A Little More Freedom

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About half a century after substantial African American migration to the Lower Midwest began, everything changed overnight—or so it seemed. Suddenly in the middle of the 1910s a leaderless African American army began to pour into the region, and its advance continued relentlessly for a decade and a half. African American arrivals had never gone unnoticed by their European American neighbors, but the large numbers traveling into the region after 1915 turned up the volume and heightened the intensity of public discussion among whites and blacks alike. Unnoticed in the clamor were important continuities between previous and present migrations. Undaunted by the criticism directed their way and the obstacles placed in their path, African American migrants continued to travel to destinations new and old where they found the best opportunities and the fewest difficulties in pursuing them.
Chapter 8

THE FLOOD

During the second year of the Great War, several factors converged to stimulate the First Great Migration of black southerners to the North. Against a background of stiffening barriers of legal segregation in the southern states, disastrous flooding and the spread of the boll weevil pushed African Americans from the South. The war cut off the torrent of European immigration that had raged since the end of the depression of the 1890s, and American preparedness campaigns, soon followed by involvement in the war, left factories hungry for workers. In 1910, 89 percent of African Americans lived in the South; by 1930 migration lowered that figure to less than 79 percent. By bringing masses of African Americans out of the South and into northern metropolitan centers, placing them in industrial jobs, and regaining their right to vote, the Migration represented a “watershed” in African American history.

Appreciation of the First Great Migration as a turning point, however, should not be allowed to blind us to significant continuities between this and previous migrations. In fact, the mass movement of the years between 1915 and the eve of the Great Depression should be seen as the product of a long period of experimentation with various alternative options. As we have seen in chapter 6, mobile African Americans in the east south central states had tried both migration to the Southwest and urban migration within their region at the same time when they were testing the possibilities in the Lower Midwest. Such collective experimentation with conditions in other southern or western states and southern cities typified African American life in the South as a whole before World War I. In further testimony to continuity, the tide that flowed into the North after 1915 had already begun to rise in the years around the turn of the century. Estimates of gross migration, rather than the more commonly employed net projections, show that even without the stimulus of World War I, significant Negro out-migration [from the South] would probably have occurred. If 1900–10 rates had applied to 1910–20 populations, 79 percent of the gross out-migration to all states and 42 percent of the gross out-migration to non-southern states that did occur in 1910–20 would have taken place anyway. In sum, the main impact of World War I was not in accelerating the rate of gross out-migration of nonwhites from southern states. Rather it was to shift the direction of that outflow towards non-southern states.

Another element of continuity lies in the fact that the displacement far-
ther south of the sources of northern migration that so many have identified with the Great Migration—from the border states to the Deep South—actually began much earlier, during the 1890s at the latest. Migration to the Lower Midwest should be understood, then, as one among several mobility strategies adopted by black Southerners. Their choices of which one to use at a particular time were conditioned by a changing complex of factors, which included access to information and the availability and cost of transportation, both of which were affected by distance between origin and destination. In addition, conditions at the place of origin and at various potential destinations also figured in the calculations of potential travelers. Individual and family decisions had to take these shifting structural factors into account.

The story of Alonzo Parham, who came with his family to Chicago in 1923 at the age of twelve, illustrates some significant features of movement during the Great Migration. Parham’s family had farmed in Fulton County, Georgia, but the spread of the boll weevil threatened their livelihood. His father found work in a small town in Virginia, first in a coal mine and then aboveground, and asked his wife to bring their three children and join him. But when Mrs. Parham discovered that the town contained no facilities for the children’s further schooling, she refused. The family then followed Mr. Parham’s brother to Chicago, blazing a trail to the Windy City for other Fulton County families who came later. Their mobility demonstrated both step migration in Alonzo’s father’s case—from rural Georgia to small-town Virginia to midwestern metropolis—and chain migration, both in joining Alonzo’s uncle and in creating a pathway for others. The Parhams’ story also illustrates the common “men first, women later” pattern and the characteristic single-jump movement of women. Economic opportunity was necessary but not sufficient to channel their movement: also foremost was educational latitude. The Parham family’s concern for education paid off when Alonzo, who graduated as an honor student from Chicago’s Wendell Phillips High School, was nominated to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point by U.S. Congressman Oscar DePriest. DePriest himself was a migrant who left Alabama with his family during the Kansas Exodus and then moved from Salina, Kansas, to Chicago in 1889. His career depended on the political mobilization of both men and women in the Southside to wield the strength that migration had forged. In fact, DePriest’s breakthrough election as Chicago’s first black alderman in 1915 rested upon the metropolitan mobility of the pre–Great Migration years. The Great Migration itself created the conditions that made possible his election to Congress.

The Midwest, which had shown a weaker attraction than the Northeast during the years 1890–1910, now emerged as the prime regional magnet
for southern migrants. Ohio’s 84,000 African American newcomers during the decade of the Great War more than tripled the previous historically high numbers of 1900–1910. During the twenties the numbers grew by half again to establish a new record high. In Indiana migrant numbers doubled, to more than 30,000, during the war decade, and then grew to 37,000 in the twenties. Illinois’s migrant numbers multiplied more than twice during 1910–1920 over the previous high, and during the postwar decade reached nearly 150,000. By 1930 Illinois, which seventy years before had held the smallest African American population of the three states, contained the largest at about 329,000. Ohio’s was now second at 309,000, while Indiana lagged far behind with about 112,000.

Ohio’s African American migrants participated in a much larger migration to the Buckeye State, which recorded net gains of both native- and foreign-born whites between 1910 and 1930. Although European immigration to the United States dwindled, first because of the war and later as a result of the restrictive federal legislation of the 1920s, all three states continued to attract more foreign-born travelers than they lost. Indiana and Illinois, however, perpetuated the post–Civil War pattern of net losses among native-born whites. African American numbers were usually dwarfed by the European American inflows, but their higher rate of mobility meant that their percentage of each state’s population grew. By 1930, African Americans made up 4.6 percent of Ohio residents, 4.3 percent in Illinois, and 3.5 percent in the Hoosier State.

Georgians, Alabamians, and Mississippians now flocked to the Lower Midwest, their unfamiliar accents making their numbers seem even larger than they were and their arrival a more novel event than the earlier migrations from those states warranted. One such traveler was Sallie Hopson, who departed Macon County, Georgia, in 1917, in company with her mother and sister. They took the Central of Georgia to Atlanta, then changed to the Louisville & Nashville to Cincinnati. The trip to Cincinnati took “about two days and one night, with lunch basket and extra cover to keep warm when the train got chilly.” Going on from Cincinnati to Cleveland, their ultimate destination, required at least one more change of train. Illinois’s Deep South migrants far outnumbered travelers from the state’s traditional sources in the Upper South, but large numbers of Kentuckians and Tennesseans continued to flow to Ohio and Indiana alongside the newcomers from the Deep South.

