarianization of black workers had a different meaning for them than for their European immigrant counterparts. For the latter, though coming to America was an opportunity, it often occurred after the immigrants had suffered a downgrade in status and a loss of command over resources in their own countries. Many of the immigrants came either from the landowning, independent peasantry or as artisan classes who suffered from capitalist development. Many of them planned to be in America only long enough to earn capital to buy more land or fund a business back home (Bodnar, Simon, and Weber 1982; Trotter, 1985; Gutman, 1977; Thompson 1967).

For black migrants the move to the North represented freedom and a new start. Most did not have the intention of going back South given its socio-economic and political conditions. They were not from an independent landowning class but mostly were sharecroppers, entrapped in the crop-lien system of the Southern agricultural economy. What positions they held as independent craftsmen were taken from them through a variety of legal and extralegal measures. So industrial employment represented a step up.

Unlike their European counterparts, black migrants could not use established kin networks to gain industrial employment. Because of racism it was difficult for black workers to gain a foothold in an industry long enough to recommend kin and friends. In their study of blacks, Poles and Italians in Pittsburgh, Bodnar, Simon and Weber discovered that when an Italian or Pole entered an industry, they were a lot more successful in getting their "kind" employment in the shop (1982, 56). They pointed out that the foreman, who was either a native white or has an older immigrant background, would rely almost solely on white ethnic employees for new recruits, especially during the busy times (59). Blacks basically had to rely on individual pitches in order to have a chance (60). The lack of a kinship network at various industries restricted employment opportunities which

these industries, black parents encouraged self-sufficiency in their children. This individualism caused black offspring to leave home earlier, to make it on their own because black parents were not in the position to help them out (93). The loss of the children's income compared to Italian and Polish families meant that black women had to work more outside the home and had more boarders than their immigrant counterparts (108). It is reasonable to think this situation existed in Chicago. For some places of employment, i.e., the Stockyards, which employed the most blacks in industry, it doesn't appear that getting a job was difficult, but advancement to semi-skilled and skilled jobs was (Barrett 1987, 48-50). The lack of occupational advance, and vulnerability to slowdowns, reinforced family instability.

Of course, gaining entrance was the key. As these groups became unionized, they used membership in closed shops as an obstacle to prevent black employment. Capital was only interested in black labor as a reserve force to call up in anticipation of or during, labor strife. Often when a settlement had been reached, the black strikebreakers were released. Thus the need for a third party to secure employment for black migrants. The Urban League fulfilled this role in many localities. We will examine how it operated within the particular conditions in Chicago.

Managing Race and Labor Relations

The role that the Chicago Urban League played in managing race and labor relations was seen differently by different groups. Local capital—Rosenwald of Sears and Roebuck, or the Armours, Swifts—saw the League as a main agent in the transformation of black rural peasants into a efficient worker and loyal, law-abiding citizen. The League would not only be able to provide capital with efficient, productive black workers, but also somehow manage racial contacts in such a way as to minimize conflict that might disrupt business and social order in Chicago.

Similarly concerned about racial conflict as a threat to the social order were white progressives. They saw the League responding to the sudden influx of cheap black labor and administering to their needs. In this way, the League played a prominent role in promoting mutual understanding between the races and, in particular, prepared the black masses for modern, urban civilization (Crew n.d.; Foster 1929).

It is useful to our understanding of the role that the League played in managing race relations in the labor sphere to hear from Graham Taylor, a prominent Progressive based in Chicago. We may assume that his views were representative of the social reform community, many of whose members participated in the founding of the Chicago Urban League (Philpott, 1978, 296-301; Davis, 1967, ch. 5). Taylor, director of the Chicago Commons, stressed in an article heralding the advent of the new branch of the Urban League movement in Chicago, the possible danger of race conflict. Taylor felt this danger was imminent given the sudden increase in the black population and its impact on Chicago's institutions. He announced that "the labor of negroes has been more tolerated than welcomed." He found that the antagonism stemmed from labor unions discriminating against blacks and employers only being interested in them as workers to the extent that they could be secured at lower wages than whites.

Taylor had been watching the situation in New York which he did not want to see replicated in his own city. He was most concerned that the attraction of black labor to meet the demands of the war industries would cause a "dangerous" situation of overcrowding. He wrote,

the situation thus being created in many localities is sure to become so dangerous as to demand immediate attention, investigation and provision for the future. Many are the dangers which are to be feared not only, but which already confront every community into which negro laborers are coming more rapidly than special provisions for them is made (Taylor 1917).

Neither the police or the health department could handle this situation “in advance” on its own. The social reformer saw the new League as making those “special provisions.” He was confident that “this effort is to be made by the agency best qualified to undertake the task”—a branch of the National League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes. He was particularly impressed that the League consisted “of able representatives of both races who have organized to secure the co-operation of all agencies to promote the improvement of negro life and labor....” “By tackling this crisis, which Taylor only saw worsening, the League would not only be working “for the benefit of the negro population, but for the safety and progress of the city as a whole...” (Taylor 1917).

It was the managing of the “civilizing process” of black migrants which was the function that the black elite wanted the League to fulfill. Robert Abbott and his *Chicago Defender*, the Urban League, and black clubwomen were in the forefront exhorting the black masses to not hurt the race by their behavior (Crew n.d., 23; Grossman 1982, 206-7). Abbott reminded his fellow citizens that they were responsible for their untutored Southern brothers and sisters. He writes,

[t]here is no desire on the part of the better element to shun their duty in teaching these offensive newcomers that the methods of the South will not be tolerated in the North, but most people dislike to be placed in the category of fault-finders, and many evils slip by on that account (*Chicago Defender*, September 27, 1919).

Abbott emphasized that it was the “duty” of these upstanding members of the black community not to shirk their part in “elevating the race.”

The Afro-American elite felt that, given existing racism, the white community did not recognize distinctive groups within the black community. Middle-class blacks believed that anything done by one member of the race would reflect positively or negatively on the whole group as far as whites were concerned. One “Old Settler” commented “[w]e all suffer for what one fool will do” (Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962, 1:74).

Black leaders were also concerned that white people were getting their opinions about Afro-Americans from their maids or “from some ill-clad colored workman who brushes against him unceremoniously in the car.” Since all blacks were the same it did not matter who whites got their opinions from. A.L. Jackson, who was, at the time, director of the Y.M.C.A., but who later worked for the League and the *Defender*, told his audience that the servants or workers whom whites come in contact with “do not represent the average negro. It takes all kinds of negroes to make a race.” He assures them that “there are colored men who have the will and ability to work with you” in Chicago (The City Club 1919, 76). The black elite took it upon themselves to not let the actions of the “uncivilized” newcomers jeopardize their ability to enjoy access to mainstream Chicago (Lewis 1984). The interests of the Afro-American elite, both the Old Settlers and the new elite, in the migrants’ behavior modification, coincided with white reformers’ concern that the black migrants would not be left unguided on the path to full citizenship. Whether the elites sought either “guidance” or the jettisoning of Southern cultural habits, the desired method was the same—social control (Crew n.d.; Lewis, 1984).

The black elite was also concerned with the “job ceiling” (Drake and Cayton [1945], 1962). They applauded the efforts of the League to secure equal employment opportunity, knowing this would remove an obstacle to development of the race. The elite often felt the ceiling themselves as they attempted to secure employment in mainstream institutions (*Chicago Defender*, April 26, 1919; May 15, 1920; May 13, 1922). Of course, this fetter on middle-class upward mobility was a major factor in the development of separate black institutions. But, as the League recognized, black businesses could not accommodate all the blacks who were qualified for white collar or skilled labor (CUL 1926, 11). They believed that the only way to expand employment possibilities required an attack on the “job ceiling.” This attack necessitated a focus on jobs that excluded blacks—skilled labor and white-collar employment. As time went on, the League began to focus more on acquiring the “better jobs” (“Employment Expansion Discussed Urban League

Secretaries Meet” 1929). The League measured its success in the employment field by the number of openings in firms that had not employed blacks before (CLUCAN 1917, 4; CUL 1923, 7; 1920, 5).

As far as black workers were concerned, the Urban League got them jobs and was an organization to which they could bring their complaints of unfair treatment or working conditions. Given the mistrust black workers had for organized labor in Chicago (Chicago Commission on Race Relations (CCRR), 1922), the League was often their only representative to industrial firms. It is unclear how often black workers sought out the League with wage and working conditions complaints. They usually responded to poor wages, limited mobility, or inadequate working conditions by absenteeism or just leaving the job (T. Hill 1921, 322; Washington 1919, 5; Sayre 1923). The League would get involved with the firms which wanted help dealing with their black labor turnover problem. The League recognized that the poor working conditions or inadequate pay were most often the cause of the problem (CLUCAN 1917, 10).

How did the League see its role in managing race and labor relations? First and foremost, the organization, like its black elite public, believed in the importance of economic progress in order that the race advance. Robert Abbott remarked that “[t]he solution of our whole problem is economic” (*Chicago Defender*, April 26, 1919). This is why the League focused on the industrial area. They believed gains in this area of labor markets would lead to more stable and lucrative employment for black migrants. Moreover, gains for black workers would provide a secure base for black institutional development and go a long way towards attaining the dream of the Black Metropolis (Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962, 1:82).

The dream of a Black Metropolis was the creation of a black city within the city of Chicago. Not only would blacks have their own businesses, social services, recreational outlets, but their working and middle classes. Drake and Cayton describe the years between 1924 and 1929 as the “fat years.” It was during this time that a “professional and

business class arose upon the broad base of over seventy-five thousand colored wage-earners, and was able for a brief period to enjoy the fruits of its training and investment” ([1945] 1962, 1:78). Essentially, the Black Metropolis in its conception (and imperfect actuality) was to be a black microcosm of the “Midwest Metropolis”—Chicago (Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962, 1:78-82; Frazier 1938, 496-497). It meant a filling out of the “normal” societal class structure, which was inherently hierarchal and represented an unequal distribution of privileges (see above p. 7).

An early indication of the Chicago Urban League’s interest in industrial relations may be found in the pronouncements of Dr. Robert E. Park, a Sociology professor at the University of Chicago and first president of the League. Park, after years as Booker T. Washington’s secretary during which he grew familiar with Washington’s ideas about race relations, was considered an expert. Parks’ ideas about the race relations cycle and the importance of racial contacts are clear in his writings. In the *Second Annual Report*, he writes, that “[t]he problem of labor is fundamental. Most other problems, whether of national morale or social welfare, are intimately bound up with it” (CLUCAN 1918, 4). It was in this area more than any other that blacks and whites would have the most “continuous contact” (since residential segregation had effectively separated the races). Thus, the possibility of race friction was increased, especially since economic interest might cause any misunderstanding to be blown out of proportion (CCRR 1922, 403). It was the role of the League “to direct the energies roused by racial antagonism into constructive channels.” Park felt the League could take blacks’ unhealthy, but understandable preoccupation with “their own problem,” and turn it from “a liability into an asset.” Certainly, this is how the League approached its industrial work (CLUCAN 1917, 4).

In an article he wrote ten years after he left his position as the executive secretary of the Chicago Urban League to become director of the Department of Industrial Relations for the National League, T. Arnold Hill, in appraising the Urban League’s relationship to black

labor, comments that all along the Urban League movement's "primary objective has been the development of economic opportunities for Negroes in cities." Despite the presence of other concerns on the Urban League agenda, "the economic question dominated." For the League there was no other concern "more important than that of employment" (T. Hill 1935, 340). Thus their role in managing racial contacts in the industrial sphere was necessary to secure employment opportunities for black workers. In the *Fourth Annual Report*, it is reported that the League's "contact with employers, superintendents and officers of companies has redounded to the benefit of the Negro workers, who in many cases have been kept at their work through our success in eliciting facts which offset prejudicial criticism" (CUL 1920, 6).

Management of black labor was only a means to safeguarding employment opportunities which had been extended by particular firms. In an earlier article in the aftermath of the Race Riot of 1919, Hill laid out clearly how the management of the labor sphere was embedded in the League's vision for advancement of Afro-Americans.

The disposition to crowd all Negroes into a separate sphere, alone and uncared for, is contrary to our scheme of Americanization. It is a source of conflict, for it accentuates the lines of contact.... Actual clashes in industry occur when the races are grouped separately and consequently opposed and allowed to develop group antagonisms. Understanding is promoted by contact (Hill 1919a, 238).

Managing racial contacts in the industrial sphere meant not the separation of races but more contact leading to a better mutual understanding between groups. Hill's successor as executive secretary of the Chicago League, Alton L. Foster reiterated later that "[t]he improvement of relationships between the races is the primary purpose of the League." Foster did not disassociate this goal from the goal of attaining the principle of equality of opportunity, "the true meaning of equality." In fact, he writes that equality of opportunity is secured by two working tenets which are "interracial co-operation on the basis of equal citizenship and encouragement of self-help among our Negro fellow citizens"

(Foster 1929, 98-99). If black workers' would improve themselves, their fellow white workers would accept them on an equal basis. The League believed that more "managed" contact would lead to better relations.

Industrial Relations and Employment Placement

Robert Park stated in the *First Annual Report* in 1917, that "One thing which the League can do and has done for the Negro and for the Nation, is to assist employers in their dealings with colored laborers, and at the same time widen the industrial opportunities of the colored man and woman. To do this is to advertise and develop one of our hitherto natural resources" (CLUCAN 1917, 3). From the start the League saw itself involved in both industrial relations and the placement of black workers. The conviction was that if the League made itself available to "handle" black labor or recommended competent blacks for the position of welfare secretary at the firms, workers would have a better possibility of keeping their jobs, and, as well, working under better conditions.

Claude A. Barnett, director of the Associated Negro Press and chair of the Urban League board's Committee on Industrial Relations, commented on the League's securing employment and ensuring it by managing the black workers. "The League's special task has been to contact large employers of labor, seek openings for skilled and unskilled workers, and to help to solve problems that might arise" (Barnett 1929, 83). Clearly, while the League saw itself seeking equal employment opportunity for black workers, its management function became a necessary part of the task (Crew n.d.; Grossman 1982, ch. 5; Strickland 1966; Spear 1967).

One of the League's principal activities was to sell black labor to local capitalists. But in doing so they needed to know how to detect or, if necessary, to instill the proper character in black workers in order to promote efficient work habits and attitudes. In other words, if the League was engaged in the "experiment" of placing the first black worker(s)

in a firm, they wanted to have a good idea that these “pioneers” would be successful. This activity necessitated that the League be able to make rational job placements, i.e., placing the person with the right qualifications for the job. Their ability to do this was part of their image of themselves as an efficient operation based on scientific principles (accurate information). The importance of this activity was not simply to place blacks into jobs, although the League did place more black workers than any other agency in Chicago. As Park notes, “The ultimate aim should be to enable colored men and women to follow the vocation for which each is best fitted, and thus to bring the complete assimilation of the race into the industrial life of the nation” (CCRR 1922, 365, 401; CLUCAN 1917, 3).

Employment placement was to be a consistent activity of the League throughout its early history. The focus was not to settle for what job possibilities were out there but to create job opportunities where there had not been any. Park points out that “The policy of the Urban League with regard to employment has been to find and, where possible, to open new occupations hitherto denied Negroes” (CLUCAN 1917, 9). The League proudly proclaimed in its annual reports how many blacks had been placed and the number in new occupations or firms. Park announced, “A total of 1792 persons, 411 women and 1381 men, most of whom were new people, were given employment. We were instrumental in getting colored workers into twelve places that had never before hired them” (CLUCAN 1917, 10).

In the area of industrial relations, the League planned to expand. “Efforts will be made to form a closer relation between the League and corporations employing large numbers of Negroes. Wherever such connection can be made, we plan so to relate the interests of the employer and employe [sic] that mutual benefit will result” (CLUCAN 1917, 12). As the League saw itself harmonizing the relations between blacks and whites, it also saw a role for itself in bettering the relations between capital and labor, especially when the labor was black.

The League did not recommend places of employment which refused to pay adequate wages or lacked decent working conditions. The League would investigate employment sites to determine if they were worthwhile places to be employed. In this way, the League rendered a service to black workers so that they could avoid possible dissatisfaction with their job placement (CLUCAN 1917, 10; 1918). For the employers, the League often advised the employment of a welfare worker “believing that the men’s interests would be safeguarded by one of their own race.” Of course, these welfare workers might be influential in instilling the proper attitudes and work habits because they were more likely to be trusted. During its first year of operation they “were able to get three men appointed in such capacities. One of these has under his care the complete hiring, feeding, sleeping, and recreation of the men. The League plans to continue its efforts in this direction, for where the system has been tried satisfactory results have followed” (CLUCAN 1917, 10; 1918, 8).

Relations with Federal Government Over Black Labor

Conscious of its precarious financial position, the League welcomed the efforts of the federal government to support some of its activities. This was the case not only because the League needed money, but because it believed that there was a role for the state to play in the insurance of equal economic opportunity for black workers. The latter principle was evident in the League’s advocacy (along with that of other race organizations) of the appointment of a special advisor in the Labor department (W. Harris 1982, 68).

The League’s employment placement activities attracted the attention of the federal government which was concerned with getting the maximum production out of *all* its workers for wartime mobilization. In March, 1917, the League cooperated with the employment service of the U.S. Department of Labor. Two clerks in the League’s employment service were given larger salaries as examiners of the U.S. Employment

Service while the League paid the rent for the office, provided telephone service and supervised the two examiners (CLUCAN 1918, 5-6). The League was able to convince the U.S. Department of Labor to open a branch of its employment service where it would be accessible to blacks living south of 43rd Street. The office was located at 5000 South State Street, where three black examiners were employed. (CLUCAN 1918, 8; Crounse, Gilbert and Van Driel 1936, 51).

For national black organizations, relations with a government agency and the League were not always as harmonious as was the situation with the U.S. Employment Service. As a result of pressure from black organizations, the Secretary of Labor, William B. Wilson, created a special Division of Negro Economics. Dr. George Edmund Haynes, a Sociology professor at Fisk University and the executive secretary of the National Urban League was named to head the new division and act as advisor to the secretary. Haynes took leave of his post from the NUL in order to become the director of this new division (Harris 1982, 67-68).

The purpose of the new operation was “to gather information for use by the department and other officials and to furnish such information to private organizations for the stimulation of the workers and for the promotion of the co-operative spirit where relations of white workers, white employers and Negro workers are involved” (Haynes 1919c, 535). These areas of concern were not much different than those that preoccupied the National Urban League and the Urban League movement. In addition to the pressure brought to bear by the black organizations, it behooved the Wilson administration to have a handle on the black labor situation since they were needed to replace white soldiers and conscripted immigrant labor for wartime production (Harris 1982, 67-8).

At any rate, while the establishment of the Division of Negro Economics was considered a coup by the national leaders, local race organizations fretted as to how the new Division would do its work on the local level. The local agencies, who were involved in

the placement of black workers, were concerned about potential overlap and conflict of interests.

In particular, the Chicago Urban League expressed concern to the national office over Haynes' and the new division's activities in Chicago. Having just been delegated employment placement by the U.S. Employment Service, the Chicago branch feared another government agency taking over the placement service (Strickland 1966, 52). William C. Graves, secretary to Julius Rosenwald and a member of the board, communicated to L. Hollingsworth Wood, president of the National League, about the situation. He related the concern the League had over not having been contacted by the new division. For Haynes' part, he probably didn't want to show favoritism toward a branch of the National League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes (Strickland 1966, 53).

