

Introduction to the 1962 Edition

BLACK METROPOLIS IS A DESCRIPTION OF ONE OF THE WORLD'S LARGER NEGRO communities, as it was during and at the end of the great depression of the 1930's. It is a history of the labor force of a great, industrially diverse city, and more especially of Negroes as part of that labor force. It is a great social survey, somewhat in the style of Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People of London* (17 Vols., published from 1889 to 1903. London), combining history and social statistics with first-hand observation and systematic interviewing. It is a lively monument to the *elan* which, generated by the New Deal, moved artists and intellectuals of all races and ethnic groups to common expression and action. It is, or was, a portent of the future of Negro Americans, a future in which they, like their countrymen of all varieties, would become overwhelmingly urban and would move and be moved toward a middle-class way of life.

Black Metropolis is certainly other things. Richard Wright has said it is a document of the agony of black men in a white world. It has much poetry in it. The authors, in the Appendix, "Black Metropolis 1961," give it still other dimensions. Let me enlarge on the facets I have already mentioned.

In the 1930's Chicago was already an immense gathering place for American Negroes, second only to New York. There were, and are, differences between these two black metropolises, differences which reflect those between the two cities as wholes. It is in the slaughtering houses, the steel mills and the various industries of Chicago, rather than in the light industries and services of New York, that Negro and other rural Americans and aliens get their foot on the bottom rung of the industrial ladder. Chicago's story, in this regard, may give the better clues to what is happening and will happen in other cities, both northern and southern. Some say Chicago is the most segregated city in the country; it may be so. If so, perhaps it is because Chicago is built of larger territorial blocks than many cities. Its Negro district is immense and unbroken. New York is a mosaic of smaller tiles,

where the average person, although he may live in a ghetto, is not so many miles from other breeds as in Chicago. Other cities approach one pattern or the other, or lie between. But more and more of them, no matter what their geographic patterns, and especially those requiring a large industrial labor force, have large populations of newly-arrived rural people, predominantly Negro. Many of the processes, many of the institutions described in *Black Metropolis* will be found, in various stages and forms, in all of them.

Every American city has had its own industrial and labor history. To all of them—and to all industrial cities everywhere—new kinds of people have come from time to time to fill the gaps at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy. The new people are generally both rustic and poor. In some sense, then, the story of the labor force of Chicago and the role of the Negro in it is a version of the story of all industrial cities, and of all poor rustics lured to the city by the hope of prosperity or freedom, or driven to it by underemployment, landlessness or technological change. It is the story of a large part of the human race of times recent and to come. The history of every growing industrial city is one of ethnic if not of racial diversity, and of ethnic succession at the bottom of the industrial hierarchy and in the central tenements or peripheral shacks of the slums. It is not always a history of ethnic and racial discrimination, but it is so often enough for *Black Metropolis* to be more universal than the story of a single harsh new city. The themes, in various keys and combinations, are being played out in the cities of all continents.

In the meantime, the balance among the positions and occupations in industrial economies is changing. Advanced industrial economies show an increase in professional and other white collar positions, with a relative decrease in the dirtier and heavier unskilled jobs, and even in the more skilled manual trades. The slaughtering houses which brought Negroes to Chicago are but the shadow of what they were early in the century. The automated steel mill needs no large roving labor gang. As a result, rural newcomers to the city and to its industries will have to make their adjustments more rapidly than in the past; they may easily become part of the pool of permanently unemployed without ever having been fully employed. In the more recently industrialized or still-to-be-industrialized parts of the world such changes may succeed one another more rapidly and catastrophically than in North America. For North America, with its Chicago, is—

industrially speaking—an old country which had more time for its adjustments than the new ones may have.

Black Metropolis is a great social survey, as that phrase was used before the day of statistical surveys of opinion and consumers' preferences. The social survey was a study, undertaken by men who believed that social facts well presented would point the way to reform of the conditions and ways of living at or below the *poverty line*. *Black Metropolis* was produced by the techniques, and with some of the spirit of a social survey, combined with the methods of social anthropology. The anthropologist more than matches the social surveyor in closeness and intimacy of contact and observation, while achieving a far more systematic analysis of social organization than ever dreamt of by the social surveyor. In this study sociologists of the Robert E. Park tradition joined with anthropologists who had worked with W. Lloyd Warner in his series of American community studies. The result is unique; its like may not be produced again. For one thing, it took a New Deal to mobilize the small army of able young social scientists who did the footwork that made the book possible. For another, bright young Negroes do not have to be sociologists and anthropologists any more. A Cayton or a Drake might today, if he chose, become an engineer, an architect or a scientist. Even as late as the Thirties a young Negro intellectual could hardly hope to get work which did not have to do with other Negroes—as clients or as objects of study. Nowadays the social sciences have to compete with other lines of work for Negro talent. The Negro in the New Frontier is not the Negro of the WPA (although he may have been in his youth). Finally, there has been technological change in social science; we now have the survey of opinion.¹ Observation is reduced to the minimum considered necessary to developing a questionnaire yielding answers which can be “coded” or “programmed” for processing by machines. Fewer skilled observers and more standardized interviewers are used. The change is not unlike that in industry. Other styles of gathering and presenting information about various segments of American life may supplant those used in *Black Metropolis*. In the decades since they did this work, the particular people who did it and the two who wrote the book have been moved on by the times and

¹ A questionnaire survey of new migrants to Chicago is being conducted at the University of Chicago by a team of which Donald Bogue is the leader and of which I am a member. Negroes are the most numerous among the newcomers.

by the logic of their own careers to new kinds of work and study. Messrs. Cayton and Drake have become students of racial matters on the world scene; their reputations are also world-wide. They cannot go back and do the same thing over again. The business of reporting on and analyzing the world of Negro and other newcomers to Chicago and the cities of the world, must pass on to others. It is one of the major tasks and adventures before the young people of our time.