Migration from the Deep South was facilitated by completion of the southern railroad network and improvement in train schedules. Only 9,000 phantom miles of mostly unusable line at the close of the Civil War, the southern network expanded to nearly 35,000 miles over the last third of the
nineteenth century. In 1893 travel by rail from Selma, Alabama, to Toledo, Ohio, required a scheduled time terminal-to-terminal of more than thirty-one hours. By 1930 the same trip still required two changes, in Birmingham and Cincinnati, but the total time fell to just over twenty-five hours. A trip from Clarksdale, Mississippi, to Chicago via Memphis on the Yazoo and Mississippi Valley Railroad (the “Yellow Dog”) and the Illinois Central now took only eighteen hours and twenty minutes, compared to an even thirty scheduled hours in 1893.14

Wherever they originated, the bulk of the migrants followed the Hopsons’ example in choosing a large midwestern city. Across the region, more than five-sixths of the growth in the African American population occurred in the fifteen cities that reached 100,000 total population by 1930. In Ohio and Indiana the migrants of 1910–1930 followed paths well worn by the migrants who had preceded them since 1890. In Illinois African American travelers executed the metropolitan shift that their predecessors had chosen not to undertake.

It cannot be emphasized enough that the African American metropolitan transition in the Lower Midwest was part and parcel of a sweeping process of urbanization that changed the face of the nation. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, radical changes in transportation and communication slowed down the subdivision of metropolitan hinterlands and the multiplication of service centers. Higher-order settlements began to capture market areas once controlled by lower-order settlements, while activities and services tended to reconcentrate in but a few high-order centers.15

But African Americans did more than participate in America’s metropolitan movement: they led the way.

Just as the first stage of Ohio’s metropolitan shift had been a distinctively African American movement, so too was its continuation after 1910. The rate of growth of African American populations in the largest cities dwarfed the rate for whites, raising the proportion of black Ohioans in its big cities above two-thirds, compared to less than two-fifths for whites (table A.15). The African American share of population in those cities more than doubled. Interstate migration certainly contributed to the metropolitan shift, but so too did intrastate mobility, as both rural areas and the smallest towns (under 10,000 population) either lost population or showed a growth rate so anemic as to indicate significant outmigration. Geraldine Moreland typified Ohio’s intrastate migrants. Born in Cambridge, Ohio (population 8,000 in 1900), she moved to Toledo before the Great War in search of bet-
In contrast to the preceding period, African American migration during 1910–1930 now showed no particular attraction to cities having large African American populations. Instead, black migration flowed in a channel parallel to white migration, only running more strongly to the same destinations.

In moving to Ohio cities during the First Great Migration, African Americans chose carefully among the available alternatives. Despite their large African American communities at the beginning of the period, both
Cincinnati and Columbus failed to attract enough new migrants to retain their share of the state urban black population. The relative fading of Cincinnati’s and Columbus’s attraction in the eyes of black migrants from the South is powerfully indicative of choices made, since the main rail lines draining the Lower South, such as the Southern Railway and Louisville & Nashville systems, terminated in Cincinnati, requiring transfers to lines to northeastern Ohio cities, most of which ran through Columbus. The cities that gained most were northeastern industrial cities, even Akron (figure 8.1).

During this period, the contrast between Akron and Springfield as African American migrant destinations shows how in migrant eyes the memory of past violence interacted with present opportunity. Both Akron and Springfield had experienced major race riots, and both had lost share of Ohio’s black urban population during 1890–1910 despite Akron’s dynamic industrial scene. During the second decade of the new century, Akron became the state’s fastest-growing city because of its booming rubber factories, and the city’s industrial expansion made it a powerful magnet for both black and white movers. Even if black workers were restricted, as at Firestone, to unskilled jobs handling raw materials, the dramatic expansion of rubber production created hundreds of jobs for migrants. Springfield, however, experienced a slight industrial decline compared to other Ohio cities and became a less attractive destination for both African American and European American migrants. By 1930 Akron’s African American population, which had been one-seventh the size of Springfield’s in 1910, had surpassed that of the Miami Valley city. With white violence a receding threat, industrial opportunity beckoned African Americans to Ohio’s northeastern urban complex. A pattern of urban mobility first cut by violence was reconfigured by economic opportunity.

While industrial dynamism was the primary force in channeling African American migration during the era of the First Great Migration, it was not migration’s only magnet. This is clearly shown by the case of Cleveland, by far the most powerful attraction in the state. With ten percent of Ohio’s black urban population in 1910, Cleveland attracted one-third of the increase in that population during the next twenty years. Yet Cleveland expanded its share of the state’s adult manufacturing workers only slightly (by less than 1 percent) during that period, and actually suffered a loss of about the same magnitude in its share of Ohio’s total urban population. Cleveland’s loss of total urban share is somewhat misleading, since its suburbs, such as East Cleveland and Cleveland Heights, were gaining share, but the contrast between the city’s powerful attraction for blacks and its less intense magnetism for whites still requires explanation. Black migrants congregated in Cleveland in part because they were prevented by
white pressure from moving to many of its growing suburbs, but in addition
the city possessed a positive appeal in African American eyes. During the
years between 1915 and 1920, Cleveland’s appeal was burnished by African
American breakthroughs into the industrial jobs that had previously been
filled by immigrants.24 Although Cleveland’s share of Ohio’s industrial jobs
did not expand dramatically, the number of its factory jobs that were open to
African American workers increased. But in addition to a thriving industrial
base, Cleveland by 1920 had become the site of the largest African American
community in Ohio. To be sure, at 34,000 that community was considerably
smaller than Chicago’s Bronzeville or New York’s Harlem, but it was still
bigger than anything Ohio had seen before. Its size and forced compactness
made possible the creation and elaboration of a network of black institu-
tions: churches, businesses, fraternal societies, social welfare organiza-
tions such as the Phillis Wheatley Association, and cultural institutions such as
Karamu House. Though late in development because of the relatively small
size of Cleveland’s pre–Great Migration black population, these institutions
nonetheless formed the essential fabric of an African American urban com-

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munity. That community attracted black migrants not so much because of
the security from white violence it could provide as because it offered the
positive values of an urban cultural life.25 The attraction of such a community
brought more migrants to the Forest City during the twenties than during
the previous decade despite a slowing pace of job openings.26

Indiana experienced even more dramatic changes in its economy and
society during the 1910s and 1920s than the Buckeye State. Agricultural
modernization throughout the period and agricultural depression during
the 1920s cut a swath through its rural population and sideswiped the small
towns and cities that depended upon farm business. A winnowing-out pro-
cess occurred in the urban hierarchy, as towns either grew rapidly or stag-
nated. Evansville, Gary, Fort Wayne, and South Bend joined Indianapolis in
the ranks of cities boasting more than 100,000 population, and the northern
location of three of the four newcomers exemplified the pattern of change
in the state’s economy. Indiana’s zone of dynamic growth centered upon the
railroad lines that crossed the state’s northern region, passed through the
Calumet in its northwestern corner, and converged in Chicago. The zone’s
defining characteristic was industrial expansion.27 Eight more cities joined
the four of 1910 between 25,000 and 100,000 population, but others did not
grow to replace them in the classes below 25,000. In fact, both size catego-
ries below 25,000 suffered an absolute loss of population (table A.16).