Not getting any satisfaction from the national office, which was reluctant to get involved, Graves and Hall met with Haynes, and Forrester B. Washington, who was the Illinois and Michigan representative of the Division of Negro Economics. Although Haynes seemed "ambushed," not knowing beforehand the purpose of the meeting, he came out with an understanding that the division would work closely with the Chicago League to avoid any duplication or overlap (Graves to Wood, Oct. 2, 1919). While the League welcomed efforts by the state to support its operations, they were not as welcoming of a state-funded rival. They were not comforted by the thought that both Haynes and Forrester B. Washington were part of the Urban League movement (Strickland 1966, 52-53; Haynes 1919c, 535).

Fitting the Worker to the Job

One of the main obstacles that the League had to fare in placing black workers was the belief by employers that blacks were not suited for modern industry. This belief

usually rested on racist assumptions that blacks were inherently unable to keep up with the pace and lacked the manual dexterity to handle machinery expertly. So a good deal of the “selling” that the League did was to convince employers that blacks could handle the technical requirements of industrial jobs.

There were other requirements for industry that employers feared blacks could not meet because of their Southern backgrounds. These requirements had to do with personal work habits. It was in the area of work habits that the League probably had the most influence in changing. Employers complained that black workers were often late, absent, slow, and unsteady. If blacks were going to succeed in industry they were going to have to adopt a work discipline that was commensurate with modern industrial standards.

The Chicago Urban League had two approaches to the problem of aiding black workers in the acquisition of job requirements: (1) tutoring black masses on punctuality, going to work on a regular basis, staying with a job, etc.; and (2) trying to convince local capitalists that these problems were often the result of a racist foreman, low and unequal wages, and poor, segregated working conditions. These two approaches fit under the League’s general mediating orientation which was especially well expressed in the *Second Annual Report*. under the heading of “Increased Social Consciousness,” the League’s dual role of “the fitting of the masses of colored people for these opportunities and the increasing of the social consciousness of the body politic,” was discussed (CLUCAN 1918, 12). The League did recognize problems of labor turnover and absenteeism as ways that pre-industrial folks dealt with harsh, industrial discipline (Gutman, 1977; Thompson 1967). Although they understood this form of resistance and worked to better conditions, they also knew that migrants had to change their behavior and to find other channels for their discontent at working conditions (Sayre 1923; Johnson 1925).

One expression of the League’s mediating orientation was the fact that the League “tried to fit the workers to the jobs and the jobs to the workers.” The latter doesn’t refer to the League intervening in job standards or requirements but refers to having an “interest in

matters of wages and hours, disagreements, working conditions and the introduction of welfare facilities” (CUL 1919, 3). The division of labor and assignment of tasks were still in the purview of management without outside interference. It appears that the League had a sense that a reciprocal relationship existed between the employer and employee. Park argued that it would be “folly...to insist that standard wages be paid colored workers, and not insist upon colored people rendering trained and efficient service [and] would be a weak case” (CLUCAN 1918, 12; Crounse, Gilbert and Van Driel 1936, 61). Lets take a closer look just how reciprocal was this relationship?

At the time that the League got involved in industrial relations after 1915, industry had felt the brunt of Taylorism. Under the guise of “scientific management” there was a separation of the mental and manual aspects of a particular job. The mental part of the labor process was taken away from the skilled craftsman and brought under management’s control. The average worker had less autonomy in doing a particular task than he or she had previously. There was an attempt to reduce the labor process, to a series of routinized tasks with all excess motion cut out to achieve a more efficient process. The worker, once fairly autonomous in the labor process, was now simply an appendage of the machine (Braverman 1974; Noble 1977; Brody 1980; Palmer 1975).

The Urban League, not unlike many social welfare organizations under the sway of Progressive ideology, whether black or white, embraced the new efficiency in all its guises (Haber 1964). There are different reasons for why the League so readily endorsed the “shibboleth of efficiency” (Grossman 1982, 277; Strickland 1966, 14). For an organization trying to persuade the white public that blacks were not inherently inferior and unable to handle the tasks of modern industry, the notion of efficiency proved especially attractive. The League tried to instill in each black worker a sense of personal efficiency which meant adopting all the necessary requirements to be effective on the job. Having achieved a high level of personal efficiency, the black worker would abet commercial

efficiency making him, in turn, acceptable to the capitalist. The notion of efficiency which preoccupied the industrial managers who aimed to get more output for less input. In other words, producing more products with less resources, including labor. This could be accomplished by a labor-saving machine or by paying labor more but not so much that it would eat into raising profits (Haber 1964).

Social efficiency for the League, not unlike other professional-led bureaucratic organizations, “meant social harmony and the leadership of the ‘competent’” (Haber 1964). League professionals sought harmony not only between the races but between capital and labor as well. In fact, some argued that the black worker, with his sense of loyalty, could be the bridge to better industrial relations. The League’s use of social work was to bring modernization and competence to the areas of social welfare and public services in the black community. This value of competence is reflected in Eugene Kinckle Jones’ lament that a particular locality with a history of racial violence had done without “a centralized social service program for Negroes,” i.e., a branch of the Urban League (E. Jones 1927, 76).

So the acceptance of all these levels of efficiency meant that the League imposed limitations on itself in dealing with “working conditions” not unlike white reformers (Davis 1967) and the conservative trade unions. The League faced an additional obstacle that the other two groups didn’t share, namely, that its racist framework made it difficult for the organization to conceive of a complaint beyond racial discrimination in wages, treatment or working conditions. Even when the League documents its refusal to send blacks to jobs because of poor wages and/or working conditions, we don’t know if the lower wages were for blacks only or the conditions poor because they were segregated. In other words, if whites were getting the same wages and working under the same conditions would the League refuse to place blacks there?

The League imposed the domination of “efficiency” on the individual black worker and worked for harmonious relations between black labor and white capital and labor to the detriment of the former. There were times when different interests could not *all* be met.

For instance, buoyed by the rapid absorption of blacks into industry in Chicago during the war, the League only recognized racial barriers to black workers' advancement. When the League foresaw the coming of the recession of 1921, they sent notices to ministers telling them about the impending unemployment and requesting that they urge their congregations "to stick to their jobs and make themselves more efficient where they are" (*Chicago Defender*, December 4, 1920). Furthermore, they accepted unemployment derived from the periodic recessions of the twenties, caring mainly to see if blacks were laid off disproportionately or not (T. Hill 1921, 325; Kornweibel 1976, 310). Given the League's racist ideology, and belief in "efficiency," it could only recognize racial discrimination as an external barrier to the worker's economic security. Otherwise, the individual black worker's employment was dependent on his or her own capabilities, not on the vagaries of the business cycle.⁴

The role played by the League in tutoring migrants to adopt "personal efficiency" was crucial for the process of proletarianization of black workers which brought them into the modern industrial order. A closer look into this process also sheds light on the politics of the Chicago Urban League. One of the legacies of Booker T. Washington to the Urban League movement was its avoidance of what the organization perceived as "politics" (Strickland 1966). The concentration on economic progress, although couched in terms of the fulfillment of American democracy, was considered a scientific process, not a political one. In discussing the plight of black women workers during the postwar unemployment crisis, Forrester Washington remarked "[t]o force all the women of one race into unskilled work is as unscientific as it is unjust" [1919, 6]. Washington attempted to make his argument on the nonpolitical grounds of inefficient use of human resources in the hopes that these grounds would be more persuasive than a call for justice. The influence of Booker T. Washington's avoidance of politics, coupled with the reduction of politics to "scientific" administration that was in vogue during this era, meant the League masked politics and the interests which it served.

Too often commentators have tried to judge the League's politics by its stand on unionization (which we'll take up in the next part of this chapter). They fail to see the pervasive political influence the League had in its attempts to socialize black workers. One commentator did observe the way in which the League, along with the local branches of the NAACP, "politicized" the voluntary associations that populated the black communities during this period (Kilson 1971). We are left to figure out this politicization and to what ends. Perhaps a look at *how* this advice was given will help us distinguish between the thin line of helping, on the one hand, or disciplining, on the other, "the dark, dumb masses" (Lewis, 1984, 558).

The Chicago Urban League operated in the area of labor tutelage in a context of welfare capitalism (Brandes 1976; Brody 1980). Industry in this era was receptive to the idea of making working conditions not only adequate but qualitatively better, hoping to get that much more output from its "happy and contented" workers (Brody 1980, 52; Bloomfield 1915). A number of firms had their own welfare schemes to ensure the loyalty and happiness of black workers (National Safety Council Proceedings, 1920). Still others depended on the League for advice in trying to handle their black labor (Strickland 1966; Grossman 1982). Some ambitious firms ended up hiring welfare workers right from the offices of the Chicago Urban League. Helen Sayre was hired by Nachman Springfilled Cushion, Inc. to deal with the labor turnover problem of the black female employees (Sayre 1923, 17-19). There are other instances of the League supplying welfare workers to the firms. Here is an example of the career interests of black social workers unable to gain employment in mainstream welfare institutions converging with the interests of local capital to manage its black labor. In announcing the opportunities for clerical work for qualified black women, the League hastened to point out the need for "good qualified leadership in all places where large numbers of girls are working, especially in this early stage of the game" (*Chicago Defender*, February 17, 1921). Since it seemed that welfare secretaries got assigned by the gender of the work force, it is more than likely that the League was

referring to female social workers who were usually limited to the areas of health, home improvement, and civic betterment.

The workplace was not the only place where this guidance was given. The League employed both black club women and pastors to spread “the gospel of efficiency” (Hays 1959; CLUCAN 1918, 9-10). As I mentioned in the previous chapter (see p. 55), these women were sent to the homes of the newcomers to instruct them on the proper behavior to adopt in order to assimilate into this new urban, industrial order. The League developed a pamphlet to be handed out to the newcomers. One scholar described it in the following way:

[t]wo American flags lay crossed in the middle of the flyer with contrasting pictures of black women dressed in rural clothing and in more sophisticated styles positioned on either side of the flags. In bold letters, ‘Which For Me’ was printed between the photographs and a list of eleven statements followed.

The first statement asserted, ‘I am an American citizen.’ Following it were other statements which proved why the first statement was true.

‘I DESIRE to help bring about a NEW ORDER OF LIVING in this community.’

‘I WILL ATTEND to the neatness of my personal appearance on the street or when sitting in front of doorways.’

‘I WILL REFRAIN from wearing dust caps, bungalow aprons, house clothing and bedroom shoes out of doors.’

‘I WILL ARRANGE MY TOILET within doors and not on the front porch.’

‘I WILL REFRAIN from loud talking and objectionable deportment on street cars and in public places.’
(National Urban League 1920, 20-21; Crew, 19].

The Chicago Urban League attempted to systematize these efforts in 1926 with the founding the Department of Civic Betterment. The department was to instruct the black working class on “habits of thrift, cleanliness, health and general good behavior” (CUL 1926, 16). It was clear to the League that they had to encroach on the hours after work in order to gain the most influence over the migrants. Forrester Washington commented that in the North migrants had more leisure time than they were accustomed to. He implied that

the League needed to find ways of filling this time with moral and wholesome leisure activities. Charles Johnson argued that the transformation of the rural peasantry meant “a reorganization of the physical and mental habits which are a legacy of their old experience.” (C. Johnson 1925, 721; Grossman 1982, 275-6). It is clear that the League aggressively sought to transform the newcomers into the image of the black elite, thereby making them more acceptable to the white community and less of a threat to the elites’ hope to one day integrate into the American mainstream (Lewis 1984).

“Gaining a Foothold”: Post-World War I Unemployment Crisis and the Chicago Urban League Response

Black industrial gains during World War I had been substantial enough to warrant some commentators to announce the black worker’s arrival to Northern industry. Some analysts were more sanguine than others (Spero and Harris [1931] 1969, 149, 163; W. Harris 1982, 61). It was clear that the blacks had made the transition from an “experiment” to become a “permanent factor in industry.” (Spero and Harris [1931] 1969, 163). What was not so clear was the use of this “factor” by large industrial employers or whether blacks would be able to retain their position and status in industry after the wartime labor emergency.

For the more optimistic observers, blacks had moved substantially into manufacturing employment and away from domestic and personal service (at least black men had). But blacks were located at the bottom of the job ladder where the jobs were dirty and often dangerous, and subject to sporadic unemployment. The white industrial elite continued to find black labor attractive as a non-union force as well. To the officials of the Chicago Urban League, black workers’ lower status was to be expected. Had not races or ethnic groups been the “farthest men down” in industry at one time or another (Evans, 1923, 16)?

The national recession of 1920-1921 threatened the tenuous hold blacks had on industry. The Chicago Urban League's response sheds more light on its politics. During an economic crisis meeting all interests is more difficult than during times of economic growth. Whose interests did the League serve? White capital's? Black workers'? The black elite's? Their own? At a time when discussion of the meaning of democracy and citizenship was ripe because of the government's war propaganda and widespread popular nativism, we get a sense of the meanings the League's professionals attached to these contested political concepts.

Some unemployment was inevitable given the slackening of post-war production. The conversion over to consumer durables was not smooth. We find an increase in the service sector, thereby increasing white-collar employment. The situation affected blacks more harshly. The by now all too familiar phrase "last hired, first fired" applied to the employment situation of black workers. As white servicemen came back from fighting overseas, they expected their old jobs back or had first priority for new job possibilities (Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962, 1:77).

The Chicago Commission on Race Relations was circumspect in their study about the future of blacks in Chicago industries. They mention that a number of factors affected the status of blacks in industry, among them were the

renewal of immigration in large volume, depressed business conditions, attempted reductions in labor costs, increasing unemployment, falling wages, the announced determination of many employers' associations throughout the country to undermine the strength of unions by establishing the 'open shop' which might involve the use of Negro labor, and the admitted prejudice of foreman against Negro labor in many plants (CCRR1922, 400).

Perhaps the dominant factor was the downturn in the business cycle that many, including the League, were unable to counteract. Because of immigration restrictions after the war, the heavy traffic in cheap Southern, Central and Eastern European labor did not resume.

Capital's assault on unionized labor might, some hoped, have a beneficial effect on black industrial employment given their use as a non-union work force by capital. But the League was not in a position to command the economy and had to adjust to the new conditions. More accurately, it had to assist black labor in adjusting to these new conditions.

When the Chicago Commission on Race Relations held its industrial conference to ascertain the opinions of employer and labor representatives in April and May 1920, the former groups had no plans for layoffs. But if they did, they assured the Commission, it would be on the grounds of "efficiency and seniority rights...[not] color" (1922, 401). This all changed as unemployment began to rise in the fall of that year. The Chicago Urban League, which placed more black workers than any agency in the city, analyzed this crisis. William L. Evans, the industrial secretary of the League, had ascertained that not only the inefficient were losing their jobs but also those with "good records." He reported on November 20 that "[a]t the present time the unemployment among colored people has reached what seems serious proportions." In fact, "[t]he present unemployment problem is probably as serious as any the League has known." (CCRR 1922, 401-2).

Black unemployment was so serious that the League began to serve notice to black workers to stick to their jobs (*Chicago Defender*, Nov. 27, 1920). The following week, the League announced in its "Labor Bulletin" in the *Defender*, that they had placed only 71 applicants as compared to 127 (out of 896 and 1,073 respectively) the previous week (Dec. 4, 1920). As conditions worsened, the League remained optimistic that there would be a turnaround. Nonetheless, they preached the "gospel of efficiency" through the ministers to black workers. The League's immediate response to the crisis was to admonish workers concerning their inefficiency. The organization found this situation intolerable "at a time when they should be most eager to please and to prove themselves efficient" (*Chicago Defender*, Dec. 4, 1920; George Edmund Haynes to Walter F. White, Nov. 12, 1919; Turner 1920, 319).

But within three to four months, the League's outlook grew less sanguine. The organization started to discourage migration from the South. Evans, although understanding reasons for migration from the South, warned the prospective migrants that "we [the League] feel it is our duty to tell you of conditions here so that you may not leave your homes uninformed" (*Chicago Defender*, March 12, 1921). It didn't seem to matter to many migrants, as one young man argued, because it was better to be out of work in Chicago than in Mississippi (T. Hill 1921, 324). At this time, Evans reported that there were 18,000 unemployed black men. The League acted as a clearinghouse for relief efforts targeted at blacks in the city (*Chicago Defender*, March 12, 1921).⁵

The appeals to efficiency were weak compared to the enormity of the situation. Early efforts had been made to seek employment opportunity outside of the city limits. Chicago was the labor distribution center for Midwestern cities and towns. Evans sought job possibilities in nearby Mid-western towns. He "was sent to Battle Creek, to Flint, to Detroit, and to parts of Wisconsin and Illinois in an effort to distribute the oversupply of labor to relieve Chicago of what might have been a most menacing and disastrous situation" (Chicago Urban League 1919, 3). These efforts were all inadequate. The League, unable to influence "business conditions," counseled black workers to become indispensable through by their productivity. This advice was helpful up to the point when even keeping efficient workers was not economical and, therefore, workers were laid off.

By the League's account, the 1920-1 recession was a temporary setback which didn't seriously affect the gains black workers made during the war. Most officials claimed that black workers were not laid off in disproportionate numbers. Blacks kept their proportion of the labor force in many large industries. T. Arnold Hill reported to the National Conference of Social Work's 48th Annual Session in Milwaukee, that the "significant development in this matter of unemployment is the fact that negroes have retained their ratio in all the large factories and industries now opened...Except in the case of a few small shops, no replacement of negroes by whites is noted." [1921, 325; Evans,

1923, 15]. It was precisely those “small shops” which had employed black women. Black women workers clearly felt more of the detrimental effects of “Reconstruction” than any others.

An indication of the recession’s differential impact on black women workers is the extent to which women remained locked into domestic and personal service employment. The proportion of the black male labor force engaged in the personal sector decreased from 45 percent to 25 percent in 1920. But black women workers’ proportion increased from 40 percent to 65 percent during the same period (Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962, 1:232-33). Mary Roberts Smith, who was director of the department of women and girls and a special investigator at the League, made the case that black women capitalized on their wartime opportunities despite being handicapped by a lack of training and experience (1918, 7-8; Van Kleeck 1919, 134-5; Irvin 1919, 521-524).

It wasn’t long after the war, though, that black women felt its immediate effects. Forrest Washington argues that black women were dismissed in industries that didn’t have returning soldiers. He appealed to his audiences’ sense of fair play, which he assumed to be a part of American justice, that, “[t]he history of the experiences of colored women in the present war should make fair-minded Americans blush with shame.” He went on to describe black women’s marginal status in industry located at “the most undesirable and lowest paid” jobs, with special disapprobation for Chicago, which was “the most inconsiderate in its treatment of the colored women worker.” There was less employment in skilled and semi-skilled job categories in Chicago than elsewhere. Those cities which were the first to release black women, i.e., Chicago, were also the places of “the least industrial progress” (Washington 1919, 4).

