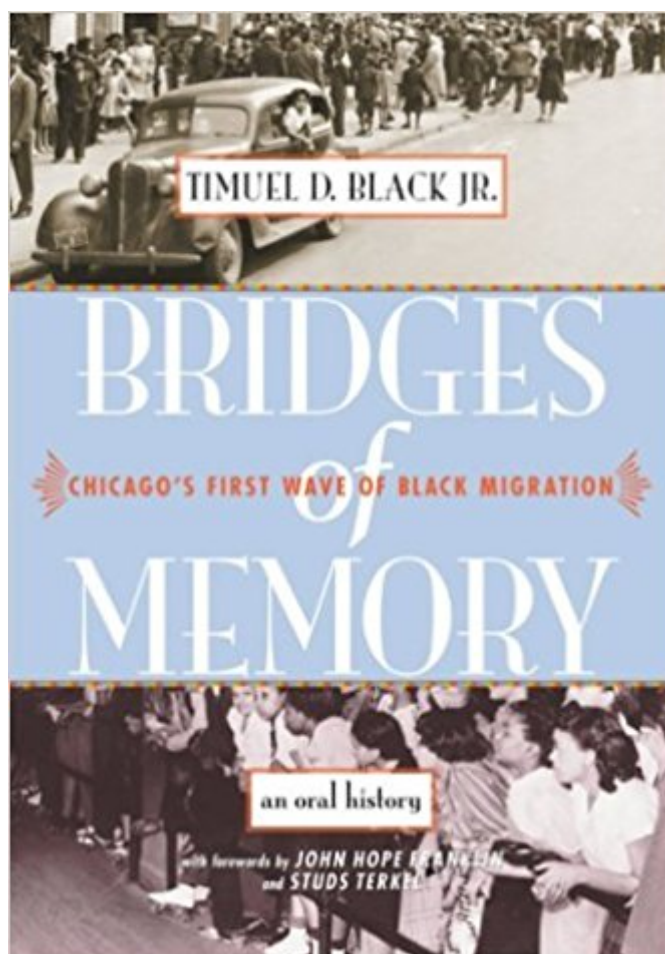


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# Bridges Of Memory : Chicago's First Wave Of Black Migration



## Synopsis

A collection of interviews with African Americans who came to Chicago from the South. In their first great migration to Chicago that began during World War I, African Americans came from the South seeking a better life--and fleeing a Jim Crow system of racial prejudice, discrimination, and segregation. What they found was much less than what they'd hoped for, but it was much better than what they'd come from--and in the process they set in motion vast changes not only in Chicago but also in the whole fabric of American society. This book, the first of three volumes, revisits this momentous chapter in American history with those who lived it. Oral history of the first order, *Bridges of Memory* lets us hear the voices of those who left social, political, and economic oppression for political freedom and opportunity such as they'd never known--and for new forms of prejudice and segregation. These children and grandchildren of ex-slaves found work in the stockyards and steel mills of Chicago, settled and started small businesses in the "Black Belt" on the South Side, and brought forth the jazz, blues, and gospel music that the city is now known for. Historian Timuel D. Black, Jr., himself the son of first-generation migrants to Chicago, interviews a wide cross-section of African Americans whose remarks and reflections touch on issues ranging from fascism to Jim Crow segregation to the origin of the blues. Their recollections comprise a vivid record of a neighborhood, a city, a society, and a people undergoing dramatic and unprecedented changes.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A two-hour interview may only scrape the surface of a life, but Black's 36 oral histories exceed the sum of their parts. Black, a jazz historian and professor, frankly selects subjects whom he personally knows-and most people Black knows turn out to be fascinating. Many of the biographies of these political leaders, activists, artists and educators turn on how their considerable gifts were made manifest in the "promised land" of Chicago in the early 20th century. Among all the leitmotifs-a dissertation could be written on the repetition of the words "money," "education" and "hustle"-the conflict between national identity and racial identity emerges as one of the most profound. On the day WWI ends, nine-year-old Robert Colin makes a small fortune selling American flags, enough to finance his family's move to Chicago. They arrive just as a race riot explodes. "That riot took all the religion out of me and all the patriotism as well because of what they did to blacks," he says. Corneal Davis, who will go on to become an Illinois state representative, gets his first job in Chicago by putting down "American" as his race. "But ain't it a shame," he says, "that after I've been soldiering and risking my life for this country, now I can't put down 'colored' and even get myself any kind of a job in a city like this?" In these moments, oral history offers the richness of novels with the punch of nonfiction, and even the casual reader, who may not appreciate Black's scrupulous attention to dates or his sentimental reminiscing with his subjects, will delight in this invaluable resource. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This is a collection of interviews with black Chicagoans affected by the great migration of southern blacks to the North during World War II. While many of these interviewees--bankers, lawyers, doctors, entertainers, and politicians--reveal substantial success stories, they also reflect on the adversities they faced and the evolution of their strategies to overcome and, in fact, endure the prejudice and hardships they found in Chicago. Black interviews more than 150 people who left their mark on Chicago, providing personal accounts of the broader sociological studies that have profiled black Chicago. This oral history, done in a question-and-answer format, captures memories of the children of the great migration, many now grandparents and great-grandparents. Without this work, many of these stories would otherwise be lost to a throwaway generation with little historical perspective. Black has captured the voices of the near past, and they tell a story as contemporary as our own: that success only comes with struggle, that progress is possible only when our history is both reflected and recognized in our contemporary lives. Vernon Ford Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