African American migration added to the complexity of change in
Indiana, as the state received two distinct migration streams. A traditional
current from the Upper South states, mainly Kentucky and Tennessee,
continued to flow, with many of its migrants ending up in Indianapolis. Meanwhile a new stream from the Deep South, which had traditionally supplied few migrants to the Hoosier State, began to swell during the 1910s and crested during the 1920s, pumping thousands of newcomers into the burgeoning industrial cities of the Calumet region (figure 8.2). For the entire period 1910–1930, the Deep South stream exceeded the flow from the Upper South by roughly a 4:3 ratio. The impact of this new flow was so powerful that, despite doubling its African American population, Indianapolis lost two percentage points from its share of the state’s black urban population (from 45 to 43 percent). The modern steel city of Gary,
which had begun to rise from the sand dunes of the Lake Michigan shore only in 1906, became Indiana’s most powerful magnet for African American migrants, whose numbers increased Gary’s black population from 383 in 1910 to 17,922 by 1930 and its share of the urban black population from virtually nothing to nearly 17 percent. Other powerful magnets included East Chicago, South Bend, and Fort Wayne.

To a considerable extent, African American migration in Indiana during 1910–1930 flowed parallel to European American. Both flows were strongly attracted to the most dynamic industrial towns and cities. White mobility, like black, was divided into two streams. The thriving industrial cities of the Calumet drew immigrants from Mexico as well as a current of southern and eastern European immigrants, the latter interrupted by World War I and then squeezed off by the immigration legislation of the 1920s. Urbanization elsewhere in the state was fuelled by native-born whites leaving the state’s rural areas and small towns. Yet there was also a difference. African Americans’ abandonment of the lower ranges of the urban hierarchy occurred somewhat faster than European Americans’, and their concentration in the upper range was correspondingly more rapid. By 1930, two-thirds of black Hoosiers lived in cities having more than 100,000 population, compared to less than one-quarter of whites. In part, African Americans’ consolidation in the larger cities represented a continuation of the metropolitan shift that had begun in the late nineteenth century. Of the sixty towns reporting black population in 1890, the African American percentage shrank during the ensuing forty years in nearly two-thirds. But the rest of the African American metropolitan movement resulted from the new stream flowing from the Deep South to the booming industrial cities of the Calumet.

Largely because of the boom in the Calumet, economic opportunity became the principal force behind African American migration in Indiana during the Great Migration years. After the Evansville riot of 1903, no further lynchings, attempted lynchings, or race riots were reported in Indiana until 1930, despite the rise of the Ku Klux Klan to political influence during the early 1920s. Blacks tended to leave towns that had experienced violence during 1885–1910, but such places were usually economic laggards as well. Indianapolis’s African American urban culture attracted migrants, most of whom were Kentuckians and Tennesseans, who were more likely than Deep South migrants to have kin or friends among those already settled in the capital city. Indianapolis failed to draw new Deep South migrants because in the years after 1910 the capital city’s economy was not growing as fast as the Calumet’s industrial prodigies. In addition, the Mississippian, Alabamians, Arkansans, and Georgians who peopled the Calumet cities had
established no substantial beachheads in the capital city. Nearby Chicago, in contrast, had begun to attract significant numbers of Deep South migrants since the 1890s.\textsuperscript{36}

The choices made by Indiana’s African American migrants during the Great Migration years resembled in some ways those made by their predecessors during the 1860–1890 period. In both cases, many migrants chose rapidly growing local economies in communities where few or no African Americans had lived before. But as a result of choices made during the intervening period, the array of possibilities had changed markedly, and this made the nature and meaning of the new migrants’ choices different, too. During 1860–1890 a relatively small migration stream dispersed across a large number of small urban places. During 1910–1930, in contrast, a very large stream (for Indiana) funneled into a very few urban places, which already were, or rapidly became, large cities. Blacks’ quest for economic opportunity was a constant across all three periods, and to a considerable extent the structural changes in the state’s economy can explain the northward shift in black Hoosiers’ center of gravity.

But structural economic changes cannot entirely explain the concurrent shift up the state’s urban hierarchy, because there were small cities with buoyant industrial economies that did not attract a corresponding share of African American migrants. Examples include Anderson and Muncie, two gas-belt towns that maintained or rebuilt an industrial base after the gas ran out. Both gained a significant share of manufacturing workers during 1909–1929—no small feat considering the dramatic gains made by the cities of the Calumet region—yet failed to secure a similar share of African American migrants.\textsuperscript{37} Neither city was likely to attract many Deep South migrants given the largely Upper South origins of their African American residents, but they could reasonably have expected to draw more migrants from the still sizable Kentucky-Tennessee migrations.\textsuperscript{38} Yet Fort Wayne and South Bend, industrial cities with 1910 black populations of comparable or smaller size than Anderson and Muncie, captured much larger shares of post-1910 migrants.\textsuperscript{39} The principal difference between the two sets of cities is the larger size of the former two in 1910: Fort Wayne held a total population of nearly 64,000 and South Bend nearly 54,000, compared to Anderson’s less than 23,000 and Muncie’s 24,000. This comparison indicates that by the century’s second decade African American migration had gained momentum toward large cities.

That momentum probably derived partly from a recognition of the dangers of smaller places, formed during the violent years around the turn of the century. Any preference for large cities over small towns on grounds of safety did not, however, operate independently of the quest for economic
opportunity. Evansville’s huge loss occurred because the city was neither thriving industrially, prospering economically, offering blacks access to industrial jobs, nor regarded by African Americans as a safe place to live. When deciding among peaceful, prosperous, and industrially dynamic communities, however, city size seemed to matter to many migrants. The wind that drove migrants’ boats toward such large ports gained strength from their prior experience in the South. As chapter 6 demonstrated, those who traveled north during the Great Migration years were more likely than their predecessors to have lived in an urban community—most likely a small
one—in the South. Having set their feet on the lower rungs of the urban ladder, they were now willing, like their European American counterparts, to climb higher.

In Illinois the Great Migration accompanied, and helped to bring about, a delayed metropolitan shift. Between 1910 and 1930 the Prairie State’s African American population tripled, and nearly seven-eighths of the growth took place in Chicago (figure 8.3). Meanwhile, Illinois villages and towns saw African American population increases lag behind the European American rate (table A.17). In some Illinois towns, such as Belleville, Bloomington, Cairo, Jacksonville, Mattoon, Monmouth, Mound City, Metropolis, and Quincy, African American populations suffered absolute declines. Both intrastate travelers leaving such communities and interstate migrants fueled Chicago’s gain. By the eve of the Great Depression, Chicago and Peoria—the only two cities over 100,000—held nearly three-quarters of the state’s African Americans, compared to one-half of the European American population.