Black Metropolis when published was a portent of the future. Negro Americans were rapidly moving to cities; now they are more urban than ever. Urbanization, which used to mean movement to the North, is now proceeding rapidly in the South. In fact, the South is now at last predominantly urban. One-crop agriculture—"stoop" agriculture—is being mechanized and is declining at the same time. We are told that half the people and half the land now engaged in agriculture could be turned to other uses without reducing our national agriculture product. Rural Southerners, Negro and white alike, rapidly being replaced by machines, are streaming into the cities. In Africa, at the same time, there are mass migrations to the cities. It is possible that people of Negro ancestry may become predominantly urban sooner than the peoples of Asia, the East Indies or Latin America—peoples whose ancestors invented cities.

The forms which urbanization will take may vary; certainly the cultures and economies from which the newcomers to cities stem vary greatly. For some the adjustment to city life and industrial work is greater than for others. But the *terminus ad quem* seems much the same in all cases. There is some evidence that all urban and industrial civilizations approach a common occupational structure, require essentially the same kinds of education and technical training, make somewhat the same demands upon people, and produce men of similar mind.² Certainly one of the obligations upon us as social scientists is to deploy forces throughout the world to observe and compare the processes of urbanization and to use the knowledge so gained to make the way less dangerous and less costly in human life and pain.

In North America itself one of the developments described in *Black Metropolis* has proceeded so far as to seem a change in kind. We have, in our economy of abundance, become a nation of consumers.

² Inkeles, Alex. "Industrial Man: The Relation of Status to Experience, Perception and Value," *The American Journal of Sociology*. LXVI (July 1960), 1-31.

Negro Americans were once looked upon merely as labor. So it has often been in the early phase of industry or industrial agriculture. The consumers were to be found elsewhere. But just as other American workers eventually came to be consumers of the products they made, so also the Negroes. This is the great turning point in any economy. Negro Americans have become consumers to be reckoned with; they were only beginning to become such in the Thirties. The day of the ancient Packard flamboyantly repainted for the Negro trade has gone. In the supermarket of the Hyde Park Cooperative Society thousands of well-dressed (unless happening to choose blue jeans and wind-breaker that day) women gather daily to do the family shopping. Most come alone in the shining family car. Many of them are Negro women. Such a woman is the new Negro: the middle-class consumer. It is the Negro consumer who sits-in demanding the right to be served and to consume the products of American abundance and to use his leisure as other Americans do. And, greatest reversal of all, the middle-class Negro, militantly but without violence demanding his right to be served when he has the price, is violently set upon by whites who, by all counts except the caste-symbol of race, are his inferiors. The Chicago race riots of 1919 pitted lower class against lower class. The lynching mob usually found its victim among the poor and the ignorant. In all cases the nice white people stayed at home. *Black Metropolis* gave us a first look at the tastes of the Negro urban middle class, which was not yet militant about its consumption.

Some years ago I cycled off westward toward State Street, Chicago, on one of the streets in the 70's, south of the old limits of the Black Belt. It was a peaceful middle-class area of one-story brick bungalows and two-flat buildings, probably built for second or third generation Irish, Czechs or Poles. Men were washing their cars, mowing the lawn, or painting the back porch on that Saturday morning. Women were coming and going from the shops, or could be seen dusting in the front room. All at once, I saw that one industrious householder had a dark complexion. Then I saw that all were brown or black. It ran counter to all stereotypes; either their faces should have been white or the district should have had a different aspect. Chicago's Negro slums have grown, but so have her Negro middle classes and the districts where they live. The forces which move people toward the middle class American ethos are tremendous among Negroes of American descent. James Conant, in *Slums and Suburbs: A Com-*

mentary on Schools in Metropolitan Areas,³ declares that the fate of our country depends upon the speed and thoroughness with which we destroy the slum, and the chronic unemployment and unemployability, the crime, the alienation, the hopelessness, the anger which it breeds and fastens upon our body social. It depends also upon the speed with which we make it possible for all Americans to enjoy to the full the opportunities for work, for consumption of goods and services and for participation in social life in their hours of leisure which our economy of abundance makes available. The great, massive crucial case, both as concerns the slum and as concerns full consumption and participation, is with the Americans called Negro. If we do what is necessary to solve their problems, we will have of necessity done it for the rest of us.

Black Metropolis stands as the classic study of urban Negro life. It is not the last word. No living document is. But he who reads it will be well on his way to becoming an understanding and continuing observer of what is and what is to come in our cities.

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³ New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961.