Black women’s employment opportunities in Chicago had, for the most part, been limited to the areas of restaurants, hotels and laundries (Washington 1919, 4). Black women had increased their portion of the labor force in the laundry industry during the decade of the 20s. Black women made up half of the work force in the Chicago laundries

only after the labor shortage of the war (Jones 1985, 178). They were being “released wholesale” from the garment industries which Washington felt was the only area where black women “could be truthfully said to have made an industrial advance.” (Washington 1919, 4; Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962, 1:77). The meatpacking industry was the only major employer which had not released black women. This positive circumstance, however, had mainly to do with the fact that there was still a high demand for meat after the war (1919, 4-5). “Over 3,000 black women in Chicago found jobs in meatpacking plants” (Jones 1986, 166). In the meatpacking industry black women held the most undesirable jobs; and received lower pay for doing the same work as white women (Herbst in Jones, 1986, 177).⁶

Black women were locked in dreaded domestic service positions. They had gotten a taste of employment that not only paid better, but allowed them to have their nights and weekends off to spend with their family or in leisure, if single. They had few options outside of the personal service sphere. Even as black women met discrimination in factory jobs, they were also virtually excluded from the white-collar sector, a sector experiencing real growth during this period (Jones 1986, 178). By 1930, only 300 black women had secured clerical work while 42,000 female workers had been absorbed in this sector of the Chicago labor market. (Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962, 1:230, see table 8). The Chicago Urban League had made extensive efforts to increase the employment of black women in clerical positions during this period. It had secured what turned out to be temporary positions for black women working at Sears, Roebuck, Co. and Montgomery Wards mail-order businesses during the holiday rush seasons. The organization had waged a long campaign to secure employment for black women at the telephone company but to no avail. White-collar employment for women depended more on “a pleasing physical appearance” which necessitated a model that most closely resembled “a native-born white American standard of female beauty” (Jones 1986, 179). The League was perhaps not unaware of the new requirements of white-collar employment which included tact, politeness, and a

charming personality, as it emphasized the physical and personal attractiveness of prospective black women looking for employment.

The inability for black workers to advance to skilled and supervisory positions, and therefore, their inability to pass on these gains to their sons and daughters, illustrated the fragility of their status in factory employment. Of course, this vulnerability would be made more apparent during the Depression. The Chicago Urban League was unable to lift the “job ceiling” put into place by employer and union racial discrimination although it tried. The League was not always privy to worker’s conditions, but did always avail itself of the extent of the workers’ preparedness to make the most out of their opportunities. In this way, the League affirmed its belief in equal opportunity and self-help sufficiency by attempting to ride out temporary setbacks to their goal of racial parity.

Policy On Remigration of Black Labor to the South and the Regulation of Black Manpower In and Out of Chicago

The stance that the Chicago Urban League took, encouraging and discouraging black migration north or remigration south, reflected the complex interplay of interests which the League attempted to balance. From the standpoint of capital migration was seen as favorable when it offered them strikebreakers or cheap labor to drag down wages. Migration was not favorable to the elite in times of unemployment and labor peace when their overcrowding in the Black Belt presented a welter of social problems, e.g., crime, poverty, sickness, racial tension. For black workers, the principle of migration which represented liberation had to be confirmed by the League. An essential belief of American liberalism is freedom of movement and the ability to “vote with one’s feet.” So black workers would probably only look askance at continued migration when it represented more competition for scarce jobs and housing. From the perspective of the League and the black middle class, the migration of black workers during periods of unemployment only

heightened competition with whites over jobs and housing, and enhanced the possibility of racial conflict. For the League it meant the failure of managing racial contacts. For the black elite it meant less penetration in the mainstream for itself and in the case of racial conflict, it meant the possibility of indiscriminate attacks since the white public knew no distinctions when it came to blacks (Lewis 1984, 551).

So treatment of the stances the League took on migration and remigration might give us a clue on how it met these varied interests. Because of the stakes involved the organization was careful not to appear to be explicitly advising blacks to do one thing or another. Apparently the Chicago Urban League was charged with encouraging black migration to Chicago. Horace Bridges, the League's second president, felt it was necessary to deal with the issue in the *Seventh Annual Report* (1923). He countered the charge that the League had been actively engaging in enticing black labor here by saying "*That is not true at all, and never was true.* On the contrary, whenever business is slack here, we send warnings throughout the South informing Negroes that work is not available in Chicago" (his emphasis). He went on to say that basically blacks did not need any encouragement to leave the poor conditions. He points out that "it was not until large numbers of them had already come into Chicago and other Northern cities that our League was organized to take care of the very menacing problems inevitably resulting from their arrival." (CUL1923, 3).

The issue of remigration first emerged for the Chicago League in 1919. Interracial delegations from the South were visiting Northern cities like Chicago and trying to reclaim the black labor which had migrated from their region. While the North was in a recession, the South had a severe labor shortage caused by the precipitate migration of black laborers to the North. These "emissaries" had the expressed purpose of painting rosy pictures about the "changed South." The Chicago Urban League was wary of becoming a vehicle for the propaganda of such groups. Therefore, T. Arnold Hill asked for clarification from the national office over policy.

L. Hollingsworth Wood responded to Hill, first, by commenting on the fact that the East Coast had not experienced the same kind of pressure that Chicago felt to persuade black laborers to go back South. He was wondering why the League has been asked to participate in this endeavor. At the time the League took a neutral position, letting the North and South compete for black labor. In this situation the League only attempted to aid the migrants in whatever option they chose. Perhaps concerned about its own influence, the League made it clear that it was the migrant him or herself that was making the decision. Wood weighed the pros and cons of getting the organization to aid these dubious delegations, feeling that doing so might win favor with Southern whites, although it would also earn the ire of Southern blacks. He promised to take up the matter at the next executive board meeting. He also suggested that a group of them deal with the issue at the upcoming National Conference on Charities meeting in Atlantic City (L. Hollingsworth Wood to T. Arnold Hill, May 19, 1919).

Apparently, the national office saw the issue of black remigration to the South as important and national enough (despite Wood's reservations) to deliberate over the matter at its annual meeting. The policy adopted at the conference held in Detroit on October 15th to 18th in 1919 had larger ramifications than simply the issue of remigration of blacks to the South. Essentially, the National Urban League affirmed the right of every Afro-American to seek opportunity and justice where he or she could find it. So it was up to the black individual where he or she wanted to be. The League would be more than happy to investigate these supposedly new and better conditions in the South. If they found better conditions, plus a willingness to guarantee the human and constitutional rights of blacks, the League would communicate what they had seen to interested parties. In fact, the Chicago Urban League did investigate conditions in the South and found them relatively unchanged (T. Hill 1919, 185). All in all, the League took this opportunity to impress upon the South the need to engage in "fundamental reform of those conditions against which the departure of these thousands of Negroes was a protest" (CUL1919, 3-4).

The significance of the position taken by the League is expressed in a number of ways. First, we get a comprehensive view of the League's attitudes toward the conditions that blacks faced in the South (and by implication migration from those conditions), clearly distinguishing them from the "cast down your buckets where you are" legacy of Booker T. Washington. For unlike BTW and his successor black leaders in the South who thought the Negro's future laid in the South, the League felt it was up to the individual black to choose where their destiny might lie. For them migration of blacks from the South was something of a "protest" against intolerable conditions. Secondly, we get the National League wrestling with the issue of its proper role in attempting to regulate the flow of black manpower in and out of the urban, industrial centers. Because of local dynamics, the local leagues did not always have the luxury of staying neutral. As I mentioned above, the Chicago Urban League found itself at a later point discouraging migration because of the unemployment situation in Chicago (*Chicago Defender*, March 12, 1921).⁷

Unionization, Strikebreaking, and Managing Race Relations at the Workplace

An important area in which to analyze the Chicago Urban League's politics is its stance towards unionization and strikes. In the interests of black workers' economic security support for unionization was crucial. The matter is complicated by the unions unwillingness to either have Afro-Americans as members or, if admitted, to extend to them all the rights and privileges of membership. How could the League best represent the workers' interest given this situation? Should there be unconditional support for unions and their greatest tool, the strike? Should they throw their lot with the capitalists who were only willing to hire them for lower wages or to work under subpar conditions or with the expectation that they express their "loyalty" by not joining the union or striking? The

Urban League sought to find a solution that best represented the interests of the black working class. In doing so they responded to some pressures more than others. But most importantly, the League met its own interest which was to be that representative; in other words, they planned to be in the position to interpret black workers' interest to both white capital and white labor.

Black Leaders and White Reformers on the "Labor Question"

The Chicago Urban League, like its parent body, had both a philosophical and a practical orientation to the labor unions. Philosophically, the League believed in unionization and the principle of collective bargaining. At the time of the League's founding and early history, unions had been accepted by white social reformers (who had a strong representation in Chicago) and, to a lesser extent, by black leadership in the community (Davis 1967, ch. 6). Practically, the League knew that unionization was here to stay and must be dealt with. They took what they thought to be a neutral position between capital and labor. (In fact some officials felt the League was at an advantage because of this position). As far as they were concerned, both could give or take away employment, therefore they must be dealt with shrewdly.

Allen Davis describes the Social Settlement Progressives as being in favor of unions but abhorrent of the violence that was too often associated with strikes. These Progressives saw first hand the ravages of poverty as a result of wage cuts and unemployment. They also saw the impact of wretched working conditions on the health and well-being of the working classes. Therefore, they were sympathetic with any force that worked to correct this situation. Labor organizers were often frequent guests at Hull House. Sometimes the settlements were the only place where the labor unions could meet. Some of the settlement workers themselves had been involved in the labor movement or, if

not directly involved as organizers, they provided support during strikes (Davis 1967, ch. 6; CCRR 1922, 431).

As far as the black leadership goes, it has been characterized as pretty much anti-union (Spero and Harris [1931] 1969, 137; CCRR 1922, 421). Black leaders such as Kelly Miller, a dean at Howard University and a member of the National Urban League's board of directors, admonished black workers to stay loyal to the people who gave them their opportunity to work in the first place. He felt that whites used labor unions to prevent open competition with blacks over jobs. But perhaps the most significant reason for Miller was the success of the "Captains of Industry." He writes, "I believe that the interest of my people lies with the wealth of the nation and with the class of white people who control it" (Miller [1903] 1980, 5:11-12; Spero and Harris [1931] 1969, 134-35).

Booker T. Washington is another figure associated with the anti-union position. His article in the *Atlantic Monthly* cites the reasons for his position being blacks' particular experience with employer paternalism as well as labor's racial discrimination. Washington did not think blacks had the personality or psychology that would make them attractive to unions. He argued that the typical Southern black works more for "the person than for wages." Booker T. was critical of organized labor's exclusionary policies, and the practice of associating blacks as natural strikebreakers. Mr. Washington was not wrong to bring up the unions' racially exclusionary policies but, characteristically, he omitted the contributions capitalists made to labor market segmentation ([1913] 1980, 5:110). In addition to these prominent figures, there are many references to preachers and social workers who are anti-union and supported strikebreaking (Chicago Commission on Race Relations 1922, 421; Spero and Harris [1931] 1969, 137; Foner and Lewis 1980, vols. 5 & 6).

Chicago Black Leadership on Unionization and Strikebreaking

Black leaders and organizations that worked in the area of industrial relations believed in unionization but felt that organized labor's racism was an obstacle to their unqualified support. The Chicago Commission on Race Relations explored the reasons for blacks' coolness toward unions. They felt that the "attitude of indifference or suspicion" was due "to the following reasons: (a) traditional treatment of Negroes by white men; (b) influence of racial leaders who oppose unionization; and (c) influence of employers' propaganda against unionism" (1922, 426).

The first reason refers to the distrust of many blacks of the motives whites had in wanting to organize them. They often realized it was not out of the spirit of brotherhood, but a pragmatic move to prevent the use of blacks as strikebreakers. The second reason refers to the leadership in the black community which openly opposed unions and advised blacks not to strike against the industrialists who had given them their opportunity to work (usually because of a strike or for reasons of lowering wages). The third reason has resonance only insofar as there was a kind of residual acceptance of paternalism which black migrants brought with them from the South, or to the extent this anti-union propaganda was furthered by black organizations. The bottom line held that if unions could act pragmatically in deciding when to organize blacks, then blacks could do the same. In other words, black workers could join the unions when it was in their best interests.

A reference to a "double-cross" by white labor during the 1903 waiters strike kept coming up in the Commission's discussion of organized labor and black leadership. Black waiters struck with white waiters against the Kohlsaats chain of restaurants. When the strike was over, white waiters were invited back and agreed to return without their black colleagues. In the confusion afterwards the black local was revoked. Organized labor blamed Kohlsaats for the problem. John Fitzpatrick, president of the Chicago Federation of Labor, argued that Kohlsaats used the newspaper it owned, the *Chicago Herald*, to set up

“an atmosphere of fear and suspicion between the colored and white workers.” He claimed that Kohlsaatt had requested the union supply them with “white union girls” to replace the black men, and they refused to do so. He further explained that “somehow” Kohlsaatt, through its newspaper, had the charter revoked from the international organization.

Fitzpatrick’s vague recounting of the story does not answer the crucial question: why did the white waiters go back to work without the black waiters? It is understood that if workers go out on strike with you, you don’t go back unless all of you do. Of course, this principle is not adhered to in every case. I am sure there are instances where blacks did not go on strike with their white brethren. But apparently this case of the “double-cross” was fresh in the memories of those queried who were “suspicious or indifferent” toward organized labor (CCRR1922, 426-427).

It may be that the distrust and antagonism reported by the Commission was entirely accurate or if so, relatively short-lived. Charles S. Johnson, the main author the Commission report, said in a letter to Walter White of the N.A.A.C.P., before the Commission had issued its report, that the 1903 waiters strike had “provided an excuse for the spirit of antagonism, indifference and hostility which has characterized the attitude of Negroes to the Unions for the past twelve years.” At the time of his writing White, 1918, he was more optimistic because “through the efforts of Mr. John Riley organizer, Dr. Geo. C. Hall, and Miss S. P. Breckinridge a more cordial relationship has been established” (April 17, 1918). At odds with the above opinion, in a sample of black workers’ opinions on unions reported by the Commission showed that 10 out of 13 were positive. The workers, many of whom were recent migrants, made comments such as unions were the “best thing in the world for a working man.” One sober appraisal by a respondent said he would join the union if “it meant anything to me materially.” A number of respondents spoke favorably about the unions offering “job protection.” Of the three respondents who offered negative opinions, one was a foreman of truckers in a box factory, another was a

clerical worker in a large mail order establishment, and the last a head waiter at a hotel who made many references to the 1903 waiters strike (424-426).

Organized labor in Chicago placed too much emphasis on the influence of race leadership in creating Afro-American workers' hostility toward "white men's unions." The long history of black strikebreaking indicated to white labor some basic anti-unionism in the black community. Not needing the prodding of black leaders, black workers directly experienced or witnessed the racial slights against them by the unions. If they had been skilled craftsmen in Southern towns or cities, or associated with the railroad industry, they got first hand experience in union racial exclusion or discrimination with regards to apprenticeships to skilled labor and supervisory positions. As social workers, the Urban League was lumped in with politicians and ministers in the anti-union camp. Just as the League was instrumental in finding jobs for migrants, and for counseling efficient work habits, it is reasonable to believe that the League had some influence on Afro-American workers' views of joining unions and supporting strikes.

Chicago Urban League Policy on Unions and Strikebreaking

Because of the Urban League's influence on black workers, or at least its claim to represent their interests, it is important to gauge their stance on this exceedingly complex issue. The League's position toward unions was conveyed in at least two ways. First, they issued a series of pronouncements about the desirability of unionization and the actions the League took with regard to individual strikes. Second, the League carried out many of the functions that would be done traditionally by unions, i.e., representing workers in grievances over discriminatory wages or conditions (Grossman 1982; 361). Of course, the substitution of social welfare schemes, whether by the firm or a welfare worker hired by the firm for unions, was one of the major reasons for the attractiveness of "welfare

capitalism” to industrial employers (Brandes 1976). As I have mentioned above, the Urban League fulfilled this role.

The Chicago Urban League’s posture toward unions was influenced by an agreement of the national body before the Chicago branch had been organized. The National League on the Urban Conditions Among Negroes stated its position in 1913. This position had to do with the National League’s relationship to the American Federation of Labor, and what the two bodies would do in cooperation. The Urban League agreed to counteract the widespread impression that white organized labor was against having blacks as full and equal members of their unions. They also agreed to educate black workers on the principles of unionization and to promote the conviction that their interest was one with white workers. For the A. F. of L.’s part, they were to try to educate white workers’ on their “indifferent or prejudiced attitude” toward black labor and to organize “the unskilled and semiskilled occupations,” bringing blacks into the unions with whites when possible, and, if not, organizing them into separate locals “with full privilege and rights of representation in the central councils and in the National conventions” (National League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes 1913).

There is no mention of a policy on, or working with, organized labor in the Chicago Urban League’s *First Annual Report*. Most of the references are to working with employers and seeking wider industrial opportunities (Chicago League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes 1917; also see previous section). The first mention of the League’s relationship to the struggle between capital and labor is in the *Second Annual Report*. In this report, it states that the League “has stood between capital and labor, insisting that each should recognize and do its duty by the Negro, using as a criterion the treatment accorded whites” (although not under the section entitled “Industrial Work”). There are other references to the League cooperating “with City and State officials of the Federation of Labor over policies in regard to Negro Labor”; also, with the “Women’s Trade Union League” where the League advised one of their organizers who had targeted

black female workers. In addition, the League had recommended a woman worker who assisted the union “in organizing several hundred women working in the Stockyards.” Early in the CUL history, while not a full blown policy toward labor, there is an early recognition that the League’s stance toward labor was similar to the one towards capital. There is also early evidence of both conferring and cooperating with organized labor in Chicago (CLUCAN1918, 12, 6; CUL1920, 8; 1926, 12).

Perhaps the most definitive statement made by the National Urban League was shaped by Horace Bridges, second president of the Chicago branch. This was at the National League’s annual convention in October 16-19, 1919. A document was produced entitled “A Way Out.” The statement declared the importance of blacks as one-seventh of the labor force. The League insisted that black workers received treatment commensurate with their numbers. In addition to challenging union racism, black workers had to deal with employers giving “meager opportunities for advancement, and the wages and labor conditions...far below the American standard.” Black workers were caught “between...upper and lower millstones” at the industrial workplace. On the crucial question of the League’s relationship to organized labor the statement declared:

We believe in the principle of collective bargaining, and in the theory of cooperation between capital and labor in the settlement of industrial disputes and in the management of industry. But in view of the present situation, we advise Negroes in seeking affiliation with any organized labor group to observe caution. We advise them to take jobs as strikebreakers only where the union affected has excluded colored men from membership. We believe they should keep out of jobs offered in a struggle to deny labor a voice in the regulation of conditions under which it works.

The National League was encouraging the Afro-American proletariat to “think more and more in terms of labor group movement.” If unionization failed because of white racism, blacks still needed to “band together to bargain with employers and with organized labor alike” (T. Hill 1919b, 184; CCRR 1922, 421).

The 1920-21 Stockyards strike was a test for the Chicago Urban League's policy on strikebreaking. This strike was significant in offering both an early look at capital's opposition to unions and at labor's strengths in the post-World War I period. As well, the strike offered evidence of whether working class unity could transcend barriers between black and white workers (Barrett 1987, 189). Afro-Americans had been instrumental in breaking the 1904 stockyard strike. The local capitalists had learned with the Pullman strike in 1894 the utility of importing black labor for the purpose of strikebreaking (Herbst [1932] 1971, 17). The meatpacking firms, cognizant of the growing strength of the Stockyards Labor Council, began to hire blacks with the expressed purpose of building up a pool of potential strike-breakers (CCRR 1922, 363; Grossman 1982, 302; Strickland 1966, 59). Alma Herbst ([1931] 1971) reported that black workers were hired "in direct ratio to the success of the unions in organizing the white laborers" (30). The Stock Yards Labor Council, which was formed on July 25, 1917, had organized nearly all of the white native and foreign-born workers. The meatpacking industry was the largest employer of blacks in Chicago. "By 1917 about ten to twelve thousand blacks had entered the yards in Chicago, representing a fourth of the industry's labor force." (Barrett 1987, 190; Herbst [1931] 1971, 30). The formidable task was to organize the increasing numbers of black workers.