What caused both those who had experienced life in Illinois and newcomers to the state to bypass the smaller urban communities whose appeal had persisted undiminished since the Civil War? No factor can be eliminated at the outset, but neither did a single force cause Illinois’s metropolitan shift. Urban places that suffered the greatest losses in share of the state’s African American urban population tended to rank among the most economically and industrially stagnant communities. A significant exception is Decatur, whose buoyant economy rode a strong industrial current, but where a lynching had taken place in 1893. Evidently the lynching, and perhaps a tense racial atmosphere that followed, blinded potential settlers to the town’s appeal—or its racial politics meant that jobs in Decatur’s booming factories were not open to blacks. Chicago, however, defeats any attempt to place simple economic opportunity at the heart of migrant choice. During the century’s second and third decades, Chicago suffered the state’s largest decline in both share of total urban population and share of manufacturing workers. Of course, the city of Chicago’s relatively poor performance economically and industrially did not mean that metropolitan Chicago was suffering, since many of the thriving places—communities such as Cicero, Evanston, Oak Park, Maywood, Winnetka, and Wilmette—occupied Chicago’s suburban fringe. But it was the city of Chicago that attracted so many African American migrants despite falling behind other towns’ rate of demographic and industrial expansion. Within Chicago the expansive years of industrial jobs opening for African American workers between 1915 and 1920 were followed by periods of hard times during the recession.
of 1920–21 and in the latter half of the 1920s. Poverty-level wages for a majority of employed African American workers required families to find a second source of income.44

White violence played a part in causing the metropolitan shift, but it was not a simple role. Incidents of antiblack public violence tended to discourage black population growth or even reverse it in communities where mob brutality occurred, such as Decatur, Danville, Pana, Belleville, Cairo, and Springfield. Residents left, and would-be migrants were repelled. But Chicago’s appeal survived the deaths of 23 of its African American citizens and injury to at least 342 others in the state’s biggest race riot, in the summer of 1919.45 Corneal Davis, whose family had decided to leave Vicksburg, Mississippi, after the lynching of Corneal’s boyhood friend, arrived in Chicago in August 1919, in the immediate aftermath of the Chicago riot.46 And the bloody race riot in East St. Louis in July 1917, which left even more African American dead, cannot be wholly blamed for the city’s loss of black urban share, at 3 percent the second largest in Illinois.47 East St. Louis also fell behind the rate of total urban population growth and lost share of industrial workers.48

| Table 8.1 The Spread of All-White Towns |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
|                  | 1860  | 1890  | 1910  | 1930  |
| Ohio             |
| Towns of 2,500 or more population | 35    | 100   | 139   | 173   |
| Towns reporting no blacks          | 1     | 4     | 4     | 10    |
| Percentage                           | 2.9   | 4.0   | 2.9   | 5.8   |
| Indiana                        |
| Towns of 2,500 or more population | 15    | 60    | 88    | 95    |
| Towns reporting no blacks          | 0     | 5     | 3     | 18    |
| Percentage                           | 0.0   | 8.3   | 3.4   | 18.9  |
| Illinois                       |
| Towns of 2,500 or more population | 33    | 76    | 144   | 192   |
| Towns reporting no blacks          | 4     | 5     | 12    | 34    |
| Percentage                           | 12.1  | 6.6   | 8.3   | 17.7  |

Source: Study data
One factor in the choices made by Illinois migrants during the period 1910–1930 was new restrictions on their freedom of access. This is shown by the growing number and proportion of Illinois towns in which no African Americans were reported by the census. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that this represented a reversal of a trend apparent during the late nineteenth century, when the percentage of “all-white” towns fell (table 8.1). Between 1890 and 1910 the percentage of towns having no reported African American residents rose only slightly from its 1890 nadir, but during the next twenty years that percentage increased rapidly, until by 1930 it represented more than one-sixth of all urban places. Between 1860 and 1930, the number of African Americans in Illinois multiplied more than forty times over, yet at the onset of the Great Depression the proportion of the state’s urban places in which African Americans could be found was lower than on the eve of the Civil War.49

African American residents had never been reported in some Illinois towns, such as Beardstown in Cass County, and among whites oral tradition cited informal intimidation as the means of keeping such communities “lily-white.”50 The increase in the number of “all-white” communities after 1910, however, reflected two new developments, heightened pressure on African Americans to leave independent towns and white suburbanization.51 Lily-white small towns scattered throughout the state, many of them with stagnant populations, were joined by rapidly growing communities in the Chicago suburban fringe, such as Des Plaines, Highwood, Lansing, Lemont, Lyons, Riverdale, Villa Park, West Chicago, and Westmont. African Americans were not absent from the metropolitan periphery: The all-black suburban town of Robbins was incorporated in 1917; Evanston increased its share of black urban population between 1910 and 1930; and other suburban towns, such as Maywood, Highland Park, and Chicago Heights, made substantial gains in black population.52 But whether through restrictive covenants, intimidation, or white violence, blacks were shut out of a growing number of suburban communities. The same trend appeared in Ohio and Indiana, in both of which the number and proportion of “lily-white” towns reached a new peak in 1930.53

Just as European American hostility blocked African American access to new suburban communities, the same force repelled residents and turned away potential newcomers from non-metropolitan urban places in general. As the case studies in chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate, despite better opportunities for home ownership than in large cities, small towns and small cities offered few remunerative jobs for African American men or women. Apart from ownership of a small home, property accumulation was painfully slow. Such day-to-day discrimination operated in nonmetropolitan towns in all
three states, but before 1910 several factors had slowed Afro-Illinoisans’ response to it. Repeated mob violence in Chicago had vividly demonstrated the presence of white hostility in the prairie metropolis (while the metropolitan centers of Ohio and Indiana were relatively peaceful). The substantial numbers of Deep South migrants who began coming to Illinois in the 1890s generally left rural backgrounds and used a stay in a small town or small city as “seasoning” to urban life before venturing to the big city. By the 1910s, then, two lessons were probably learned: first, how to adapt to urban life, and, second, that no midwestern community of any size was immune from mob violence.

Once these lessons were learned, the pull of Chicago’s attractions could finally exert maximum force. The choice of Chicago as a destination reflects the possibility of African American community building, an opportunity to develop black churches and fraternal societies and black businesses—in short, the institutional infrastructure for an African American urban culture.54 Chicago became an urban black community—or rather interlocking communities, the Southside and the West Side—of unprecedented size, wealth, and diversity.55 Unlike small towns and small cities on the Illinois prairies, Chicago offered a variety of choices, of church, of workplace, of social circle, options that were not available in smaller places. Furthermore, the diversity of a large African American community allowed greater scope for retention of southern culture than was possible where a black community might represent a larger proportion of the whole, but be smaller in numbers, more homogeneous, and more exposed to white oversight.56

One Chicago migrant’s reflections upon the contrasts between Chicago and his Mississippi origins also illustrate some reasons why the Windy City was preferred over smaller northern urban places. Born about 1901, Junius Gaten came to Chicago before World War I with his aunt and uncle. Although he lived in a neighborhood that was at first largely white, he remembered both a segregated world in Chicago and the joys of a rich African American community life. He reminisced about black nightclubs, theaters, ballrooms, businesses, and fraternal societies. The issue in Mississippi was not, Gaten said, simply a matter of survival.

I didn’t come out of a lazy family. I came out of a family in the South that had everything they needed ‘cuz they worked like hell for it. We never seen a hungry day. Plenty to eat, plenty of everything, chickens, cows, hogs, pigs, anything. What you didn’t have was freedom that you had here. If you would go to town, you’d better get out from there before the sun started to goin’ down. You don’t want to be caught back up in there. Anyway in a way we didn’t see—we in our towns was quiet. We didn’t have any nightclubs,
any cabarets. When I got to be a young man, we saw the bright lights as you call them. And I enjoyed that.

In Chicago, Gaten recalled,

We had the Pithians, Attamatocks Club, the Odd Fellows Clubs, the Elks, we had the Masonics. We all had dance halls and entertainment of all kind[s]. So we enjoyed life. . . . You see, life was not easy, but coming from the South where you was burdened down, you were afraid to talk, you afraid to say this, if you was on the sidewalk white folks come by, you got to get off, get in the mud. Here we had a little freedom. And it meant so much just to be free and to be able to make your own living and spend your money like you see fit.  

