

# Bronzeville: The 'Black Metropolis' of Chicago



## The History of Bronzeville

Located on the south side of Chicago, Bronzeville was the economic and cultural hub for Chicago's black community. As African Americans fled oppression in the south, they began settling in Chicago as early as the 1850s. By the 1920s, the black population in Chicago had amassed to 109,548 people. Like other northern cities during that era, blacks could not assimilate into the city at large and white businesses and social communities did not serve the black community. Chicago's Black Metropolis, like other Black Wall Streets, were created because blacks were cut off from the economic and social resources in the rest of city. In 1908, James Binga established Binga Bank, providing homeowner and small business loans to black residents. 35th Street was the prime location for a variety of black-owned businesses.

There were several well-known black-owned and well-financed building projects carried out in the Black Metropolis during the 1920s. The Overton Hygienic Building, a combination store, office, and manufacturing building commissioned by entrepreneur Anthony Overton in 1922 was the catalyst for much of the Black Metropolis' growth. Chicago's Black Metropolis also served as the center of black journalism, including the *Chicago Whip*, *Chicago Bee*, *Broad Axe*, the *Half Century Magazine*, and the influential *Chicago Defender*, a newspaper with a nationwide circulation. Churches also played an important role in the development of Chicago's Black Metropolis, both spiritually and socially. Large congregations, such as Quinn Chapel AME, Olivet Baptist Church, Pilgrim Baptist conducted extensive social programs and were instrumental in securing lodging and employment for blacks arriving from the south.

The district transformed from business and banking during the day to an entertainment mecca for African Americans at night. There were numerous music-oriented nightclubs and all-night restaurants throughout the business district, such as the Dreamland Café, the Royal Gardens (later Lincoln Gardens) and the Elite Club. [The Black Metropolis gained nationwide publicity](#) as

a model of black achievement, with extensive coverage in both white and black press at the time.

*UrbanMain has been working with the [51st St. Business Association](#) in Bronzeville to leverage community assets and external resources to unite nodes of business activity in the district.*