There was every indication that the Chicago Urban League supported the stockyards organizing campaign. Robert Abbott, who had opposed unions prior to 1917, changed his position during the war (Grossman 1982, 349). In an editorial entitled "Marketing Our Labor," Abbott set out his new viewpoint on unionization. He shrewdly argued that with the wartime labor shortage, organized labor needed Afro-American workers more than the workers needed it. Although the past relationship had not been good for blacks, "it is to our economic, social and political interest to join with organized labor now, it should not make the least bit of difference to us what was their attitude toward us in the past, even if that past was as recent as yesterday. If they extend the olive branch

in good faith accept it today” (*Chicago Defender*, April 26, 1919). Another indication of Abbott’s new views and support for the organizing campaign was the invitation he received from the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen (AMC&BW) to address a union conference. He was cheered for his views (Barrett 1987, 205; Grossman 1982, 343-53). Dr. George Cleveland Hall was an honorary member of Local 651, the predominantly black local of the AMC&BW (Grossman 1982, 357).

T. Arnold Hill, more pro-union than most of his colleagues, set the tone for the Urban League. During the height of the organizing campaign in July, 1919, Hill addressed a mass rally of black and white workers that got reported favorably in the union newspapers (Barrett 1987, 205). When it came time for the strike in 1920, the League and its supporters did not support it. There are many reasons. It seems that the Stockyards Labor Council’s attempt to organize black workers met the criteria set out by the Chicago League for supporting a union and its strikes. Perhaps the most significant factor in the League’s nonsupport was the extent of black unemployment during the 1920 recession at this time. Close to 20,000 black workers were unemployed. The wages paid by the stockyard firms looked good to someone dependent on relief (Barrett 1987, 212; Evans 1923, 15).

Furthermore, black workers without wages affected black businesses and churches. The black professional and business class, already more sympathetic to the packers, were in almost complete opposition. The League itself depended heavily on contributions from the stockyard firms, Armour, Swift, and Wilson. After the strike had been broken the contributions from Swift, Armour, Wilson ceased to flow to the League, adding to its financial uncertainty after 1922. This financial dependence was probably not the overriding factor, but it, did have significant influence in the League’s changed position (Grossman 1982, 358; Strickland 1966, 59, 74).

Other significant factors had to do with the nature of race relations, strained because of the race riot in 1919. Despite efforts by the unions in maintaining peace, the

antagonism that arose from that event seemed to corroborate the suspicion of black workers that white unions were not sincere in organizing them. White unions were viewed by black workers as being opportunistic (CCRR1922, 426; Grossman 1982, 334). Unions organized black workers in order to protect themselves from the strike-breaking by blacks. For their part, blacks were cognizant of their loss of post-war skilled positions, about which the union did nothing (Barrett 1987, 212; Evans 1923, 15; Grossman 1982, 360).

It is clear that the League was governed by what it considered the best opportunity for the race. On its estimate, support of the stockyards strike, in light of mass black unemployment and the packers (temporary) contributions to black institutions, was not in the best interests of either black workers or the organization. Therefore, they changed policies and began to supply strikebreakers to the stockyards. In contrast to these efforts, the Milwaukee Urban League combined with other black organizations to actively discourage the migration of blacks to that city in a time of labor trouble. Joe Trotter (1985) explains that this position resulted from the small numbers of blacks, who were more vulnerable to racial violence, and to the pro-union Socialist municipal government (57). If one understands the Chicago Urban League's framework of locating and extracting opportunities, the change in policy makes sense. William Evans, the industrial secretary, remarked in a later article, "[t]he strike of the Stock Yards Union offered a chance for occupational advancement to colored men which was accepted." In recounting a remark made by a black union organizer in the stockyards that the Urban League and the YMCA had contributed to the breaking of the strike, he points out forcefully that, given the level of black unemployment, "the calling of a strike was pure folly and that no force, social or otherwise, could have saved the situation to the union" (Evans 1923, 15-16). The Chicago Commission on Race Relations reported that a spokesperson for the League (probably Evans) remarked the "[t]he League is not opposed to unionism, but is interested primarily in the welfare of colored workers" (CCRR1922, 432). If black workers were inclined to

look skeptically at the stockyard unions, the League's opportunistic policy encouraged them to reject the union at a crucial time.

It was the position taken by the League on unionization that piqued the authors of *Black Worker*. In Spero and Harris's discussion of the League's labor policy and activities, they are very critical of what they called the League's "opportunism." They report that during the winter of 1926-27, the fig and date workers on strike charged the Chicago Urban League with sending black women to the shops without informing them that a strike was going on. They also point out that this was after the executive secretary, Albon L. Foster, claimed that the League did not supply strikebreakers. But perhaps the most damaging charge against the League was its nonsupport for a black union, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in 1926 (Spero and Harris [1931] 1969, 140-41).

The Pullman Company had asked the League whether a public statement supporting the Pullman porters by the national executive secretary, Eugene Kinckle Jones, was his personal opinion or League policy. When the League got back to them that it was his personal opinion, the company spokesperson asked why he signed the letter as executive secretary. T. Arnold Hill, writing Foster in Jones' absence, counseled him not to accept the contribution that Pullman Company was threatening to withhold. Hill reasoned that the Pullman Company had not made a contribution before, so he figured they were using the League for propaganda reasons to thwart the efforts of the porters union. He argued that an acceptance of a contribution would be an implicit endorsement of the company and make both the National and Chicago Leagues look bad in the eyes of black workers. Nonetheless, the League disassociated itself from Jones' endorsement and the Pullman Company made the contribution (Spero & Harris [1931] 1969, 142; Foster to Hill, April 2, 1926; Hill to Foster, April 12, 1926).

For Spero and Harris the League represented to the industrial elite "a conservative stabilizing force in the colored community...." They characterized the League as "a middle-class social service body interested in getting jobs for Negroes and in breaking down trade-

union barriers in order to accomplish this end more effectively.” For them, the policies and activities of the League “showed no conversion to the idea of working-class unity.” In fact they anticipated Bunche’s criticism (1940) that the League dealt only “with high officials of the trade-union movement...[but] have never reached down to the rank and file....” For these writers the League’s actions never “suggested that there was anything odious about strike breaking, about taking the job of a man who was struggling for better conditions” (Spero & Harris [1931]1969, 140, 143, 281).

These authors were not alone in their harsh appraisal of the Chicago Urban League’s opportunistic labor policy. Frank Bell, who proclaims that he belongs “to a labor group,” criticizes national black leadership because they “have deserted labor.” He’s especially critical of the Urban League. His criticisms fit the actions of the Chicago branch. He writes:

While the Urban League is doing great work, it does not reach the spot. The Urban League can place, but it does not regulate. For example, if white labor is replaced by colored labor in a factory and this colored labor is given two dollars less than the white and two or three hours more work per day is added, then we suffer. Colored labor needs more than to be placed, it needs to be helped to get out of his job what he puts in it. I believe we are better off without certain jobs if we are to be placed there by certain agencies and then made to work more and for less money than other people. Although they say we are getting big wages, my standard of living is as much as any other laborer (Bell to White, December 21, 1924).

The League’s record on strikes during the depression corroborates Spero and Harris, and Bell’s observations (Cayton and Mitchell 1939, 406-408). The Chicago Council of Negro Organizations, was founded in 1935 by Albon L. Foster and others as a moderate alternative to the National Negro Congress (Strickland 1966, 130). The organization which sought more employment for black motion picture projectionists and ran afoul of the black members of Local 110 of the Chicago Moving Picture Machine Operators. The black unions members called the picketing sponsored by the Council

“misguided.” They said the organization “evidently didn’t take the trouble to acquaint themselves with the true facts of the case” (*Chicago Defender*, November 28, 1936). The Urban League’s industrial secretary led the picketing (Strickland 1966, 132).

Another instance, perhaps even more damaging, is that of Lester Granger, head of the Workers’ Bureau for the National Urban League, and it concerns the difficulty of setting up a local branch of the Negro Workers’ Council in Chicago. In a memorandum on the relationship between local branches and Workers’ Councils, he states:

The Chicago Urban League is not the only one of our affiliates which has been unwilling to establish a Workers’ Council or to go along with us on our national labor policy. It is, however, exceptional in that the Chicago League is at present regarded with distrust or active hostility by practically every Negro trade union group that I have contacted. Much of this distrust, no doubt, is unjustified, but, on the other hand, some of it is plainly justified in statements and acts of the Industrial Director of the Chicago Urban League (Granger memorandum, May 20, 1938).

The purpose of this section was to explicate the League’s policy on unionization and strikebreaking. It appears that the racist framework from which the League operated dictated an opportunistic labor policy. Given the nature of industrial struggles in Chicago during the period, it was the capitalists who would have the “opportunities” to offer, however short-term they might have been. The League’s shortsighted policy attempted to maximize the “opportunities” black workers had at any given moment by not supporting a given strike. This stance may be excusable given organized labor’s racism, but the Chicago League’s reputation with black trade unionists is just as unsupportive. As I noted above, the League had carried out many of the functions that a union would for black workers. It appears that much of what fed the Chicago Urban League’s mainly anti-union stance was its fear of losing its leverage with management in representing black workers’ interests. Consistent throughout the League’s history was the attempt of the Chicago League to represent the workers, thus satisfying their main goal of

interpreting *all* of black life to white elites, while sustaining the legitimation for their leadership. The organization's interests in unitary interpretation and representation of the black community is apparent in the social welfare field.

Endnotes

¹T. Arnold Hill had to report the proportion of funds contributed by blacks to the CUL to William Graves, Julius Rosenwald's secretary, Strickland, 1966, 33-34; also see fund appeals by Abbott in the *Chicago Defender*, May 13, 1922).

²Horace Bridges (1936), the second president of the League who was white, said the naming of M.O. Bousfeld as the first black president realized a dream of his.

³Where there is no explicit call for blacks to mirror the hierarchal white class structure, it is implicit in the League's support for the development of a black business class. It is also implicit in the League's belief in whites as the model of civilization, and in meritocratic-based, equality of opportunity.

Eugene Kinckle Jones (1923) writes in the inaugural issue of *Opportunity*, the Urban League "has sought to make its contribution towards elevating the Negro in the social scale, the motive being to make it easier for the Negro to assimilate the cultural advantages of American civilization and *to aid more Negroes of capacity and talent to emerge from the mass of their fellows of less promise*" (4)[my emphasis]. Calling for the right to upward mobility, he continues, "whites sooner or later, no matter what their present status or environment, are vouchsafed in time a chance to rise above their present level. Such is not the case with the Negro in anything like the same degree that it obtains for the whites" (5). Does Jones believe that whites will all become more or less equal? Or does he believe that whites will have the opportunity to aspire higher if they have the ability and talent? I believe he believes the latter, and this is what he wants for the Negro—a hierarchal class structure based on ability, capacity, talent, and achievements. In other words, Jones, like his colleagues recognize racial limits to upward mobility, but not class limits. Those limits are interpreted as inability and a lack of self-development.

An example of the black elite's belief that they should be on top of this hierarchal structure is Loren Miller's (1931) self-critique of black professionals during the Depression. Talking about the professionals, he remarks, "this numerically small group looms large in Negro life and its welfare is, as a matter of fact, the ideal toward which our racialism has tended" (239). He says later on that the black professional's "ideal is the establishment of a black upper class toward which the worker may strive, the same hope that America holds for all its workers" (240). E. Franklin Frazier (1928-29) adds, "...there is no demand on the part of Negro leaders to tear down social distinctions and create a society of equals. He quotes a black newspaper editor telling a white man "the white people draw the line at the wrong point and put all of us in the same class" (82). Currently, the National Urban League states its mission as the: "Elimination of racial discrimination and segregation in the country, and achievement of parity for Blacks and other minorities in every phase of American life" (National Urban League 1986). It seems clear that racial parity means social stratification *within* the black community.

⁴One may argue that the League's racialism was natural given the oppressive burden of racial segregation during this time period. I would argue that excuse does not hold. In more recent times, the head of the Chicago Urban League, was quoted as saying, "Economic activity is not simply the central preoccupation of the city, it is the reason the city exists" (Squires, Bennett, McCourt and Nyden 1987, 14). This statement should give us a sense of the historical importance given to growth, and I might add corporate-led growth. For an early, and insightful critique of the League's racialism and reluctance to embrace fundamental economic reform see Bunche (1940, 267-72).

⁵In a later article Evans reports the number to be 20,000 unemployed "colored people," 1923, 15; Hill, 1921, 324.

⁶For a general appraisal which states that black women suffer more from race prejudice, Turner (1920, 318). For an specific example see Washington 1919, 6.

CHAPTER III

RACE RELATIONS, SOCIAL WELFARE, AND THE POLITICS OF BLACK URBAN REFORM

The politics of the Chicago Urban League between 1916-1940 has been characterized as nonpartisan, interest-group politics. With its ideology of professional, scientific-based expertise on black social needs, the League did not see itself engaged in politics as such. But a cursory look at the activities of the League would indicate the League's involvement in the "political process" through its efforts to "reform existing governmental structures" (Moore, 1981, 73, xiii). In other words, it has been argued that the Urban League emerged as an black interest group, both on the national level and in many localities, lobbying government officials and private elites for an end to racial discrimination in employment, housing, welfare, and other social services (Moore 1981; Strickland 1966; Weiss 1974; Parris and Brooks 1971).

In this chapter, I argue that this is a particularly limited conception of the League's politics. I contend that on the one hand, the League's assistance of black migrants "in acculturating urban lifestyles" was political as was its attempt to mediate urban racial conflict. On the other hand, I want to suggest that its reform goals were narrowly racial, and therefore had little consequence for the material lives of the black rank and file given the unequal opportunity structure available to most black Americans. The conception of goals in a racist framework masked the class bias of the League (and the black elite in general), and had the long-term effect of couching black political interests in middle-class

terms, e.g., racial inclusion into a stratified society as opposed to fundamental economic reform enabling more black people to live decent, secure lives.

Political scientist Martin Kilson, in his seminal essay, "Political Change in the Negro Ghetto, 1900-1940's" (1971), placed the Urban League in the context of "interest-group articulation" which operated alongside clientage politics in many Northern black communities between 1915 and 1930. Interest group politics emerged as a result of clientage politics' failure to "deliver the goods." As well, the sheer growth after World War I of black communities led to greater social organizational complexity and more minute socio-economic differentiation. One of the principal functions of the Urban League was to politicize local professional and other voluntary associations and to integrate them "into the national political arena of Negro urban voluntary associations" (179). For my purposes, I shall concentrate on the Chicago political arena. How, and to what ends, did the Urban League politicize other black civic organizations, especially when it didn't see itself explicitly engaged in politicization? How, and to what ends, did the League "reform existing governmental structures" in Chicago? In order to address these questions, we need to look at the Chicago Urban League's activities and policies in the areas of race relations and social welfare.

Race Relations in Chicago

I have argued above that the League construed its main purpose as the promotion of better relations between the races (Chicago Urban League [CUL] 1920, 4). The League felt that blacks and whites could get along better if they understood that they had the same ambitions and expectations in life. The vehicle for this contact for understanding was the League itself. The League saw itself as an example of what interracial cooperation could accomplish. The operation of the black civic organization featured white and black businessmen and professionals working harmoniously to solve racial problems. Both

racess were engaged in policymaking over how the League would approach black urban problems. The League publicized its unique approach in order to promote interracial harmony to black and white citizens. The League never missed an opportunity to publicize interracial gatherings and meetings because these events represented racial progress. Increased interracial contacts among the elites of both races represented more acceptance by whites of all blacks as equal citizens. The fact that many of these events had “the better elements” of both races participating probably was not lost on the black masses.

It was assumed by the League that each group of elites would manage the behavior of the masses according to an acceptable model, i.e., themselves (Hill 1919a; Haynes 1919d, 698; 1913b, 110-111; CCRR 1922, xxiv). Implicit in the League’s “teaching habits of thrift, cleanliness, health and general good behaviour” was the assumption that these “habits,” held up as necessary for modern urban living, were already possessed (and thus to be taught by) the respectable, genteel, successful black upper-class (CUL 1926, 16; L. Miller 1931, 239). To be sure, it was assumed that one did not have to have a middle-class income to attain such cultural habits (Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962, 2:523). Holding up its end of the bargain was one of the principal motivations for the League to engage in social welfare work amongst the black masses. But the League’s work in race relations took on other forms. I’ve discussed the League’s work in promoting equal opportunity and managing race relations in the work sphere above. I’ve touched upon the League’s work in the homes and neighborhoods of black migrants for the purpose of producing efficient workers for corporate capital in Chicago. Before I discuss other purposes and consequences of the League’s work in the domestic sphere, I will assess the significance of the League’s efforts for manage race relations and to establish racial peace and social order in Chicago.

The Urban League was formed at a time in Chicago when popular demands were negotiable because of the need for manpower for wartime production (Stein 1986, 38). The labor movement in Chicago was ascendant and considered the most advanced in the

country (Barrett 1987, 191). The migration of over 50,000 blacks with their attendant needs, and an unyielding, decentralized city structure, added race to the explosive social calculus (Katz 1987 151, 175). The leading classes in Chicago were concerned with popular insurgencies unleashed during the war. The “return to normalcy” after the war meant bottling up these rising expectations resulting in deep-seated class and racial conflict.

It was not long after the Armistice that the worst fears of elites were borne out in the racial conflagration in 1919. The League, only in its third year, played a prominent role in attempting to maintain peace during that conflict. It was this formative experience that shaped much of the League’s function and orientation with regard to racial conflict in the future (Taylor 1917; 1919).

The Urban League and the Chicago Commission on Race Relations

It was probably just a matter of time, given the sudden influx of blacks during World War I, for there to be enough “racial friction” to produce a major racial conflict. The black population in Chicago had increased from 75,000 in 1915 to 125,000 in 1919. Black migrants competed with whites for jobs, housing, and places of leisure. For the most part, given an expanding industrial economy, there was comparatively little conflict at the workplace. Blacks could take on the dangerous and dirty jobs which previously had been the reserve of immigrants from Southern, Central and Eastern Europe. The only conflict that ensued was over unionization. These conflicts erupted either over blacks being barred from unions and engaging in strike-breaking, or if welcomed, refusing to join unions because they were suspicious of whites’ motives (CUL 1918, 2).

Housing and leisure activities was another matter. Decent housing at affordable costs was a continuous problem for blacks during World War I and in its aftermath. The moratorium on building housing during the war, coupled with the violent resistance by whites to the spilling over of blacks into their neighborhoods, caused intensive

overcrowding in the Black Belt. It also meant that whites and blacks, not living in the same neighborhoods, had contact only on transportation lines and in contiguous leisure areas. In fact, a fatal incident on July 27, 1919, the stoning and drowning of Eugene Williams, which touched off a race riot, occurred over disputed racial boundaries at the Twenty-sixth Street beach (Taylor 1919, 696; Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962, 1:65-66). Over the course of a week's rioting, 38 people were killed, 537 injured, and approximately 1,000 left homeless (CCRR 1922, 1; Katz 1987, 176).

The League performed two interrelated functions during this conflict: relief and maintaining order. It was used as a headquarters to dispense food to the black workers and their families who were cut off from work in the stockyards and other areas. Unlike the case of ethnic white workers, racial segregation often forced blacks to live some distance from their places of work. The League printed up circulars and hired messengers to tell people to stay off the streets; to stop passing rumors about the riot; and to cooperate with the police. The Chicago Commission on Race Relations report stated that the League played a vital role. Because of its prior work with the employment needs of migrants, it was "conversant with difficulties likely to result from the rioting" (Chicago Commission on Race Relations [CCRR] 1922, 45).