As historian Grace Hale notes, “By the 1910s and 1920s, the urban North had become the promised land for African American migrants from the South not because it promised a time or place of racial ease but because it held out the promise of racial agency.” That promise shone brightest in the big cities, where African American numbers created the greatest distance between blacks and whites while holding out the prospect of political influence in the larger community. Chicago drew African American migrants, not only because it was the midwestern metropolis, but also because it was a black metropolis.

FROM THE TRICKLE TO THE FLOOD

The argument presented thus far depends upon certain assumptions about the efficiency of communications, between North and South and within the North. Migrant flows to some kinds of destinations and away from others correspond to specified sets of characteristics of urban places, such as the occurrence or nonoccurrence of violence, economic prosperity or slump, industrial dynamism or stagnation, and large or small African American populations. Some of these correspondences can be explained by the experience of residents within a community, but the redirection of mobility by those who never had such exposure requires us to assume that such migrants learned about both chosen and rejected communities, directly or indirectly, from those who did. Similarly, a persistent characteristic of the migration process, such as the refusal to avoid towns containing large proportions of European immigrants, holds analytical meaning only if we can assume that the migrants knew in advance of the immigrant presence and
decided to move in regardless. The issue of communications in turn raises the question of the influence of the pre–Great Migration migration—"the trickle"—upon the Great Migration, "the flood."

"Even though the [late nineteenth-century] migration streams were relatively small compared to later periods," write Daniel Johnson and Rex Campbell, "they may have served a very important function, i.e., they developed pathways and linkages that served as mechanisms for facilitating and even encouraging later movements." Historians who have examined specific southern origins or northern destinations emphasize continuity between the trickle and the flood, manifested in personal links between earlier and later migrants. During the Great Migration, investigators sent into the South by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Division of Negro Economics reported that letters from previous migrants operated powerfully to instigate emigration. A survey of Virginia farm families in the late twenties found that 75 percent had offspring living in the North, usually in cities. When whites in East St. Louis charged that blacks had flooded the city in the months before the 1917 riot, the railway station manager pointed out that what was mistaken for crowds of arrivals were actually large welcoming committees, averaging ten or twelve for each passenger. Migrant oral histories provide abundant evidence for chain migration, as migrants rarely arrived at their midwestern destination without some prior personal link. Even the minority who came friendless usually possessed information about the place. Furthermore, various studies comparing migrants with nonmigrants have shown that migrants were more likely to be literate. Nevertheless, both contemporaries and later historians believed that migrants arrived in northern cities uninformed and unprepared for urban life. Before concluding that information networks constituted a structural component of African American migration to the Lower Midwest, further evidence is required.

The 1890, 1900, and 1930 censuses reported state-of-birth statistics for larger cities, from which the origins of African American residents of those cities may be derived. Because it contained a larger number of sizable cities than its sister states to the west, Ohio furnishes the best laboratory in which to study continuity of migration patterns, from which the efficacy of communications may be inferred. A comparison of the share held by cities of migrants from each source reveals that large migrant groups in each city in 1930 were generally already overrepresented in that city as early as 1900 (table A.18). Columbus presents the most striking example. The 1,060 West Virginians living in the capital city on the eve of the Great Depression represented a substantial increase over the 324 who had been living there thirty years before. So did the 3,409 Virginians, compared to 1,266 in 1900,
and the 2,310 North Carolinians, whose numbers had increased from 250 in 1900. In part these concentrations reflect the channeling effect of railway lines. The principal lines connecting Virginia, West Virginia, and North Carolina with Ohio—the Baltimore & Ohio, the Chesapeake & Ohio, and the Norfolk & Western—all ran through Columbus. But choices still had to be made, since all three lines also ran to Cincinnati, the B & O to Akron, and the C & O to Toledo. In all of these cities Virginians, West Virginians, and North Carolinians were underrepresented in 1930. How did prospective migrants in Virginia, West Virginia, and North Carolina come to choose Columbus over Cincinnati, Akron, Toledo, and other cities, if not through the influence of communication with previous travelers?

Similar patterns of continuity appear in concentrations of Deep South migrants as well. Tiny colonies of South Carolinians in Youngstown (14) and Cleveland (43) in 1900 nevertheless represented significant clusters in light of the scattered distribution of their 437 fellow Palmetto Staters across Ohio. By 1930 these clusters had grown into much larger settlements, 963 and 3,509, respectively, and the two northeast industrial cities still held significant shares of the greatly augmented number of South Carolina migrants to the Buckeye State (11,831). Similarly, Toledo’s distinctive cluster of Mississippians in 1930 (936) grew from a small but equally special 1900 cohort of seventeen.

Communication created city-specific migration streams among the six major groups of Ohio’s black migrants during the Great Migration period. Cleveland was a mecca for five of the six state groups—Georgians, Alabamians, Tennesseans, South Carolinians, and Mississippians—and was shunned only by Kentuckians, who settled instead in Cincinnati and the Miami River Valley cities of Springfield and Dayton. Georgians, besides Cleveland, were significantly overrepresented in 1930 only in Akron and Cincinnati. Alabamians generally migrated to the northeastern cities, except Toledo. Tennesseans, in contrast, generally preferred Toledo and Dayton along with Cleveland and avoided Akron, Youngstown, and Columbus. South Carolinians liked Cleveland and Youngstown, but they shunned Toledo along with the Miami Valley cities. Mississippians chose Cleveland and Toledo, and were underrepresented in Akron, Cincinnati, Columbus, and Springfield.

Communication networks, of course, can only partially explain the channels cut by mobile African Americans, for as important as the amount of information transmitted is its content. To place communication in context it may be helpful to follow the choices of one state cohort across forty years of migration. In 1890 only 474 Georgia-born African Americans lived in Ohio, and in 1900 there were 847. By 1930 their number had mushroomed
to 48,847. Yet Georgians’ locational choices remained remarkably consistent, as can be seen in the regular proportions attracted to Springfield, Dayton, Toledo, and Columbus (figure 8.4). When they were not, the changes can be explained by factors already noted. Cincinnati, which held Ohio’s largest African American community in 1890, increased its share during the 1890s as African Americans sought security in numbers from the wave of white violence breaking over the state, then lost share as the state’s economic and industrial heartland moved north. Closer to that beating commercial heart, Youngstown and Akron attracted more travelers from Georgia during the Great Migration. Cleveland’s African American community grew based on its industrial strength, and maintained its appeal based on the promise of its new black urban world. Collectively, these large cities attracted more and more Georgians away from smaller centers as the years went by.

The migrants of the Lower Midwest’s trickle years thus appear to have played a crucial role in channeling the flood. They were the reconnaissance parties, exploring the new territory and reporting what they found to their friends and relatives in the South, who in turn passed on their reports to others. Their letters and visits, and the newspapers they supported, furnished the means by which prospective migrants learned that there were few jobs for them in the North until the immigrants stopped coming. Or that small

Figure 8.4 City Choices of Georgia-born Ohioans, 1890–1930.
towns could be not only unwelcoming but violently hostile. Or that a new world, beset by old dangers but also pregnant with novel possibilities, awaited them in the region's metropolitan centers.