The League's approach to its dual role of short term relief and maintenance of order is indicative of its claim to be engaging in "scientific" social work. Not limited to short-term intervention, the League tried to lay the groundwork for better race relations, to do "preventative" work. The League sent telegrams to the governor and mayor suggesting ways to end racial strife. T. Arnold Hill, the League's executive secretary, was one of the representatives from forty-eight civic organizations who met at the Union League Club for the purpose of petitioning the governor to appoint a commission to study the underlying causes of the riot. The appointment of a commission was a common practice of urban reformers. Professional and civic reformers placed a lot of faith in the "scientific" study of social problems. For politicians, the appointment of a committee of community notables

afforded the appearance of “doing something” without committing oneself to risky public policies which might alienate voters (CCRR, 1922, 46).¹

The League was well-represented on the Chicago Commission on Race Relations. The Commission had equal numbers of black and white members. Board members, Dr. George C. Hall and Robert S. Abbott, were amongst the black representatives. Major financial backer and patron of the League, Julius Rosenwald, was amongst the white representatives. Perhaps most important was the fact that Charles S. Johnson, then head of the League’s Department of Research and Records, had been appointed associate executive secretary to the Commission.² Johnson used the files he had gathered as director of the Research Department for much of the empirical data used for the report. As far as the analytical framework is concerned, Johnson was still under the sway of his mentor, Robert E. Park, using the latter’s race relations cycle to explain the conflict that ensued. Park’s race relations cycle was originally conceived with ethnic immigrants in mind. He applied it to blacks who had been migrating to Chicago and other Northern cities. His cycle posited a series of stages including racial contacts, competition, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation. Johnson, in *The Negro in Chicago*, focused on investigating the first three stages, then reported the Committee’s recommendations for the latter two stages (CCRR 1922, xvii; Persons 1987, 64, 65).

There is much debate over the causes of the Chicago Race Riot of 1919. For our purposes, I am concerned with how the League analyzed these causes. I believe they gave more weight to factors such as adverse public opinion and the lack of racial understanding than competition over jobs and housing. Robert Abbott, in an editorial, blamed the riot on the influence of Southern thinking on Northern whites. He pointed out that Southern whites had migrated North to the cities simultaneously with blacks. He explained that these whites had gained various white-collar jobs and policy-making positions. Abbott did find fault with the ethnic gangs and the native whites who were involved in an earlier and unpunished bombing of black homes in Hyde Park, but he claimed it was a result of

Southern white thinking becoming pervasive in Chicago. Of course, Abbott's view had been consistent ever since he attempted to scare Southern blacks north with his sensationalist stories of grisly, horrible burnings, lynchings, and other terrorist events. The upshot was that the League would have to work against this Southern bias infecting Northern white opinion (Tuttle 1982; Persons 1987, 66; Taylor 1919, 696; *Chicago Defender*, August 30, 1919).

T. Arnold Hill had a harsher appraisal, though one that further confirmed the League's belief in race relations engineering. Hill argued that the people of both races who hold "a decided preponderance in intelligence, industry and decency" had "to create sentiment as will make a recurrence [of the riot] impossible." He insisted that the more difficult task was to insure justice and "equality of opportunity" for all men. He pointed to the urgency to put these conditions into place. The urgency existed because blacks had become "imbued with the idea of self-determination" through their participation in the war and the social disruption had followed it. In addition, Hill, echoing Graham Taylor's fears (1917) pointed out the susceptibility of blacks, given an unjust social order, to "revolutionary influences which would welcome his allegiance" (T. Hill 1919a, 222, 238; see also, Haynes 1919d, 699).

Hill attacked the municipal government of William "Big Bill" Thompson as "undisciplined" and lax in law enforcement. He argued that blacks suffered the most from this slack administration, particularly when it came to prosecuting violent crimes against Afro-Americans. Thompson, representing the machine faction in the Republican Party, had blacks to thank for gaining office the previous year.

But Hill had a solution to the racial antagonism that had developed in Chicago since the Great Migration. He recommended that "a sound mutual relationship between white and colored people should be fostered, and this relationship should be accomplished through attention to the accredited spokesmen of both groups" (T. Hill 1919a, 238). Blacks and whites had to be able to know what strata in the other group represented an

enlightened and legitimate opinion. What better vehicle for the identification and representation of this leadership than the Urban League (T. Hill 1919a, 238)?

Hill's conception of the Negro problem reflected conventional thinking on race relations. He opposed segregation because if separated, blacks would be "alone and uncared for" which is "contrary to our scheme of Americanization." He points out that blacks "are basically loyal to institutions which offer for them even a fair measure of protection." How can blacks become good citizens isolated from their fellow citizens, and unprotected by the city's laws and institutional policies? To segregate blacks, bestowing a badge of inferiority on them, "is a source of conflict, for it accentuates the lines of contact." When the races are isolated from each other, they are "allowed to develop group antagonisms. Understanding is promoted by contact." Hill saw continued racial conflict in the future unless "a program of reconstruction for our racial relations" based on civil rights and justice emerged (T. Hill 1919a, 238; see also, *The City Club* 1919, 76).

Hill's essay is significant because it sets for the League's conceptualization of race relations and its approach to resolving potential racial conflict. Hill foresaw a prominent role for the League in dealing with the problem of race relations. He also tried to raise the fear of black radicalization in order to extract concessions from white elites. By implication, "the accredited spokesmen of both groups," i.e., the Urban League, represented a more moderate alternative. Hill's effort to extort concessions from the city fathers was not isolated. In his introduction to the *Third Annual Report*, president of the Urban League, Horace Bridges, posed the question: "Do you want to know now to avoid further race riots and redeem the honor of our city?" Bridges enticed the readers to read the following pages where he or she will be shown "the facts and...[told] how they may help." There were no explicit instructions, but the inclusion of a card for a contribution made the answer all too clear—financial support for the program of the Urban League (CUL 1918, 2; see also, 1919, 4).

There were a number of motives behind the League's black professionals promoting its role in quelling potential race riots. One major concern must have been the indiscriminate nature of attacks on blacks. Black elites constantly complained about whites' refusal to recognize social and moral distinctions amongst the black population. To the general white public there was not much difference between the black criminal they feared and the black law abiding citizen who was a credit to his race and community. Importantly, it was upwardly mobile blacks who were most vulnerable since they lived on the outskirts of the black community, next to the white community. These were also the same class of blacks who were subject to bomb and other violent attacks by whites who wanted to prevent any black incursion into their neighborhoods. In addition to new residents, these attacks were also made on white and black real estate agents, e.g., the banker, Jesse Binga, who sold or rented to blacks. Urban League board member, George C. Hall, commented in the aftermath of the riot and during the Commission deliberations that the fact that these bombings were going unprosecuted would lead to another race riot (The City Club 1919, 75-6; 1920, 48).

It is not surprising that the Chicago Commission on Race Relations reported favorably on the efforts of the Urban League during the riot and afterwards. The Commission commended the League, along with other institutions, for its work in adjusting migrants to the city. The League's work in race relations, especially in the summer of 1920, was pointed out. But it was one of the Commission's recommendations which would prove to be most significant for the League. The Commission recommended establishing "a permanent local body representing both races" which would be charged with investigating situations of potential racial conflict and intervening with the intention "to preserve the peace" using information and "sound public sentiment" to promote interracial understanding (CCRR 1922, 94, 146-7, 644, 645; Wood 1924, 123).

Whether the commissioners had the Urban League in mind or not for this recommendation, it was clear that the League felt it was that “permanent local body.” The League regularly reported on its efforts at interracial conciliation. These efforts ranged from settling disputes and preventing conflict to serving on city-wide committees with their white civic counterparts and featuring interracial gatherings. For an example, in the *Seventh Annual Report* (1923), the League reports preventing racial conflict in Chicago Heights. The organization also promoted “conferences with leaders on methods” to deal with racial strife in a section of the city. While active intervention in racial trouble spots did not occur that often, it was clear that as a latent function the League attempted to prove it could handle the situation should it show itself. Much more normal was the fact that the League participated on some race relations committee. In the same annual report, it states: “As a society of both white and colored people, the League is by inherent organization an instrument for the improvement of relationships between the races” (CUL 1923, 6-7).

A.L. Foster in the *Thirteenth Annual Report* (1929) notes that the League has been serving as the race relations body spelled out in the Commission’s recommendations. He reminds us that the League was consulted regularly on matters regarding race relations. Final legitimation of the League as representing the “permanent local body” are the words of Governor Lowden at the annual dinner in 1930. Lowden commented on the invaluable role the League played during the riot. He confirmed what the League officials had believed for some time, that the League was “the permanent race relations commission of Chicago.” So that there could be no mistake, Foster announced in the same report the formalization of what had been an informal understanding in the reform community and amongst civic elites. The “Interracial Commission” led by Dr. Arthur G. Falls and Dr. Horace J. Bridges became “the coordinating agency for all committees on race relations.” It was soon “recognized as the official clearinghouse for all interracial problems in Chicago” (CUL 1932, 9).³

The Chicago Commission on Race Relations gave expression to what the League's founders had in store for it from its inception. The League was designated to carry out the race relations engineering program conceived by the Commission. This program was characterized as the most "formal codification of Negro-white relations in Chicago since the days of the Black Codes." One author called the riot commission's chief achievement a program for "the peaceful accommodation of white Chicago and black Chicago." He argued that while the Commission did not approve of legal segregation, this was not to be taken as an endorsement of integration. Thus, the report allowed enough theoretical room for the existence of voluntary segregation (Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962, 1:69; Philpott 1978, 211).

The Urban League had become the main agent to carry out the elite solution for the race problem in Chicago. Shorn of offensive references to black sensibilities, *The Negro in Chicago* represented the elite's program for racial accommodation in Chicago. The Urban League was given the mandate to carry out a top-down political solution to the race problem. The thrust of the recommendations was for equality of employment opportunities, racial tolerance and understanding, proper socialization of black migrants, and more equitable, nondiscriminatory and quality municipal services to blacks. The general thrust, as well as specific recommendations, were virtually identical to the Urban League's program. At least one Commission member recognized the link, and was moved to play a major role in the Urban League's finance campaign of 1920-1. He attempted to get his white colleagues to recognize the severity of the racial problem and in addition, support the League in carrying out the solution (Strickland 1966, 77).

The potential threat of racial conflict to the social order was borne out in the opening statement of "The Problem": "The relation of whites and Negroes in the United States is our most grave and perplexing domestic problem." The Commission forecasted the role that public opinion would play in race relations ideology. "It is of first importance that old prejudices against the Negroes...be supplanted with respect, encouragement, and co-

operation....” Finally, the report pointed to the elite nature of the resolution. Racial understanding and mutuality “cannot be forced, but will come naturally as the leaders of each race develop within their own ranks a realization of the gravity of this problem and a vital interest in its solution....” (CCRR 1922, xxiii, xxiv).

From the standpoint of white business and civic elites, the Urban League was founded in the womb of the Chicago reform community (Diner 1980; Foster 1929) to carry out the program which crystalized in the Chicago Commission on Race Relations report, *The Negro in Chicago*. The main function assigned to the League was the management of race relation contacts by shaping black working class behavior into appropriate models, thus preventing the friction that would lead to the kind of conflict which occurred in the summer of 1919 (Taylor 1919; also see Foster 1936). The success by which the civic elites assessed the League is reported by an editorial in one daily newspaper in 1928. The editorial commented that the League promoted blacks’ “welfare” in such a way as “to fit [them] for good and useful citizenship.” The healthy by-product of this political socialization was the fact that “the risk of racial friction [is] reduced and the possibility for racial cooperation increased.” The editorialist commended those who aided “the work of a sanely guided efficiently administered organization and one essential to common good.” Ironically, he states, “[i]f there were not an Urban League we should have to create one.” (*Chicago Evening Post*, January 3, 1928 quoted in CUL 1929).

The League had so completely met the interest of the white civic elites that if they were going to “create” an organization themselves it would have looked like the League. The statement masks the extent to which the League’s founding was shaped by the needs and expectations of white elites. The other point that is revealed by these comments is the extent that the League’s efforts to adjust black migrants to Chicago’s economy and society was a political process (Stein 1983, 466n; Willingham 1975, 5). The idea was for the League to attempt to create orderly, economically self-sufficient black citizens who would not be a burden on the public treasury nor the city’s jails and courts. In this way the city

fathers could have a relatively docile, ever ready reserve labor force for their factories, offices and homes.

Social Welfare

I have argued that the Urban League sought to manage race relations by producing black citizens who were law-abiding, productive, and self-sufficient citizens. They sought to produce citizens who would have the proper work ethic and appropriate deportment. After forming these character traits, black citizens would not cause racial friction and subsequent conflict. The Urban League interpreted the "civilizing process" as on-going. Although the League on occasion dealt directly with the rank and file, their focus was primarily on rationalizing social welfare policy and practices.

The modernization of the Chicago black population necessitated an agency which could provide coordination of information and contacts about the available services for blacks. In addition to information on services, the League claimed to know all about black life itself. Its expertise inhered in its knowledge of black conditions. As social experts, League professionals took their place alongside their white counterparts in the settlements, universities, human service bureaucracies of Chicago, and as members of the new middle class. League officials could boast of the "acquisition of some specialized knowledge" as their class basis. They differed from members of the new black economic elite, who were bankers, insurance executives, and doctors, because like the "old middle class" they owned capital as their class basis (McClymer 1980, 6; Trotter 1985, 83). Knowledge of the "Negro problem" meant the League could serve both white elites and the black rank and file. Amelia Sears, acting president of the League in 1926, remarked:

the Chicago Urban League is dedicated to the task of interpreting to the citizens of Chicago the justice, good will, the enlightened self-interest on one side, the achievements, the big interests with banks, manufactures, commercial concerns, the cultural contributions, judges, physicians, teachers and poets on the other side (CUL 1926, 4).

To its white patrons, the League could relay to them the “achievements,” “the cultural contributions,” the success of business and professions. To its black public, the League could share with them whites’ “good intentions” in gradually ending racial proscription. In both cases, they suggested they had influence over each group to bring “sympathetic understanding” between the groups (CUL 1926, 4). Strickland (1966) argues that this situation represents the two masters the League has tried to serve through its history. But let us not lose sight of what the League gained in this position—a legitimate basis for its claim to race leadership status, and a new field to exploit for the organizational and career interests of the Urban League professionals (Johnson 1938, 268).

From the inception of the League, its mission was not to engage in direct service delivery, but to rationalize existing social welfare organizations. Its reform efforts in the black community centered on the need for training and developing expertise in social work. In the *First Annual Report*, one of the main stated objectives of the League was “to organize and co-ordinate” the welfare work done by other black agencies, churches, fraternal orders, clubs which had been of the “primitive type.” The League would provide “expert advice” to the “welfare agencies of the city” on “their relation with colored people” (1917, 3-4). The organization made referrals for jobs, housing, welfare and other services. They saw their liaison role connecting the needs of black clients to the relevant social agency (Lubove 1983, 172).

The Great Migration dramatized the need for rationalizing welfare services on the behalf of the arriving black farmers and artisans; making sure their needs were promptly met while eliminating wasteful and inefficient duplication. The participation of black civic groups, e.g., Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, Baptist Women’s Congress, Wabash branch of the YMCA, etc., was considered an endorsement of the plan that all black organizations would “unite in a practical plan under the supervision of one agency.” The League’s organization was essential for “shaping public sentiment toward a definite and

formal federation of Negro social service movements” (Chicago League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes [CLUCAN] 1917, 6).

It wasn’t long before the League was being considered “by all welfare organizations as the clearinghouse for social service work among Negroes.” But this recognition did not occur without some struggle. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, in her autobiography, relays a story of her organization, the Negro Fellowship League, was denied access to the Illinois Central train station by the Traveler’s Aid Society, in order to receive newly arrived migrants during the holiday season in 1917. The Traveler’s Aid Society claimed they had a monopoly of the space, sanctioned by T. Arnold Hill of the League, who, in doing so, spoke for all black social service agencies. Mrs. Wells-Barnett surmised that “[i]t seemed that the Urban League was brought to Chicago to supplant the activities of the Negro Fellowship League.” If her claim that Hill had been deprecating the employment office of the Negro Fellowship League to the industrialists is true, then Wells-Barnett may not be that far off the mark (Duster 1970, 371-373). The important point to remember is that the League’s struggle established its pivotal role as coordinator of black social welfare organizations.

One of the functions carried out under the rubric of “clearinghouse” was the role of the League in determining which black organizations were worthy of public support. A major indication of the League’s screening function was its claim that, since the organization’s existence, there had been fewer “fraudulent enterprises” (CLUCAN 1918, 7, 9). Coming onto the scene in 1916, the Urban League represented a trend in the centralization and further bureaucratization in black social welfare work.

Welfare historian Michael Katz (1986) says there were three options open to social workers in the early twentieth century: “social activism, urban mediation, and case work.” Case work won out and became the dominant activity in the field. Social workers felt the method’s claim to being scientific gave them the professional credibility they had been lacking. But with the advent of case work came a de-emphasis on reform of social and

economic conditions led by settlement workers (Katz 1986, 165-166; Lubove [1965]1983, 119; Ehrenreich 1985, 56-57). Because of racial limitation on black advancement, black social workers did not abandoned reform as readily as the rest of the profession.

The Urban League did engage in social action over racial discrimination issues, and mediated between black clients and the city's complex, decentralized human services network. Interestingly, they stressed that the organization didn't engage in case work as a rule. It would only get involved in case work if it appeared that there wasn't an agency (a black one or white one that accepted blacks as clients) to refer the black client to. In fact, a "trained woman" was hired to make "first visits" to determine who the client should be referred to. That was the extent of the League's engaging in direct delivery of welfare service except during the Great Migration when migrants were sometimes met at the train station or during downturns in the business cycles, which necessitated that the League dispense relief (CLUCAN 1917, 9).

The League probably refrained from direct delivery because they wanted the welfare agencies in the city to properly serve blacks. They wanted to make the case that the same standards used for other groups should be used "in caring for and handling colored people." So the League employed these standards in the work they did with blacks and presented these "programs of work" for the perusal of public officials and civic elites. This, the League felt, was its "biggest and most effective service." They argued that in order to serve blacks well agencies or companies must hire blacks to serve black clients. The *Second Annual Report* mentioned that they "insisted" on use of black "physicians in State and City administration because we believe that proper standards would be guaranteed to us more readily through them." Likewise, the League persuaded the Social Service Department of Cook County Hospital that, in addition to giving "more attention to colored cases," they employ "one of our women." It also appeared that the call for more expertise was a way of legitimating the employment of more black social work professionals. "For instance, to contend that colored social workers get better results with colored cases would

get us nowhere, unless we were urging colored men and women to train for social work” (CLUCAN 1918, 12, 11).

In both cases, the League’s solution to the poor service or neglect of black cases by public institutions was the hiring of a black professional. The League’s approach served both black professional and working class interests. The public institutions served blacks well by having “one of their own” administer to them. The black professional stymied by the “job ceiling,” got a break. And the League gets credit for bringing the reform about. This approach to racial reform anticipated the social welfare economy of black middle-class service providers and black working-class service recipients that emerged in the 1960s (Brown and Erie 1981).⁴

The Urban League’s heroic efforts centered on the work they did with newly arrived migrants who came in a constant stream throughout this period. They gave very good and practical advice to migrants. This advice included wearing warm clothes for the Chicago winters or letting migrants know what the housing market was like in order for them to avoid exorbitant rents or exploitative insurance premiums from black and whites alike (CLUCAN 1917, 11; 1918, 11). In its second year, the League included among its various capacities being “a center for the migrants from the South, handling approximately 15,000 people yearly....” The League saw itself as a significant “factor in the adjustment of conditions among the colored people” which depended on their working well with “all respected welfare agencies” (CLUCAN 1918, 8). The problem was that the professionals at the League also thought that visiting the homes of 2,000 migrants by Club women who exhorted them to be “orderly citizens, efficient working-men and good housekeepers” was also practical advice. So there wasn’t any discernible difference between telling someone what to watch out for and telling them how to behave in the messages going out to the newcomers in the city. Also, problems of dirty streets and unsanitary personal hygiene were lumped together, fusing responsibility for the personal and the environmental. In fact, if anything, the advice on behavior might even be more emphatically stated (CLUCAN

1917, 11; 1918, 9; Lubove [1965]1983, 122; Ehrenreich 1985, 55). Not unlike the first generation of social workers and social scientists, the League had difficulty distinguishing “between morals and facts” (McClymer 1980, 22).

It should not be assumed that migrants always took advice from the League’s club women and church volunteers or from Robert Abbott’s editorials in the *Chicago Defender*. One indication that advice was often rejected or at least not adhered to widely was the fact that it continued to be given. (Of course, we don’t know if the audience was a new migrant family or one that had heard it all before). Another indication of the poor’s reluctance to follow the League’s advice is the comment: “It is said that the people that need care and instruction in civics are the last to realize it and never look for it” (CLUCAN 1918, 10; CUL 1926, 18). A recurring criticism was the behavior of migrants in public, especially on the streetcars (CLUCAN 1918, 10; *Chicago Defender*, Nov. 28, 1936; Sept. 27, 1919). In Columbus, Ohio, when a black worker was admonished by a “colored photographer” about how a worker should not have sat down next to a finely dressed white lady with his work clothes on, he called the photographer a “white folks’ nigger” (Kilson 1971, 173).

Despite little evidence of resistance on the part of migrants and working-class blacks, it is hard to believe that there was not more given the paternalistic tutoring by Abbott, the League, and others. Andrew Polsky (1983) found resistance on the part of white working-class families to “friendly visitors” and other charity agents. He argues that it was resistance by the working class to therapeutic intervention by settlement residents and charity agents which caused the Progressives to call for the creation of public institutions. Progressives, concerned about the “social pathologies besetting working-class life,” developed a “therapeutic discourse” which “formulated terms for remedial intervention by outside specialists” (Polsky 1983, 2; Katz 1986, 129; Lasch 1977). Working-class members could reject the advice of “private social agencies” but if the same remedial intervention was conducted by a public institutions it would have the advantage of legal compulsion. Polsky remarks that with these new methods the state intervened “into

the working-class household, penetrated its dark secrets, and opened it to enlightened practices" (Polsky 1983, 3). John Ehrenreich corroborates Polsky findings in commenting on what the introduction of psychiatry in 1920s meant to the social work field.

Environmentalism neither meant the impact of large impersonal forces nor the impact of school, job or neighborhood on the individual. Increasingly, the "environment" meant the home (Ehrenreich 1985, 6).

The Urban League was susceptible to both trends. The idea of "remedial intervention" into black working-class households was justified under the guise of "adjusting the migrants." As I already noted, there was a constant stream of black migrants from the South, often replacing longer term residents who moved onto stable, working class status (Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962). Administering to needs of the migrants was referred to constantly in the League's annual reports during the inter-war period (CLUCAN 1918, 2; CUL 1920, 5; 1926, 16; 1927, 7; 1928; 1938, 6). There was wholesale visiting of migrant families during the war but not much afterwards. There was more selective intervention having to do with school truancy and/or juvenile delinquency in later years. Also, neighborhood clubs took on some of the functions that the club women had performed for the League.

The League believed in environmentalism because the opposite argument, eugenics, bolstered the "scientific racism" of the period. The League maintained that the migrants "require instruction, admonition and direction, lest their individual defects should be regarded as racial or constitutional failures" (CUL 1923, 9). In a racist environment, the League understood that any characteristic, good or bad, of individual blacks would be generalized to the whole race. Thus the League focused on expunging those "bad" characteristics of its clients, while at the same time spoke about the "better elements" whom whites should consult with.

While the League, obviously would not accept blacks as being inherently inferior, it did believe in a person developing himself or herself through education and attainment of

high moral standards. The main large impersonal force the League recognized was racism. They also recognized how alien the urban, industrial environment must be for the migrants. But the League did not seem to notice how industry during the twenties began the process of technological displacement—replacing unskilled workers with labor-saving machines to increase productivity by reducing labor costs (Kornweibel 1981). The League while focusing on breaking into the ranks of white-collar employment missed the trend toward the drying up of entry-level positions in industry. It was this inadequate sense of the impact of large social forces, and the League's belief in cultural superiority as a response to racism, which rendered the League susceptible to the new meaning of environmentalism.

Therapeutic intervention and the new environmentalism coincided to guide League's to attempts to reshape the behavior of the black rank and file, to provide links to external experts to restructure "disorganized" families, and to reorganize black working-class neighborhoods. Let us take a look at how the League dealt with the problem of juvenile delinquency. The League's response was to establish its own Children's Department which not only did ameliorative work but attempted preventive work as well. Through this department, League workers cooperated with schools to increase attendance, improved scholarship, and better "deportment." And they helped families deal with "incorrigible and backward children." Again, this department would only do what "is not adequately done by other agencies..." (CUL, 1918, 10-11; 1919, 6). The League's perspective is indicated in its description of the kind of work done in the children's department: "Our school cases are mainly those of delinquent or backward children whose deficiency results from no fault of their own, but from carelessness or neglect of their parents, unwholesome surrounding, misdirected or undirected play, or some other external influenced" (CUL 1920, 12). The individual child or adolescent was not at fault. The problem lay with his home or neighborhood life, thus the parents were responsible. Consistent with the practice of visiting the homes of migrants to tutor them on proper behavior, the League took an interventionist stance with to "incorrigible" children. The Urban League's "policy...is to

reach the child through the home and whatever amusement or ambition interests him most.” The ringing triumph of the department’s work was reflected in the fact that “[p]arents are bringing their children’s problems to us and abiding by our decision.” The League contributed to undermining the autonomy of black working-class families. The intervention by the League created a dependency on the part of some black parents on outside experts (CUL 1920, 12, 10; Busacca and Ryan 1982, 85).

The League’s standards for the black family are reflected in the collaborative project they did with the University of Chicago. E. Franklin Frazier doubled as the Urban League’s director of Research and Records and research assistant to the Local Community Research Committee of the University of Chicago from 1928 to 1929. Frazier completed his work on the “Negro Family in Chicago” under this arrangement. The progress reports on his research revealed the attitudes the League had towards the black family. The impetus for the study seems to have come from “social workers and others concerned with Negro life [who] recognize the prime importance of the family as an institution of control in group life.” The study aimed to gauge the impact of urbanization on the black family.

In line with the ecological paradigm of the Chicago School of Sociology, the spatial distribution or social stratification of different sections of the black family were examined. The underlying assumption for the League was “that programs either for control or amelioration can only be rationally framed when they take into account the wide variations in Negro group life.” The League was always wont to draw distinctions within the black community. In drawing distinctions it wasn’t clear which stratum got “control” and which got “amelioration,” or what circumstances warranted different program responses. What was clear was the focus on the family for solving black social problems (“Executive Secretary Report to Board of Directors,” March 1928; CUL 1928; 1929).

In the following year, the League, talking about this completed project, proclaimed the family as functioning “as a unit of social control in the adjustment of the Negro population to urban life.” Social workers felt the “status of the Negro family” was the

cause of many social problems. Indices of "family disorganization" included "desertion, non-support, illegitimacy and juvenile delinquency." Spatial distribution correlated with social stratification in the black community based on "homeownership, cultural, occupational and ecological factors...." But apparently the crucial factor for determining "[r]ates of family disorganization...[is] the cultural development of the Negro population." Family disorganization, in fact, was not a recent phenomenon caused by urbanization but was reflected in "the civilization processes in the Negro population that has been going on for generations." The most significant factor indicating "low rates of family disorganization...[was] a high rate of home ownership." Given the high cost of housing in the black community this could not be very many people (CUL, 1929; Proceedings of the National Safety Council 1920, 671).

It is significant that an organization which devoted most of its time and resources to investigating the employment situation of blacks would not consider these effects on "family disorganization." During the period in which the study was done it was reported that "for the masses which represent the unskilled class, the situation was critical and nearly as acute as during 1921." Although occupational factors were mentioned as one of the factors considered, they were not central.⁴ (CUL 1929).

The second study completed under the cooperative arrangement between the University and the League was undertaken by Earl R. Moses. Moses was a graduate of Oberlin College and was teaching sociology at Straight University in New Orleans. He replaced Frazier who had gone on to the faculty at Fisk University. The second study was entitled, "Juvenile Delinquency Among Negroes in Chicago." The study focused on "the community and family backgrounds of Negro delinquency" in relation to its distribution. One of the major findings of the study was the conclusion that juvenile delinquency was "not a problem of race but...more intimately bound up with community patterns of behavior and disorganized conditions...." Juvenile delinquency was a result of "mal-adjustment to urban conditions." Consistent with other assertions from the League was the

observation that black “areas are not homogeneous communities” (“Summary of Activities of the Chicago Urban League for the Fiscal Year ended October 31, 1930”; CUL 1932; Platt 1969).

The description of the study in the annual report of 1931-32 points out the characteristics of a disorganized area. These characteristics include “a nondescript and unstable population...deteriorated physical condition, encroaching business, high degree mobility, etc.” What got emphasized was the lack of “censors of behavior.” The report states, “[a] common body of tradition and stabilizing community institutions are negligible.” Again economic or outside forces, e.g., neglect of municipal agencies, are ignored. “Encroaching business” is taken for granted. It is listed as a characteristic but not a cause for the dislocation (CUL 1932, 13-14).

Organized communities were characterized as having stable populations, good physical upkeep, stable community institutions, common traditions, and “a comparative lack of pathological social conditions.” We see that an area of disorganization with no checks on behavior is characterized/caused by the social pathology of the people. The orientation of the League is to remediate “disorganized” areas, families, and individuals by providing moral and cultural uplift and elevation to a black middle-class model. A further illustration of this point is the Civic Department’s plans for a “Family Adoption Movement.” The plan was to recruit “twenty-five persons in families needing adjustment. Each person, in cooperation with the civic secretary will work out a plan for each family and help it to become normal.” What was “normal” was the stable, homeownership, upwardly mobile middle and skilled working-class families of the organized areas where League officials lived. It is this logic which legitimated intervention first by the League and then by many municipal agencies (CUL 1932, 14; “Executive Secretary Report to the Board,” March 1928).

It was not that the League failed to recognize that outside forces adversely affected the black community. Foster writes that the area had been exploited without interference

from city agencies. He remarks that "...there has been little or no concerted effort among the residents to offset this reputation...as an area of exploitation." The League's responsibility was "to develop a common mind...[that] it is up to them to decide on the future value of their property and present moral conditions of the neighborhood." Full citizenship meant responsibility in working for community betterment. It was indicative of the League's orientation that Foster chose to focus on the area's "reputation" rather the fact of exploitation. Perhaps a great deal is reflective of black powerlessness. In other words, why attempt to change the unchangeable? But was it unchangeable because the League did not have sufficient resources and power or was it the way in which the League conceived the problem which circumscribed its actions? I believe it was both. (CUL 1932; Foster 1936). The League observers knew that homeownership and stable community institutions were dependent on economic security which, on the eve of the Great Depression, was restricted to professionals, white-collar and skilled workers. But without a popular orientation, they could not conceive of how they would gain that economic security outside of private negotiations with employers and labor unions, or by promoting business development in the black community. So without an alternative conception, they pushed "community betterment" activities that paled beside the enormity of segregated, slum induced conditions. The vast majority of the black population who were in personal service and unskilled sectors had low rates of homeownership and high rates of family disorganization. What we find here is a confusion of statistical correlation with causal analysis characteristic of positivistic social science. The confusion serves an ideological function, namely, the designation of being disorganized, thereby suggesting some factor or agent should organize them. This, in fact, became the function of the League with respect to its lower class clients and their families. Also, by elevating the "cultural" while masking the economic causes of disorganization, class differences in the black community were seen, not as a result of lack of access to economic resources, but a part of a cultural tradition which went back generations. Mystifying the economic advantages of the elite,

their “natural talent” and cultural background set them up as role models and placed them in a morally superior position from which to represent the best interests of the entire black community. Cultural superiority and/or expertise in Negro social problems was the basis of the League’s leadership claim (Ehrenreich 1985, 55; Lubove [1965] 1983, 122).

The Urban League was much like the settlements in its desire to interpret and organize black working class life (CUL 1938, 2, 3; 1926). They were at a disadvantage by not living in the neighborhood. One of the major differences was that black middle-class people, living closer to the working classes than their white counterparts, wanted to put as much distance between themselves and the popular classes as possible. Also, there weren’t many independently wealthy, second-generation women and men to live amongst the rabble. The Urban League always entered the neighborhood by its volunteers visiting migrants’ homes, or addressing church congregations but not living in the neighborhoods. In 1927, the League recognized that one of the desperate needs in the community was “the development of neighborhood club work.” The League preferred to do its “civic education” through block or neighborhood clubs. In fact it was considered “[o]ne of the best mediums...to reach people” (Polsky 1983; Davis 1967; Foster 1936; CUL 1927, 12; 1926, 18).

The neighborhood clubs were described as the way to reach people, not for people to reached them. It is hard to believe that residents did not participate in the running of the clubs’ affairs. When the clubs were referred to, it was always as a means to educate the residents. Furthermore, the clubs would be a medium by which social control could be exercised. Robert Abbott, in his exhortations on the need for the masses to behave, suggested that the clubs could be used for surveillance. Abbott saw the role of the neighborhood clubs as keeping the “undesirables” from the “respectable residents” or letting people know they are “out of place” (*Chicago Defender*, Sept. 29, 1919).⁵

The League held its board meetings and conferences at the City Club, an elite club located downtown. Still, in the tradition of the Frederick Douglass Center whose site the League took, the League appeared to keep a physical or, at least, a social distance from its working class and underclass clients (Foster 1936; Reed 1982). The social distance that the League maintained didn't prevent the organization from presenting itself as a "neighbor." The League promoted educational clubs for domestic workers as well as professional men.⁶

A significant way that the League approximated the settlements without becoming one was the setting up of a model apartment on the second floor of the Urban League building in November 1927. L. Fish Furniture Company furnished the apartment which consisted of a living room, dining room, bedroom, kitchen and bath. The model apartment had many purposes. It served as a way the women could approach "the art of making housework practical, economical and attractive as possible." The apartment was also used in conjunction with the Board of Education as a site for "practical demonstrations" for domestic science classes from the neighborhood schools. The Department of Industrial Relations used the model apartment to train domestic workers (CUL 1927, 12; 1928).

The model apartment was just one part of the relationship between the Urban League and the L. Fish Furniture Co. The L. Fish Company award was inaugurated at the time the apartment was set up in the Urban League building. The award was the result of the joint efforts of Nahum D. Brascher, who was civic secretary on loan from the L. Fish Company and Malcolm L. Vineberg, the manager of the company's South Side store. The purpose of the award was entirely consistent with the League's efforts in civic education. Better citizens were to be made by "the stimulation of that sort of community interest in better homes which tends to produce better men and better women." Brascher started a group called the "Community Builders" which promoted "programs intended to improve the home life of Chicago's citizens." This is an expression of the League's sense of environmentalism writ small. Better homes and home life produces better citizens. And

the better home is represented by the model apartment generously donated by the L. Fish company. The many uses of the apartment included free advertising of the company which dealt with and was trying to attract black consumers (CUL 1928).

All of the League's discussion of "standards of living," were consistent with the theme of making do with what one has. Unlike our contemporary understanding of the phrase, which refers to income, the League's usage meant the standards by which you live, e.g., moral principles, cleanliness, thrift, etc. The function of the Department of Social and Civic Improvement "to raise the standards of living among the Negro population by teaching habits of thrift, cleanliness, health and general personal behavior." The upshot was that significant improvements could be made in one's life irrespective of income (CUL 1928).

The League wanted to have some link with every aspect of the black worker's life, not necessarily directly, as in dispensing services, but as a liaison to private and public employers and agencies which could provide aid to blacks. The League was in the position of organizing the disorganized and interpreting their conditions to the city's elite. Of course, part of this interpretation had to do with making class distinctions and representing disparate interests, though all in the name of the greater interests of the black community. The various interests in the black community were seen as a continuum, not in conflict. When the lower classes in Chicago were developed enough along cultural lines, they, too, would benefit from the program and politics of the Urban League. A look at the way in which black League professionals conceived of career opportunities in social work may help to further illuminate the League's conception of politics (CLUCAN 1918, 11).

Black Social Workers and the League

The fact that the Urban League was dominated by social workers shaped its approach to the problem of race advancement. The requirements of a profession attempting to gain legitimacy in the corporate order meant a moderate approach to social problems. Social work proved particularly attractive to the black middle classes who wanted to lend a “scientific” cast to its uplift work amongst the black masses.

Social workers aimed at amelioration not radical change. This was especially true in the conservative climate of the 20s where social workers were trying to attain serious professional status, thus, even ameliorative reform was de-emphasized in favor of scientific case work. Without its reform face, social work slid into social control in the name of helping the unfortunate to adjust. The “disorganized” black lower classes were not to spread their “germs of disease” and “germs of crime”—which spread “almost faster”—to white areas. In a program of barely hidden social behavior modification, the black working and underclasses must not hurt the reputation of the race by preventing some of its members to advance in a climate of racial tolerance and harmony (Dorothy Bushnell Blumberg to Chicago Woman’s Aid, February 21, 1936; “Better health for Negroes means better health for the entire population,” Dec. 1927, 2; Lewis 1984).

The Urban League movement represented a boon to black social workers. Earlier on the League was shaped by professionals trained in other areas, but many were converted to the ideas and practice of social work. A prime example was the second executive secretary of the National Urban League, Eugene Kinckle Jones, trained originally for engineering at Cornell University. When he found few employment opportunities in his field, he made his life’s work making sure that there would be opportunities for black people. From the very start, one of the National League’s objectives was to train blacks in the field of social work. Of course, meeting this objective guaranteed future workers for the Urban League movement. The National League recruited “qualified college bred

colored men and women for colored community leadership throughout the country.”

Another guarantee for future Urban League professionals was the stipulation that the League would have first chance at the recipients of the Urban League fellowships. The other effect of the objective of reproducing black social workers is that it would extend the influence of the League’s approach over the other social work in the black community (The Chicago Urban League, December, 1927, 2; Wood 1924, 120).

The Chicago branch was a flagship of the Urban League movement. Its importance as the Western Regional Center for the movement is reflected in the fact that T. Arnold Hill, as field secretary of the National Office was allowed to become the Chicago branch’s executive secretary. While Hill held the post of executive secretary, he also doubled as the western regional secretary. The importance of the Chicago branch within the movement is indicated by the number of its officers who left executive secretary positions at other branches for lesser positions of responsibility in Chicago. For example, Alonzo Thayer was executive secretary of the Pittsburgh branch; he became industrial secretary in 1929. Frayser Lane was formerly executive secretary in St. Louis before coming to Chicago as head of the Civic Betterment Department. The Chicago League was a coveted place to be for social workers in the movement (“Summary of Activities, Oct. 31, 1930”).