**METROPOLITAN MAGNETS**

To understand fully the implications of metropolitan choices, a searchlight must be thrown onto the dangers and possibilities latent in large midwestern cities. Whether in Chicago's stockyards, Gary's steel works, Akron's rubber factories, or Cleveland's foundries, big cities after 1915 offered jobs for African American men. In fact, the Midwest led the nation in opening factory jobs to African Americans. The new availability of industrial work in cities reversed patterns of decline in black occupational opportunity since the late nineteenth century, when immigrants squeezed African Americans out of trades, such as barbers and waiters, which they had previously dominated. Factory work, while rarely skilled or open to advancement, at least provided regular pay in good times, a chance to change disagreeable jobs, and relief from the close personal scrutiny by whites common in the South. In addition, the expansion of African American communities offered new opportunities, however limited, for black entrepreneurs.

Premature death constituted the principal danger of black metropolitan life. Northern cities were historically unhealthy places for African Americans, the number of deaths commonly exceeding births. In midwestern rural areas and small towns, African American death rates, while higher than those of European Americans, generally seem to have been lower than those prevailing in metropolitan places. For some migrants, the decision to move cityward, either from the rural South or from a smaller northern community, no doubt shortened their lives.

The second major danger facing African Americans entering the city was the pressure on family life caused by loss of control over their habitat. Chances for home ownership were severely diminished in metropolitan places compared to nonmetropolitan communities. The 1920 census reported rates of black homeownership in southern states ranging from 14.5 percent in Georgia to 41.2 percent in Virginia, and averaging around 20 percent. As we have seen, the percentage of African Americans living in family-owned homes stood at 23 and 37 percent in the two 1900 Springfield samples, and reached as high as 48 percent in Washington Court House in the same year. A sample drawn from the 1920 census in Muncie, Indiana, found 32 percent of adult African Americans living in family-owned homes. In contrast, only 17 percent of African American homes in
Indianapolis, 9.5 percent in Gary, and 7.4 percent in Chicago were owned in 1920. In the South, too, the proportion of black homeowners tended to fall as city size increased.\textsuperscript{50} To move cityward was to reduce one’s chances of becoming a homeowner and thereby to exert the most fundamental form of control over one’s surroundings.

One of the most serious aspects of the situation was restriction of the parts of the city in which African Americans could live, i.e., the creation of “the ghetto.” White terrorism and restrictive covenants kept African Americans confined to an area that expanded, but expansion never came quickly enough to alleviate overcrowding. Meanwhile, European Americans moved out of neighborhoods that had initially been racially mixed. Because of the overwhelming demand for housing in a limited area, African American families typically paid higher rents than European Americans would have paid for the same accommodations. Overcrowded quarters, together with city officials’ reluctance to provide urban services to African American neighborhoods, as well as police action in pushing city vice districts into those same neighborhoods, of course contributed mightily to the notoriously high African American metropolitan death rates. In addition, high rents took back from African American families at least part of the higher wages they gained by moving north and cityward.\textsuperscript{81}

At the time, many commentators, both European American and African American, blamed the difficulties African Americans faced in northern cities on the migrants themselves. In white eyes, “the Negro problem” had moved north.\textsuperscript{82} Sober scholarly reflection leads to a significantly different view. “[T]he situation in the city,” as sociologist Charles Tilly points out, “rather than the fact of moving, shook Negro family life in the time of the great northward migration.”

The distinction may seem academic: the impact of any move on the individual always includes the differences in living conditions between the origin and the destination. Yet it matters a great deal. For in the one case we might conclude that as migration slowed down and the immediate shock of moving faded, the troubles of Negro families would disappear. In the other case, we could hardly expect much improvement until the opportunities open to Negro men and women in the big city changed.\textsuperscript{83}

As subsequent history has shown, those opportunities did not change for a very long time.

One opportunity that big cities did offer in contrast to smaller urban places was jobs for women. Women’s gainful work furnished a way of cop-
ing with the high rents African American families had to pay, as well as the low wages relative to whites that were paid to black workers. Most of these jobs were in domestic service, but some were in factories. In contrast, most small towns and small cities provided little opportunity for African American women beyond domestic work, and perhaps not much even of that. In Evansville African American women’s only “industrial” work took place in a cigar factory. Oral history respondents in Springfield, Illinois, agreed that African American women who wanted better jobs than domestic service had to leave. The contrast between African American women’s opportunities for gainful work in larger and smaller urban places may have been, at least in part, a function of numbers. Even if large cities held the same proportion of families who could afford to hire a maid, nurse, or laundress, the proportion of the population that was African American was often smaller in such places than in lesser urban communities, and the supply of African American domestic help accordingly restricted. Big-city work opportunity for women in turn spurred migration and helps to explain the ongoing metropolitan shift in all three states.

More than the huge numbers of migrants during the World War I decade signaled the onset of a new cycle of migration. In all three states of the Lower Midwest, the sex ratio of the migration stream rose, indicating a greater infusion of men than women. This occurred most dramatically in Ohio, where industrial opportunity played such a large part in drawing travelers to the dynamic northeastern cities. Then during the twenties the migrant sex ratio fell, to parity in Indiana and below parity (i.e., more women than men) in Ohio and Illinois (figure 1.1). Among midwestern cities after 1890, a rising proportion of women in the migrant stream over a twenty-year period usually accompanied growth in the city’s share of its state’s African American urban population. That is, the proportion of women migrants grew just when a city’s migration stream expanded.

Women’s role in metropolitan growth may be seen in the histories of individual cities of the Lower Midwest (figure 8.5). The long-term trend over the years between 1890 and 1930 was for sex ratios to fall from high levels. That is, cities in 1890 generally contained more African American males than females, but over the next forty years more women than men came. By 1930 the four largest African American communities—Chicago, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Indianapolis—were near parity. The principal deviations from this long-term trend appear in the dynamic northeastern Ohio industrial cities—Akron, Toledo, Cleveland, and Youngstown—during the 1910–1920 decade. During the twenties, women dominated the migration stream in every city, bringing down sex ratios across the top range of each state’s urban hierarchy.
These temporal and geographic variations between men and women strongly suggest that migration was a gendered experience at the African American grassroots. In each of the three cycles of migration between the Civil War and the onset of the Great Depression, men led the way. Although across the seventy-year period men did move cityward, they were more likely to stop in rural areas during the post–Civil War years and in smaller centers. When women came north in rising numbers relative to men during the 1880s, the migration as a whole was too small to have much impact in redirecting the flow toward the big cities. Women did cause such an impact in Ohio and Indiana, however, during the new century’s first decade. Women’s effect on the path of midwestern migration became apparent once again during the 1920s, when their locational choices contributed to the continuing metropolitan channeling in Ohio and Indiana and the new cityward direction in Illinois.

In conclusion, the choices that brought African American migrants to midwestern cities were not simple ones. They were based on a multitude of sometimes conflicting incentives, which reinforces the point that choice operated at the heart of the movement. Personal and collective histories, both in the South and in the North, weighed heavily in shaping locational
decisions. So too did present opportunities, the information networks that carried news of dangers and possibilities, and the transportation systems that conveyed the migrants themselves. Metropolitan migration was both racially tinged and shaped by structures common to blacks and whites alike.

**ALTERNATIVES**

Even in the face of the metropolitan transition underway across the region after 1910, some small cities continued to draw African American migrants. Their magnetism, continuing in some states and renewed in others, indicates that the appeal of metropolitan centers, while broad, was not universal. Furthermore, some migrants who were classed by the census as metropolitan residents in fact were seeking lifestyles as close as possible to a small-town model.

In Ohio towns and cities with more than 10,000 but less than 100,000 population enjoyed healthy growth during the twenty years after 1910. Communities in the lower part of this range gained European American population faster than the statewide rate, and the more populous small cities actually grew more rapidly than Ohio’s biggest cities (table A.15). Yet healthy as were the increases in European American populations, African American populations in both size categories expanded at more than double the European American rate. The proportion of black Ohioans who lived in towns in these brackets fell only because of the concomitant rush to the cities. Black mobility to these midsized cities reversed the pattern of 1890–1910. Having avoided such communities around the turn of the century, migrants were now returning to them.

Intrastate migrants moving step by step up the urban hierarchy certainly contributed to this growth in midsize cities, but so too did interstate travelers. During the Great Migration, Alabamians and Georgians made up the largest groups of migrants to the Buckeye State. In 1930, virtually all of the Georgia-born and Alabama-born blacks living in Ohio had migrated to the state during the previous thirty years. They were more likely to be living in the state’s seven largest cities (Akron, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, and Youngstown) than were U.S.-born blacks as a whole (79 percent and 76 percent respectively, compared to 67 percent), but one-fifth of black Georgians and nearly one-quarter of black Alabamians were living in smaller places.82

In Indiana and Illinois, African American population growth in the growing numbers of second-tier cities (25,000–99,999) kept pace with European American increases. Indiana’s second-tier cities actually increased
their share of the state's African Americans, probably because they drew from the devastated rural areas, villages, and small towns. Data are not available to assess definitely the distribution of interstate and intrastate migrants among Indiana urban places, however. In Illinois it is possible to estimate the proportion that migrants from Mississippi, the state's most prolific source of immigrants during the period 1910–1930, contributed to the total who settled in nonmetropolitan communities. That proportion, between 27 and 38 percent, somewhat exceeds the proportion that black Mississippian comprised of the total African American migration stream to the Prairie State. It follows, then, that Mississippian did not concentrate in Chicago, instead continuing to divide between metropolitan and nonmetropolitan destinations.

Possible factors to explain small cities' appeal to African Americans include the familiarity of a small-town environment to those who had never lived in a large city and a more relaxed pace of life. Some would-be migrants who wrote from the South to the Chicago Defender indicated that they preferred small towns. "I don't care for the large city life," a barber wrote from Starkville, Mississippi. "I rather live in a town of 15 or 20 thousand." Phoebe Mitchell Day, born in Springfield, Illinois, worked for two years in Chicago before returning to Springfield to stay. "I've always been used to a small city, and I never was really happy living in Chicago," she recalled.

For those migrants attracted by newly opening industrial jobs, these could be found in small cities as well as large ones. In Ohio African Americans were drawn to the fast-growing industrial cities of Barberton, East Cleveland, Elyria, Massillon, Niles, and Warren in the booming north-eastern part of the state, as well as to Middletown near Cincinnati; these cities held 1930 populations ranging from 16,000 to 41,000. Every Indiana small city that gained a significant share of the state's African American urban population was a thriving industrial community. These included former gas-belt cities Anderson and Muncie, northern manufacturing centers Elkhart and Kokomo, and East Chicago and Hammond in the Calumet region. In Illinois rapidly growing industrial activity helps to explain the appeal of Chicago's western suburb Maywood and Rockford farther west. Meanwhile, however, other lusty industrial small cities, such as Ohio's Norwood and Illinois's Cicero, Blue Island and Granite, stoutly resisted any larger African American presence. And African American migrants poured into other small cities where the pull of new industrial opportunities was weaker, such as Cleveland Heights, Ohio, and Evanston, Illinois.

Greater opportunity for a more extensive range of personal contacts with other community residents may have offered to African Americans an opportunity to dispel racial stereotypes, which in the early twentieth century
were uniformly negative. When an African American doctor moved into an all-white neighborhood in Canton, Ohio, he and his family had “problems. People didn’t want them. . . . But after they got to know them they accepted them.” But the author of an intensive study of African American life in the small-town North argues that racial stereotypes were never completely shaken off. The white community in Monroe, Michigan “assumed some level of responsibility for its blacks. But having an identity in Monroe only mollified and did not defuse or nullify the effects of the more powerful social identities,” that is, the negative stereotypes (emphasis in original). Nevertheless, in contrast to the impersonal contacts of large cities, African American residents may have found establishing an individual identity less difficult in smaller urban settings.

The findings from the three case study communities examined thus far indicate that greater opportunity for home ownership distinguished smaller from larger cities during the years around the turn of the century. This factor and others may be tested for the Great Migration era by a close scrutiny of a fourth case-study community, Muncie, Indiana. In 1880 Muncie was only slightly larger than Washington Court House, but it held a much smaller African American community. Discovery of an immense natural gas field in northeastern Indiana in 1886 changed everything for Muncie, as for other gas-boom towns. Natural gas supplies and other inducements enticed glass and metal works to the “Magic City,” and their presence allowed Muncie to escape the effects of the severe depression of the 1890s. In fact, Muncie’s European American population expanded by 85 percent during the depression decade, and its African American community also experienced healthy growth (77 percent). Drawn by the gas boom–induced prosperity, Alexander Kelley and his wife Belle came to Muncie from Indianapolis in 1886. Both had been born in slavery, Alexander in 1855 in North Carolina, and Belle two years later in Kentucky. In 1873, Alexander reported, his mother “decided to take me farther west where I would have better advantages.” In Indianapolis Alexander learned to cook and worked as a hotel chef. Belle, meanwhile, had traveled to Indianapolis with her parents. She and Alexander met and married in the capital city, then moved to Muncie. Belle worked as an “expert housekeeper,” and Alexander found a position as chef in the Kirby House Hotel, where he cooked for many years. Their granddaughters still lived in Muncie in 2001.

The local economy slumped after the gas ran out in 1901, but Muncie reindustrialized during the second decade of the century. By that decade’s conclusion, Muncie was a diversified industrial city. Its best-known works, the Ball Brothers Glass Manufacturing Company, had been for two decades the nation’s leading maker of glass fruit jars, but the town also held other
significant glass factories such as the Hemingray Company, which made insulators for the rapidly expanding electrical industry. In addition, foundries and other metalworks and a recently built Chevrolet assembly plant figured large on the local industrial scene. Muncie now held more than 36,000 citizens, and during the period of impressive growth since 1880, its African American population had grown faster than the European American, to a total of 2,054 in 1920. At 5.6 percent, the proportion of African Americans in Muncie’s population exceeded that in New York, Chicago, Cleveland, or Detroit.\textsuperscript{104}

Interviewed in 1980, a black migrant to Muncie who had worked in one of the city’s foundries recalled, “You could always get a job in Muncie when you couldn’t get a job any place else. Used to be plenty of work here in the factories and the foundaries \textit{sic}. . . .”\textsuperscript{105} Most African American men worked in unskilled jobs in metalworks, with another substantial group in glass factories. A few blacks managed to find skilled work as machinists. About one in ten women workers also filled industrial jobs, all in glassworks.\textsuperscript{106} One reason for African Americans’ presence in Muncie’s factories may have been that they allowed employers to carry out the shopworn tactic of creating ethnic divisions among their work forces, a trick that would otherwise have been impossible to pull off in a town that attracted few European immigrants.