The training and placement of black social workers was an early concern of the Chicago branch as well. It was the assessment of those who created the League that many black social workers had been “trained in the school of experience.” This lack of formal training led to the charge that early social work by blacks was “primitive.” The League attempted to facilitate more formal training and experience with a professional social work agency for practitioners already in the field. They offered the opportunity for volunteers “to work in connection with the League’s office.” For those studying locally, they provided the opportunity “to apply their social theories in connection with the League’s activities.” Board members Edyth Abbott and S.P. Breckinridge of the University of Chicago, and Agnes VanDriel, formerly of Loyola, were largely responsible for the

number of well-trained black social workers ("Plan of Work for the Chicago Organization," p. 2; Foster, 1936).

The League did carry out one of its early objectives to place black social workers in various agencies in the city. The League had to tell "existing organizations working among the colored people without the service of colored social workers the advantage of the use of Negroes for work among their own people" ("Plan of Work for the Chicago Organization," p. 2). Amongst social agencies, the earliest placement was with Juvenile Court. When Nachman Springfilled cushion hired Helen Sayre from the League, she was the first black welfare secretary of an industrial firm in Chicago. Other early placements of black social workers had to do, in some cases, with the influence of white board members. This was the case with the hiring of Lorraine R. Green as the first black worker by United Charities "as a visitor at Central District" through the influence of Miss Amelia Sears. She began work in May 1919.

By the early thirties, Chicago was considered to have "advanced far beyond any other city in the fair treatment of its social workers." The social welfare field was fruitful for blacks as well. They were employed "in every important organization in a variety of positions including those "positions of authority and responsibility as rapidly as their efficiency warrants." If the black social workers' qualifications were the only things holding them back then it could "truly be said that the color line has practically been eliminated in social service in Chicago." By the time of the Urban League's twentieth anniversary, blacks were "employed in practically every capacity," from district superintendent to switchboard clerks at United Charities, the city's chief social welfare agency. The League was most proud of the number of blacks employed in supervisory positions (CUL 1932; Foster 1936).

As I discussed above, the Urban League represented a new point of departure for social work amongst blacks. Work which had been done previously was largely of a religious nature. Charity was dispensed without regard to "real social needs." Rather than

charity, what modern social work had to offer was the attempt to make a man "more or less independent of alms." Of course, the Urban League was a representative of the new trends in modern social work with its "established business methods" (E. Jones 1917, 27, 26).

The new role that the social worker played would be "as an interpreter of problems that are distressing society in general." It was argued that no one else in society could better perform this role. Social workers had the knowledge and methods which enabled them to uniquely fulfill the role of interpreting social and industrial conditions. The social worker had the responsibility to speak out against insufficient wages if he saw a number of families suffering because of an inadequate standard of living. But he would need to be cautious, as well, which should come naturally to the "good case worker." The social worker, no matter how sympathetic, must objectively interpret the facts. And here professionalism takes over, as the social worker must, in the interest of "his client's moral development, take a side which is opposed to the immediate self-interest of his clients and their co-workers." Robert Dexter points out that the social worker must not give total acknowledgement to the "economic element" as the cause of community and individual distress. He or she knows that many individual problems will not go away with increased income. Dexter goes farther in revealing the anti-democratic nature of his notion of modern social work by declaring "that money alone or political democracy alone has not been the salvation of any individual or nation." He warns his audience against allowing the field of interpretation to be preempted by "those without our experience who loudly and vehemently demand wages and industrial control as the social panacea." Social workers must take up their duty and not get so bogged down with individual cases. They must meet their professional obligation to speak out, letting the truth of an interpretation take them where it may. For Dexter, truth was the objective which the social worker with his or her scientific method could aspire. Only those with an unbiased view and dispassionate posture could adequately interpret society's problem to itself (Dexter 1920, 278-281; CUL 1938; 1926).

In a later essay, Dexter explained why black social workers should be preferred over white social workers when working amongst their own people. He felt the latter suffered from two faults. Either white social workers applied the standards of white family and social life to their black clients or they didn't apply any standards at all. Dexter believed the "intelligent colored worker" would not set impossible standards for black families, but, even more importantly would not consider her clients "non-moral or unimprovable." Here he makes the point that while there may be more "sub-normal groups" within the race than with whites, that was due to the "later emergence from barbarism" of blacks. It was absurd to classify an "entire race" as uncivilized.

Dexter explained further that it is the knowledge the black social worker has of his or her own community which makes him or her more qualified. Their white counterparts rely on sensationalized news reports for their information, have stereotypical views, and do not have knowledge of the full diversity of the black community, especially "[t]he fact that the bulk of the men and women are hard workers...." He complains that black social workers aren't chosen for the same reason as whites but because they are considered "safe" or "good." He argues that black social workers who are selected because they are considered "safe...carry no weight with their own people." He maintains there are many "devoted colored men and women" who are genuinely interested in "race improvement."

Dexter considered knowledge of all movements for race advancement crucial for the black social worker. He is quick to say that one does not have to sympathize "with every radical movement...[but] be ready to lend every possible assistance to the sound and constructive movements." He asserted that the most important requirement for social work with blacks was that the social worker have "faith in the ultimate destiny of the Negro race." Dexter warned black social workers to be on the lookout for race prejudice within social work organizations and in communities. He felt that, on the whole, social workers were "relatively free from prejudice" but he worried about larger agencies (Dexter [1921]1978, 427-430).

The black social worker, in being better suited to serve the black community, had a special responsibility that went with that suitability. Black social workers had to restore black people "who have congenitally or through accident, become handicapped...as nearly as possible to the normal." In addition, they had "the task of bringing the whole Negro group as a separate social entity up to a higher level of social status." Jones argued that social workers had to answer to a "critical Negro public" who wanted to see what they were doing toward "securing larger opportunity for the Negro as a separate racial group."

Jones reported that the social worker felt that the most important trend in the social work field was "that general social agencies should always consider the Negro's social needs as proportionate parts of the total social service needs of all of the people." He argued that activities for blacks within organizations such as family welfare, or health agency black social workers should be placed in "strategic positions...so that the most effective work may be done." This would serve two functions. First, it would give black social workers an additional field of career opportunities. Second, the black public would be satisfied both with the idea that blacks were being served by a general social agency and, as well, that one of their own had been hired to handle the work.

Jones argued that the field of social work was suited to treat "the whole problem of race relations in America." "Effective social work" would raise the social and economic status of the group. It would "give them a stronger economic foundation and a better appreciation of social values." Moreover, social work "will develop competent and dependable leadership within the racial group." The field facilitated close cooperation between black and white community leaders and rendered blacks "an articulate group in the community." Social workers were in a position to counteract arguments of black inferiority, and to combat obstacles to giving blacks their rights. Jones asserted that social workers would be able to extirpate "from the Negro masses the feeling of insufficiency or inferiority." A true solution to the race problem would be the development of a strong race "from whom will emerge outstanding characters whose special contributions to the welfare

of man will tend to bring more respect for and more confidence in the Negro as a people” (E. Jones 1928, 458, 463).

In order for the black social worker to accomplish the dual responsibility of normalizing subgroups and accomplishing racial progress he or she needs training. I have argued previously that the Urban League represented a movement in the black community to modernize social work. One step towards modernization is through professional training. The main benefit of professional training for the social worker was the application of the scientific method to the job. Forrester Washington argued that the scientific method underlay all the professions. He implied that social work’s full acceptance would be enhanced with the profession’s acceptance of the scientific method.

The scientific method had many advantages for social workers. It allowed them to assess quickly and accurately problems within the field. The saving of time became a saving of money in a field where the latter was not necessarily plentiful. The prevention of waste was another consideration. Washington likened social work to “the mechanical field,” suggesting that “a ruined piece of commodity” in the latter would be equivalent to the “individual whom the bungling, untrained social worker failed to restore to normality.” The individual would be an economic loss because he would not only not be able to make a contribution to society, but would continue to be a burden on it. Beyond the economic argument, Washington asked others to consider the suffering caused by “blind experimentation” which could entail “the impairment and sometimes destruction of that little appreciated, but most important and most valuable commodity of all—human life.”

Washington felt that, in addition to the scientific method, the social worker needed what he called a “wholesome philosophy of life.” He believed this philosophy came out of professional training. Only trained social workers would have “abundant but sensible optimism.” They would know the contribution they were making to society. The trained social worker was likely not to be discouraged by a failure or two. He had to believe in social evolution, to believe that his efforts, however small, would go toward the

development of mankind. The trained worker would not let his or her "humanitarian impulse" be limited to a few cases. He wrote that the scientific method taught social workers that social misfits, e.g., unmarried mothers, thieves' "abnormal behavior" may be the result of heredity or physical abnormality or "causes entirely beyond the will and control of the individual concerned." He did not blame the client for his condition, not unlike the doctor who does not blame his patient for their sicknesses. His impersonal attitude is one "of impartiality and of toleration for human weaknesses" which is necessary to be able to treat many types of cases (Washington [1926]1978, 446-448; Lubove [1965] 1983, 123).

The embrace of environmentalism by the social workers occurred for a number of reasons. Social work, not unlike many professions, saw itself as disinterested and working for the common good. Safely ensconced in the ideology of professionalism, it is unlikely the Urban League recognized how they advanced their career interests through the kind of reform they advocated. For them there was no other alternative other than reform directed by experts. And the Urban League was expert in race relations and black social uplift. The belief in environmentalism was tied up in the social workers' sense of their role. If human abnormality resulted from heredity or some physical condition, they would have no role. An individual could not be rehabilitated, he would be doomed for life. But if forces beyond the individual caused these problems, or if the human being was improvable, then there was a role for the social workers.

The other problem that stemmed from the League pursuing simultaneously race advancement and career opportunities is the fusing of the public and private realms. Job opportunities in either area were seen undifferentiatedly. Therefore, the League was not likely to recognize the adverse effects of its reforms and state social regulation. It is no coincidence that one of the early opportunities for League professionals was in the Juvenile Delinquency department. The difference between taking advice from the League and

compulsion from the courts was lost on the League officials. The League's lack of recognition of the difference between advice and compulsion reflected a number of things. League officials felt their advice was the right thing to do because they were experts. So did it matter whether the client chose to take the advice or not, if this is what the client should do from the League's point of view? As well, the League did not make distinctions between private and public social agencies. Placing a social worker in any agency was considered a gain. These attitudes, coupled with the statist bias of the League's officials, allowed the eventual underwriting of their programs by the government. This bias, in turn, reflected the thrust of black elites who sought recognition of black interests from the state, but were immune to the coercive functions of the state, thus allowing for its penetration into the lives of black lower classes. The transition from the League to the state was all too easy. While the League sought full citizenry, it unwittingly ushered in an "administered citizenry" for the black working and under classes.

Garveyism, Communism, and Machine Politics

I agree with the interpretation that the Chicago Urban League represented a moderate alternative during times of political turmoil in 1919 and in the early 1930s. As I have argued above, the League had a more significant though subtle role in times of social peace. While the League called for full civil rights for its Afro-American constituents, at the same time it circumscribed the arena for self-directed action on the part of those constituents. The League placed conceptual constraints on the development of mass political agency not only by through its middle-class methods of negotiation and education, and the kinds of issues which it contested, e.g., equal employment opportunity, but with its notion of the disorganized and pathological black underclass. Examining the response to and interaction of the League with Garveyism, Communism, and the black submachine

in Chicago will further illuminate the League's attitude and approach to the ordinary black citizen.

Garveyism

Marcus Garvey, originally from Jamaica, is credited with leading the largest mass movement in black American history. He also crystallized the incipient nationalism of race conscious blacks during and after World War I. Garvey is known for his failed business schemes and the dream of establishing an empire in Africa modeled after the British empire. What is less known is Garvey's adherence to Booker T. Washington's belief in black business as a means of racial uplift; Garvey just desired a larger field for his petty capitalism (Stein 1986).

Garveyism in Chicago didn't appear to have an impact on the Urban League. The number of black migrants coming to the city "provided the basis for a flourishing branch of the Universal Negro Improvement Association." It appeared that the League competed with the Garveyites over influencing the social adjustment of black migrants. The Garveyites would reject any adjustment which entailed assimilation but would direct the efforts of the masses to support various business schemes in the name of redeeming the race (Stein 1986, 132). There aren't direct references to the Garveyites in the surviving primary material of the League. There was personal animosity and a contentious relationship between Marcus Garvey and League board member, Robert Abbott, no doubt played a part. Abbott heavily criticized Garvey in the pages of the *Chicago Defender* for his charlatan efforts to get the black masses to invest in his business schemes and his vision of going back to Africa (Spear 1967, 194-197; Haywood 1978, 106-107).

In late 1919, Garvey brought a libel suit against Abbott and the *Defender* for its portrayal of the purchase of the S.S. YARMOUTH for the Black Star Line as a swindle of the masses' hard-earned money. Garvey was rewarded a token sum, hardly enough to

defray the legal costs involved. When Garvey came to Chicago to sell stock in the Black Star Line, he denounced Abbott for his criticisms. At the close of that meeting at the Eighth Regiment Armory, Garvey was arrested for illegally selling stock. He posted bond and left the city. Soon afterwards, Abbott successfully brought a libel suit against Garvey for his Chicago address and for articles in the *Negro World* (Cronon [1955] 1996, 75-76; Spear 1967, 194-195; Stein 1986, 79, 166-7).

It is not unlikely that board members and officials of the League shared Abbott's distaste for Garvey and his politics. How influential Abbott's views were on policy are unclear. Abbott lent his name, prestige, money, and the pages of the *Chicago Defender* to the Urban League but was not part of the inner circle which made policy. There are some references to the development of racial consciousness amongst blacks, made at the height of Garveyism, which were attributed to other phenomena. Robert Park warned in the annual report of 1917 that blacks use the "energies" stimulated by racial antagonism to constructive ends. Park felt that this racial consciousness came less from a political leader than from segregation and racial prejudice which caused the Negro to be constantly self-absorbed with his problem. A social service organization, like the Urban League, based on specialized knowledge was thought by Park to be more appropriate for race relations (CUL 1917, 4).

Writing in 1923, J. Milton Sampson, the League's director of the Department of Research and Records, found many reasons to a raised racial consciousness amongst blacks. Significantly, in addition to the rejection of blacks through segregation, Sampson saw the efforts on the part of the black economic, political and civic elite as a plan for voluntary segregation. Racial consciousness was stimulated by the black elite for the purposes of more black mass patronage of businesses, services, and votes. It would appear that when race consciousness was raised by the Chicago League (or its representatives) the connection to Garvey was ignored or assumed not to exist (Sampson 1923, 15-18.)

Perhaps the closest reference to Garveyism was made by the Chicago Commission on Race Relations in one of their recommendations. The Commission recommended that blacks promote “sound racial doctrines among the uneducated members of their group, and the discouragement of propaganda and agitators seeking to inflame racial animosity and incite Negroes to violence.” This reference probably had more to do with the UNIA offshoot “Abyssinians” than the local UNIA branch (CCRR 1922, 59-64; Haywood 1978, 106). Again we don’t know if these are oblique references to the local UNIA. The Commission probably felt that the efforts to incite violence were made by individuals as much as by organizations. Another recommendation was that tempering of racial pride, while important within limits, should not promote preoccupation with race and thus a “separation of race interests” which would “interfere with racial adjustment.” It is clear that the Commission felt that the League was one of the “sanest elements” during the race riot in contradistinction to individuals and groups who promoted the unsound racial doctrine of excessive racial pride linked to inciting violence (CCRR 1922, 646, 647).

The most revealing fear communicated by the Chicago Commission (and I believe shared by the League) was its feeling that “the uneducated members” of the race were easily led and swayed. This was the reason for the call for responsibility on the part of black political organizations. The notion that the masses could not organize their social life had political ramifications. It suggested that they were not capable of directing those lives nor collectively manipulating the conditions which impinged on their lives. The idea that the League had to organize the social life of the black masses meant that they had to protect them from pernicious political influences they were incapable of resisting themselves.

The image of the ordinary black citizen as easily swayed, even against her better interests, by the demagogic appeal of Garvey was prevalent in black intellectuals’ criticism of Garvey. This image is prevalent in the intellectual criticisms of Garvey that we will examine. Charles S. Johnson and E. Franklin Frazier, each of whom had brief stays as research directors of the Chicago League, were influential in the circles of the Urban

League movement. They shared the sense that Garvey was a significant force in the black community and should not be written off as a crank. While they felt the masses were “gullible,” they nonetheless understood that Garvey had tapped some source of dissatisfaction or recognition within them which had not been touched by any organization or movement before.

Johnson explained that the Garvey phenomenon represented the “new psychology of the American Negro peasantry.” He suggests that the masses remained loyal to Garvey even though “they may have been fleeced” because the movement “afforded a mental relaxation for the long submerged Negro peasantry.” Garveyism represented an outlet for obstructed desires and “repressed longings.” Johnson was particularly impressed with Garvey’s ability “to build up a sentiment to attract” capital among blacks which “was scattered, uninterested, and small.” But what concerned Johnson the most was the fact the movement did not need “Garvey himself.” He felt “the sources of discontent” by the black masses undergirding the Garvey Movement needed to be effectively channeled in a constructive direction (Johnson, 1923, 231-233).

Frazier characterized the Garvey Movement as a “crowd movement.” He was trying to explain why the masses were attracted to Garvey while “other outstanding efforts” went unsupported. He suggests that a crowd psychology would not be attracted to the Urban League’s “so reasoned a program of social adjustment....” The League and other organizations’ efforts “lacked the dramatic element.” Frazier felt that, not unlike the fraternal orders but on a grander scale, the Garvey Movement promoted the “self-magnification” of the black masses. He argued that the Garvey Movement, by blaming the setbacks of blacks on whites, responded to the fact that “[e]very rabble must find someone to blame for its woes...except [its] own incapacity.” Frazier saw a danger in the masses finding excuses not to become more self-reliant (Frazier [1926]1974, 236-241).

In a later article on Garvey, Frazier made some of the same points but elaborated on a number of them. He pointed out that since blacks as a whole had been excluded from “all

serious participation of American life” they were “fertile soil” for a mass movement to grow. What specifically appealed to the “average Negro” is the way the mass movement provided him with “meaning to his life and worth to his personality” something required by “all mediocre people whose personalities must be supported by empty fictions.” Frazier saw the Garvey Movement acting as “an asylum” for blacks dissatisfied with their status. Going further, he argued that, unlike organizations like the NAACP or Urban League, which “appeals to intelligent persons who are trying to attain tangible goals through cooperation” the Garvey Movement gave the masses what they wanted. He described what the masses wanted by saying they sought “identification with something that makes them feel like somebody among white people who have said they were nobody.” (Frazier [1926] 1978, 307-311).

Both authors tried to explain the appeal Garvey held for the masses given the “unreasonableness” of his political program. They attributed the appeal to a “new psychology” rather than any sense that Garvey’s program spoke to the black rank and file’s self-understanding of their needs and interests. Believing in the “reasonableness” of the Urban League program and others they didn’t even investigate how the UNIA might have spoken to the masses’ interests. As it turns out Garvey’s program, at the bottom, was the black petty-bourgeoisie’s vision of developing a black capitalist class, but the base would be Africa rather than Chicago or Durham, North Carolina. There was more agreement in goals between the UNIA and the Urban League than was realized by Frazier or Johnson. In spite of the League’s primary interest in social work as a means to eliminate racial barriers to employment in public and private welfare bureaucracies, they always supported the development of black business in the community (Stein 1986, 169-70; Haywood 1978, 110).

What they really were interested in was how Garvey motivated the masses. They were unable to see how he motivated them to a program that ultimately was not in their interests. He was able to persuade the masses to back his program because of the defeat of

popular insurgencies in 1919-20, which left the masses without any real alternatives; hence, they were vulnerable to Garvey's message. The twenties were a time when the black masses were relatively insecure because of the volatile business cycle while the black middle class grew and prospered (Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962; Stein 1986; Kornweibel 1976). Charles S. Johnson came away from his analysis of the Garvey phenomenon understanding that the Urban League and other middle-class organizations needed to adopt a stronger rhetoric of racial pride and promote the accomplishments of race relations engineering. The orientation to promote both black cultural achievements and better race relations was embraced by the Urban League movement. This orientation partially explained their more aggressive posture in fighting racial discrimination in employment, housing and public schools and on publicizing race relations achievements by Executive Secretary A.L. Foster (Stein 1986; Lewis 1984; Strickland 1966; CUL 1933, 2; Reed 1982, 30-31).

Communism

Unlike Garveyism, Communism was referred to directly in the publications of the Chicago Urban League. There wasn't much notice of communist activity by the League during the 20s despite the fact the Chicago was the site of the founding of the Workers (Communist) Party in 1921. Chicago was also the headquarters for the party newspaper, *The Daily World*, for a time during the twenties. There were black communists in Chicago but they were relatively inconsequential to South Side politics. It wasn't until 1930-31 when the Unemployed Councils began mass demonstrations located in the South Side black community that the city and the Urban League began to notice. The Communist Party members played a dominating role in the Unemployed Councils and led many mass demonstrations including "rent riots." In fact, the event which signaled the danger of mass

discontent in the black community to the city elites was a rent riot (Haywood 1978, 442-443; Piven and Cloward 1971, 63).

While blacks were 11 percent of the Chicago's population in 1930, they made up one quarter of the relief cases. In some sections of the South Side black community, unemployment was 85 percent. Blacks who had suffered disproportionate unemployment during the 20s continued to experience disastrous impacts on life chances during the Great Depression. The loss of jobs was compounded by the failure of eight out of nine banks where blacks had the bulk of their savings. The first Unemployed Council was organized on the South Side in fall of 1930. Unemployed black workers participated in the Council's organization. On August 3, 1931 riot ensued when police attempted to evict an seventy-year old black widow, Dianna Gross. Three blacks were killed in the struggle that followed. Mass funerals were organized in the black community to demonstrate its outrage. Blacks responded favorably to the demonstrations by making 5,500 applications in a three week time span to the Unemployed Councils and over 500 to the Communist Party (Haywood 1978, 442-3; Piven and Cloward 1971, 63n; CUL 1932, 7; Strickland 1966, 108).

The Urban League had been involved in organizing the black community to provide for their own destitute. It wasn't long before private dollars ran out for relief. The community had to rely on city and state relief efforts. The League was like other black organizations, dependent on black workers' income and it had been running a deficit. A.L. Foster, the executive secretary, was the only League official left on the organization's payroll. Other officials were offered jobs directing relief in the black community. Alonzo C. Thayer supervised the lodging of unattached black men and women. He was paid by the Governor's Commission on Unemployment and Emergency Relief. H.N. Robinson, Thayer's assistant, assisted in the supervision of homeless shelters and was also paid by the Commission (Strickland 1966, 104-5, 112; CUL 1932, 16, 23).

In the midst of depression and large budget deficits, the Urban League let its attitude toward communism be known. In the annual report of 1931-32, the League warned against the “communistic elements taking advantage of the dire situation of poverty and desperation experienced by the black masses. Following the eviction riot in August, 1931, Foster and the industrial secretary, Alonzo Thayer, were on vacation. Foster returned promptly, given the situation. After a brief investigation of the destitution of blacks, the board of directors called a meeting that included representatives from the more important social welfare agencies in the city. Public officials attending the meeting included Amelia Sears, who doubled as a board member and county commissioner, tried to procure funds for a lodging and feeding station from the mayor and to try to speed up public works building using black labor. At the follow-up meeting on August 19, it was reported that Mayor Cermak had failed to give funds for these relief efforts (CUL 1932, 24-25).

Foster describes the efforts made by the League to meet the influence of the Communists on the South Side:

Subversive organizations, frequently led by professional agitators, have taken advantage of the situation and have done everything possible to create dissatisfaction and active revolt. It has been the task of the League to hold out to these thousands of unfortunate citizens a guiding hand and encouraging word. (CUL 1932, 7).

When faced with popular insurgency spurred on by Depression-induced conditions, the League sought to check the influence of the Communists. Rather than seeing that the conditions were enough to get the ordinary black person stimulated, League officials chose to see “professional agitators” trying “to create dissatisfaction” as if the masses weren’t already dissatisfied. The image conveyed was of the impressionable and vulnerable black masses. More than a friend or neighbor extending “an encouraging word,” there was an organizing agent offering “a guiding hand.” Concern about the influence of the Communists over the black masses conjured up images of race riots and the spread of

Communism. This concern was evident in the larger intellectual circles of the Urban League movement (CUL 1932, 7; Strickland 1966, 109).

George Edmund Haynes, former executive secretary of the National Urban League, expressed his concern in an article of the *Southern Workman* published at Hampton Institute. Haynes decried the lack of influence clergymen had over the black masses after migration, world war, and secular public school education created “new needs and desires.” He claimed that the largely rural population of blacks required “face-to-face contact with a leadership that understands their mass emotions and how to arouse and guide them.” It was the eroding contact that the black rank and file had with “the usual avenues of guidance and help” which provided fertile ground for the Communists. This was the guidance that Foster said the Urban League would give to the black popular classes in Chicago (Haynes 1933, 153).

Haynes believed that, prior to the difficult times during the Depression, black commoners had been loyal to American institutions. They had sought change in non-militant, non-violent and “sacrificial service even to those who exploited and oppressed them.” This was the guidance proffered by black clergyman and intellectuals. Just as significant, Haynes was critical of white clergymen for not doing more. He was disappointed that the interracial movement, including the Commission on Interracial Cooperation in the South and the National Young Men’s and Young Women’s Christian Associations, had not garnered more support from the white public. Haynes argued that “the indifference and lack of interest of millions of white Christians and other citizens” offered blacks little in the way of relief from domination and exclusion. This lack of support from whites left blacks “largely to the mercy of skillful zealots” who specialized in arousing “mass emotions.” He warned his audiences of “the risk to democracy of leaving her twelve million Negroes to feel there is no other way out” (Haynes 1933, 158-160).

Much in the way the participants in the Urban League movement reacted to Garveyism in the early 20s, and to Communism in the 30s, betrayed a fear of the easy

manipulation of the ignorant, unsuspecting, pliant black rank and file. The question of whether some agency should or should not speak for or “guide” the black masses was not raised. The only question for the League was who should perform this disinterested function—the un-American, irresponsible Garveyites and Communists, or the reasonable Urban League. Of course, in a giant metropolis like Chicago, there was less occasion for face-to-face contact with those who provided you with services. It was helpful having some one or organization that knew how things worked to help out. If the help was voluntary, then the ordinary black citizen could take the advice or leave it. Having a say in what policy should be carried out was less important if there were other alternatives. For the new arrival, the pervasive influence of the League meant there weren’t that many alternatives. One of the democratic advantages of machine politics over the “interest-group articulation” of the Urban League for the rank and file was the periodic referendum on the former’s performance.

Machine Politicians

Electoral politics was significantly affected by the great increase of black migrants during the war. Previous to that period, black politicians were wholly tied to the white politicians that controlled the second ward (where blacks were the most concentrated). Their patronage depended on the good faith of the white politicians. Symbolic gestures from Mayor Carter Harrison, II (a Democrat) appointing Archibald Carey onto the censorship board and the subsequent banning of *Birth of a Nation* by Mayor William Thompson (a Republican), who later formed an alliance with Carey were significant in keeping the black politicians and their constituents’ loyalty (Katznelson [1971]1976, 93; Spear 1967, 124-125). It was not until the increase in population in the second ward that black politicians like Oscar De Priest and others were able to use the emerging voting bloc to leverage more patronage. New black migrants having suffered under Democratic

regimes in the South were almost completely Republican in their party loyalties. Despite having perhaps the most powerful black machine in the country it was powerless to affect many of the everyday problems of the black community. For it was really a submachine, as all black machines were at that time, ultimately dependent on the white machine (Gosnell 1967; Katznelson [1971]1976, 102-104; Kilson 1971).

The Chicago Urban League, while it had some differences with black machine politicians, nonetheless considered them more acceptable than the Garveyites or Communists. Black League professionals and politicians came from the same stratum that emerged after 1915. Both groups represented clientage politics; the white patrons from the dominant political party (Republicans prior to 1930 and Democrats afterwards) for the politicians, and white philanthropists for the League black professionals. Kilson argues that these patron-clientage relationships existed side by side. He claims that the interest group politics of the Urban League were more inclusive than those of the high status individual selected by whites to be the black leader. Machine politics represented greater socio-economic differentiation and a more advanced "mode of adaptation" to an urban political system (Kilson 1971; Katznelson [1971]1976; Gosnell 1967).

There are many references to black politicians and League officials collaborating in service to the black community. Both groups participated in calming the black masses during the Race Riot of 1919. Louis B. Anderson, alderman for the second ward, was an early contributor to the Urban League. Black politicians helped to run the financial campaigns in 1930. During the unemployment crisis in 1926, Anderson "provided an emergency lodging house for the homeless men who could not be cared for at the municipal lodging house...." Congressmen DePriest secured a place for emergency lodging which the League supervised in 1930. Despite an apparent overlap in the function of aiding the adjustment of black migrants to urban life, there was little indication of competition and rivalry. One author commented on how well the two groups of elites cooperated (CCRR 1922; CLUCAN 1917, 15; CUL 1932, 22; Reed 1982, 101, 114).

The cooperation between black politicians and the League didn't altogether mask the animosity the latter felt about aiding and abetting vice in the black community. One of the few times this conflict over the moral reform stance of the League surfaced was in the 1923 race for alderman of the second ward. T. Arnold Hill, then the Chicago League's executive secretary, frustrated with the worsening financial situation, sought new opportunities. He was drafted by the Deneen faction of the Republican Party, which was committed to reform. Hill ran on a platform to rid the second ward of vice. But there were other elements in his campaign which betrayed those groups who stood to benefit from his election to the City Council.

Hill's platform was laid out in a political advertisement in the *Chicago Defender* a week before the election. Hill pointed out that he did not want to deal with "personalities" but, rather the records of service for each candidate. Hill got characterized as a "whole-souled Race man," someone who had worked with both the ordinary citizen and the elite of the ward. It was reported that Hill was part of an effort "to get high-class men to serve the city in public office" since the "fair name of Chicago is at stake." The article went on to say that "[t]he increasing property interests of the Colored residents...demand that they have a more than general interest in the good name and prosperity of Chicago." While Hill was tending to the needs of the unemployed through the Urban League, Anderson was "busy feathering his nest with what a great many people are calling the 'ill-gotten gains of vice.'" It came down to an uncorrupted Hill serving all the interests, especially those which benefitted from Chicago retaining its "fair name," in contrast to a corrupt and self-serving Anderson. (*Chicago Defender*, Feb. 24, 1923).

In the election, Hill was soundly beaten by Anderson, 6,399 to 2,572 votes. Hill was characterized as an outsider and a tool of the Municipal Voters League. The voters were told by Oscar DePriest that the second and third wards were "organized." With organization "no outside influences, nor Race traitors, could defeat the honest purposes of the district's residents." Louis B. Anderson, was perhaps the main symbol of black

political achievement (before DePriest's election to Congress in 1928), being Mayor Thompson's floor leader in the city council. Also, Anderson, using militant racial rhetoric, neutralized the vice issue. Although vice often victimized the black rank and file, the beneficiaries of the underground economy ostentatiously supported charities in the community. The concentration on vice as an issue meant more to the elite, whose status stood to suffer more by a decline of the ward's reputation. The lesson seemed to be learned since no other League official entered the fray. In competing for political office, Hill violated the League's non-partisan stand. This stance grew less important in the thirties, however (*Chicago Defender*, March 3, 1923; Strickland 1966, 81).

Unlike Hill, Earl B. Dickerson had been involved in politics before getting involved in the League. As a black Democrat, Dickerson benefited from Anton Cermak taking office and turning out black Republicans in 1930. Dickerson was appointed as assistant attorney general for the northern district of Illinois. Shortly thereafter, he emerged as one of the new leaders from the League's board of directors. He took over the vice-president position which was reserved for blacks in 1931. Dickerson had been active in the local NAACP and was considered a "gadfly for racial justice." Dickerson as a politician "never acted within the circles of power of the Democratic Party" (Reed 1982, 91, 107-8, 109, 111, 115).

Dickerson became alderman of the second ward in 1939. He became a rival of William Dawson who, as the committeeman for the second ward, controlled patronage for the ward. Dawson refused to endorse Dickerson as the Democratic nominee for Congress a year later after promising to do so in exchange for the latter's support of Dawson candidacy for ward committeeman. Dickerson's lack of support for incumbent Arthur Mitchell alienated him from the Kelly-Nash machine. This alienation paved the way for Dickerson's devastating defeat by Dawson in the 1942 Congressional election. Finally, in 1943, Dickerson lost his city council seat to a Dawson backed candidate, William H. Harvey giving Dawson complete control of the second ward (Biles 1984, 99-101).

While Dickerson fought the Dawson machine he had become president of the Chicago Urban League in 1940. Dickerson was considered a race radical and this is indicative of how far the League had gone toward becoming militant on issues of racial discrimination. In 1923, Hill had lost to Anderson who cloaked himself as a more authentic Race man. More than a decade later, Dickerson lost to a candidate who refrained from using racial rhetoric. Dawson, remembering Dickerson, said, "He was always raising the race issue and antagonizing people.... Me, I never raise the race issue, even in Congress, and I certainly didn't in the Council." (Biles 1984, 100). Learning the lessons of Garvey, the aggressive posture on racial discrimination favored by A.L. Foster and Dickerson attempted to respond to popular pressure on the Urban League. The policies however didn't change. The League still spoke for the dispossessed in a way that allowed for their maintenance, but not for their empowerment.

Endnotes

¹William Graves joined Hill, Graham Taylor and others on the committee chosen to petition Governor Lowden (CCRR 1922, xv; Diner 1980, 130).

²Johnson, a black graduate student under Robert E. Park at the University of Chicago, had been called in as a witness. Apparently, Johnson while entering the Urban League building at 3033 Wabash Avenue witnessed a beating. Johnson came to the inquiry with a plan on how he would conduct the research. The Commission members so impressed hired him. Although Johnson held the title as associate, and was paid less than the executive secretary, Graham R. Taylor, he has been widely credited with having written the report, *The Negro in Chicago*. See Diner 1980, 130; Persons 1987, 64; Philpott 1978, 211.

³This report covered the period of 1930-32.

⁴Actually, Drake and Cayton ([1945] 1962) point out maybe everyone does not benefit, they claimed when "a lower-class Negro confronts a Negro of higher status in the role...of client receiving relief...the atmosphere is surcharged with latent class antagonism.

⁵To be fair a study entitled "Economic Aspects of the Chicago Negro Family" was planned by Irene Graham of the University of Chicago. I'm not sure if it was done, or if it was why there wasn't any mention in the primary materials available.

⁶“Block or neighborhood organizations will be formed to meet purely local needs, such as better service from the various city departments; the elimination of some public nuisance; and the assumption on the part of the local group or a more definite social responsibility.” Quoted in “Purposes of the National League On Urban Conditions Among Negroes. Plan of Work for the Chicago Organization” in Julius Rosenwald Papers, University of Chicago.

⁷Educational clubs were created as joint ventures by the Industrial and Civic departments. Two were organized in 1926. The “Urban League Progressive Club” represented the Crest Lamp Shade Co., and the “Urban League Friendly Sisters representing Domestic Workers.” The 1926 annual report forecasted the organization of more clubs which would promote “health, thrift, recreation and other educational programs for workers.” CUL 1926, 15.

⁸Blumberg was soliciting the help of this organization as part Urban League’s Woman’s Division of the financial campaign.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

I have brought into question the characterization of the migrant during the classic Great Migration. I have argued that this characterization of the black newcomer to Chicago as ignorant, unsophisticated, and in need of "adjustment" gave the League a legitimate basis to exist. It is not the fact that these characteristics did not have some basis in material reality, they did. The League, as I have indicated, were heroic in its efforts to attend to the many needs of the migrants who did not have a resourceful kinship network to fall back on. I have questioned more, not the giving of aid, but the *kind* of aid that was given. Specifically, the fact that advice on decent housing with reasonable rents, and good jobs went hand in hand with telling migrants that they had to change their *ways*. That advice inherently, and perhaps unselfconsciously meant moral tutelage from the "better classes." It is true that middle-class migrants were also snubbed by the Old Settlers making antagonism less a class issue and more a cultural one. But these middle-class migrants, which made up the majority of the ascendant new middle classes, was the League's attentive public. As the League's public supported the moral admonitions to the more recent newcomers and dispossessed in general.

The League was clearly responding to the dominant notion that blacks were not ready for full citizenship by attempting to change the migrants to render them acceptable by the overall white public. They did not want to give whites any excuse for not giving all Afro-Americans their rights, particularly, the equality of opportunity. The League carried their program into the workplace and in the homes of migrants. The League folding into the trends of welfare capitalism sought to "make over" and "recreate" the rural newcomer into an efficient industrial worker. The League saw in principle that unionization would safeguard black workers' economic security. But in Chicago, the combination of union

racism, and the League's apparent need to represent the black worker did make for a happy marriage between the League and organized labor.

The homes and neighborhoods of the migrants was more the League's domain than the workplace where they were definite guests. Although the League did not live in the neighborhoods they visited, they were in close enough proximity that they could have daily contact with the migrants. The League's program of remaking the migrant meant penetrating his or her home life. It meant going to the source of the disorganization and attempting to reorganize the personality and habits of the migrants. The League paved the way for its own organizational survival as interpreters of the black migrant experience. Their therapeutic approach reduced the migrants to clients relying on the League as experts of the migrants' (and by easy extension, the masses) experience, needs, and interests. This phenomenon, I argue, serve to obviate the need for the migrants to develop their own agency on behalf of their social needs.

The League became the accommodating agent of the plan for better race relations—the Chicago Commission on Race Relations recommendations. *The Negro in Chicago* called for racial change but it had to be managed by racial experts, for fear that another racial conflagration would occur. This plan and the League's program talked about black social problems as matters of adjustment or maladjustment. Public policy issues such as employment, housing, welfare, other social services were discussed and approached in terms of racial access to be brought about by the collaboration and negotiation of interracial experts. Moreover, the race relations engineering that the plan implied provided a new field of employment for the black social workers as they began to penetrate private, but mainly public bureaucracies in Chicago at the time. Instead, the approach to black social problems which calls for black functionaries to administer to the needs of the black poor which got its start during this period anticipates the social welfare economies of today's black communities.

To answer Martin Kilson's question about how the League politicize black professionals on the local level, I would say that the politicization had a racial focus and offered an administered solution which aided the career mobility for those professionals. Some would argue that the League could not respond any differently, because of the overwhelming racism of the period, particularly, the intellectual justifications for racial differentials. This environment led League officials to believe their approach was the only viable one, and given the nature of the constraints on them they were correct. But the League failed even on its own terms, e.g., racial parity. In fact, the exclusive focus on racial inclusion and the administered approaches to black social problems has not significantly altered blacks' disproportionate dispossession. While the black poor are being maintained on inadequate and demeaning aid, the black elite enjoyed the benefits of professional and white-collar employment however meager at the time. Most importantly, the Urban League's approach paved the ideological way for the social welfare economy of black middle-class service providers and black underclass recipients which dominates the political economies of many black communities today.

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