As well as jobs, African American migrants found integrated schools, buses, and streetcars, although no white-run restaurants would allow them to eat on the premises and theaters seated blacks only in the balconies, forms of discrimination that continued at least into the 1930s. Some parks and swimming pools were closed to blacks. Oral history interviewees reported that African Americans were not hired as clerks in stores or waiters in restaurants.\textsuperscript{107} The glass workers’ union excluded African Americans. Despite African Americans’ long and now substantial presence in Muncie, as late as 1920 a local newspaper seemed to regard them as an alien element. The \textit{Muncie Evening Press} carried a regular “Colored News” column that reported local events, illnesses and recoveries, and comings and goings. In every respect but the names of its subjects, the “Colored News” column was identical to the paper’s “Society” column, but the two features never appeared on the same page.\textsuperscript{108} The public sector, however, told a different story. At least in part because of black Muncie’s increasing political weight, before 1900 an African American had been appointed to the fire department, another to the post office, and a third to the police force.\textsuperscript{109}

Muncie also seems to have been free from antiblack collective violence. Its relatively tranquil racial atmosphere may have been particularly important in bolstering Muncie’s appeal to African Americans during its industri-
al slowdown in the first decade of the century, a period when violence flared in other communities such as Evansville, while black migrants continued to flow into Muncie. Muncie’s proportion of black population grew even during the 1920s, when it was a stronghold of the Ku Klux Klan. Some of the Muncie interviewees recalled witnessing Klan meetings or having personal acquaintance with Klansmen, but none recalled any incidents of Klan-inspired violence against blacks. And if their memories are accurate, black Munsonians took the Klan’s antics in stride. “The Klan was active in 1920,” reported Henry Sims. “They used to assemble right down here on Broadway. There was an auditorium there and a rink. They’d use the skating rink and things. And they’d use that to meet there. But, the Klan never did anything around here. Had a parade.”

African American residences clustered in three of Muncie’s nine wards, but the clusters were generally racially integrated. Three-fifths of the members of a sample drawn from the 1920 census manuscripts lived in households that had at least one European American neighbor, and one-quarter lived in households having two European American neighboring families.

Muncie’s African American community was both knit together by a vigorous associational network and linked to developments in the larger African American world. By 1903, when the community numbered a little over 700, one African Methodist Episcopal and one Baptist church were holding services, and they were joined within a decade by a Methodist Episcopal congregation. A Masonic lodge and its associated Eastern Star chapter for women, lodges of the Knights of Pythias and the Odd Fellows, together with local societies, were also functioning by 1903. By 1918 the small circle of African American businessmen had established a local branch of Booker T. Washington’s National Negro Business League, and a chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was active by 1920, only eleven years after the founding of the national organization.

Although their industrial jobs were routinized, closely supervised, and allowed little scope for advancement, Muncie’s housing market afforded color-blind opportunity for African American families to own their own homes. The African American home ownership rate (32 percent) was lower than the European American rate (43 percent), but the difference is entirely accounted for by differences in age, origin, and, most important, persistence within the community. Because more African Americans than European Americans were newcomers to Muncie, they had not had as much time to accumulate the price of a home. And time within the community mattered, because for both men and women persistence was the most powerful
predictor of home ownership. Like the two Springfields before 1900, Muncie before 1920 offered a structure of opportunity for home ownership, with the advantages for family life that control over one’s immediate environment allowed.

Alexander and Belle Kelley made up one set of home owners. In 1920 they were living in Whitely, a racially integrated working-class neighborhood that held Muncie’s principal African American community, situated near the metalworks where many local men were employed. Alexander was cooking at the General Motors plant, one of the very few African Americans employed there. Also living in the Kelleys’ mortgaged home was their married son James, who was working as a busboy at the Kirby House Hotel, Alexander’s longtime employer; married daughter Beulah; and Beulah’s husband, James Taylor, a Tennessee migrant who worked as a fireman at a foundry. Down the street lived James Blackburn, who, like Alexander and Belle Kelley, had been born in the South on the eve of the Civil War. James and his wife, Lula, had migrated from North Carolina to Indiana between 1899 and 1903, arriving in Muncie before 1910. Both were listed in the census as unable to read or write, but all six of their children living at home or nearby were literate; one son worked in a foundry, another as a hotel porter. The Blackburns, too, owned a mortgaged home. For both longtime Munsonians the Kelleys and the more recently arrived Blackburths, persistence in Muncie paid off in home ownership. The Kelley home provided family-controlled housing for five adults, a foundation and nexus of mutual support for workers holding jobs at the bottom of the local occupational ladder that few African Americans were allowed to climb.

Migrants to metropolitan cities sought similar benefits in black suburbs. Whether built by European American developers, one of the few African American construction companies, or the owner himself or herself with assistance from family and friends, homes could be acquired in the suburbs for much less than in the central cities. In Evanston north of Chicago, Cleveland’s Chagrin Falls Park, Cincinnati’s Lincoln Heights, and in many other communities in these and other midwestern cities, African American suburbanites sought the same combination of semirural setting, small-scale development, and proximity to metropolitan jobs that attracted European Americans to city fringes. Evanston offered mainly domestic and service jobs in the Chicago metropolitan area rather than industrial work, but by 1920 black Evanstonians had achieved a home ownership rate of 31 percent, nearly the same as their counterparts in Muncie. The small group of middle-class African Americans who populated the Chicago suburb of Morgan Park did even better, owning nearly half of their homes. Suburban settings that attracted migrants were diverse, including industrial satellites, clusters
of domestic service workers in wealthy white suburbs, and all-black residential communities. Some, such as migrants to Evanston, came directly from the South, stopping in Chicago no longer than necessary to change trains. Others, such as residents of Chagrin Falls Park and Lincoln Heights, tasted city life before escaping to the suburbs. In the suburbs they could gather extended families, engage in home food production to cushion unstable employment, and build community institutions: “By 1920, fully one-fourth of the nation’s African American YMCAs and YWCAs were located in suburbs.” Their homes may have been simple, and city services deficient or missing altogether, but African American suburbanites managed to recreate desired elements of familiar settings and were able to gain a valued measure of control over their surroundings.

Suburbs attracted about 15 percent of the African American population growth in northern metropolitan centers between 1910 and 1940, or about 285,000 people. Between 1910 and 1930, about 16 percent of the increase in African American population in the Lower Midwest took place in small towns and small cities. These figures suggest that a significant proportion of the migrants to, among, and within Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois during the Great Migration years, perhaps as many as one in four, settled away from the burgeoning central cities. Together with the evidence concerning urban experience in the South, migration sequences, and changing patterns of locational preference, such decisions reveal that the bright lights of Chicago and other metropolitan centers were refracted through the migrants’ own backgrounds and dispositions.