I was a homeowner, and lived in Chicago from the early 1960s thru the mid 1980s. The book is

interesting, as I read I reflect on my life experiences in Chicago. Chicago is a great city. Thank you for the book Timuel Black.

The recollections of those interviewed consistently draw you in especially if you've been to some of the places or met some of the people mentioned. Some of their memories are really quite compelling.

A wonderful historical tome featuring many black Chicagoan's who are unknown to many, but who made significant contributions to the community and city at large.

My parents moved to Chicago during the first wave and Mr. Black has filled in many unanswered questions that I found to be curious. The documented conversations makes one feel like you were there. Enjoyed the read from start to finish; I could not put this book down.

What a gift this collection is! In 1988, Timuel Black began to record and preserve the recollections of people who had lived in Chicago a long time, particularly the first generation of the Great Migration. When he wrote the introduction to this book, he had recorded over 125 conversations and still had "many , many more people with whom I would like to speak." Thirty-six of those conversations are presented here, with two more volumes planned to follow. The interviews are conducted using the "participant observer" technique, and since Dr. Black - a long time resident himself - is an "insider" these interviews are essentially honest, intimate conversations among old friends, many of whom have now passed. As Dr. Black makes clear, this book is not intended to be a history of Black Chicago and its institutions, but rather a collection of oral memories from people who participated in shaping those institutions. But his field work provides invaluable data for future researchers attempting to compile that history. If this book contained nothing more than the biographical information about each of the 40 participants (some are joint interviews), it would make fascinating reading. But the interviews bring each vividly to life. We meet people from all walks, including civil servants, educators, politicians, jazz musicians, railroad workers, business people, even two generations of South Side Chicago represented by mother and daughter Mildred Bowden and Hermene Hartman. Some, like George Johnson, tell a story of "from rags to riches." Others fall into a category of "just keep on keepin' on." But all are riveting. I look forward to the next two volumes!

The strength of this book is in its informality. Mr. Black is friends with nearly all of his interviewees

(he has known several of them for over 40 years), and the sessions read as a conversation rather than an interview. This book is especially useful for one looking for supplemental material about the neighborhood of Bronzeville in Chicago, segregation (from an individual perspective rather than scholarly leaning), and smaller aspects of city history and social change that are often forgotten. Some of his interviewees include a man that owned a company that distributed hair straightener around the U.S., a man that started what would become the Illinois state lottery, well respected teachers, and military servicemen. There is a great deal of repetition that could have been eliminated regarding DuSable High School, locations of buildings, boundaries of the neighborhood, and references to people that are not elaborated upon; it is possible that Black chose not to edit this out to keep the interviews intact. It would have been extremely helpful for maps of Bronzeville throughout the past 80 years were inserted among the small selection of pictures that are included, in order to help those unfamiliar with the neighborhood navigate through some of the interviewees' memories of businesses, theaters, and homes.

Here's my bias. I like history. I like to hear people talk about their lives. I like intelligent, articulate, effective language. And I loved this book. The people interviewed are fascinating, and Timuel Black helps them tell their stories in an unpretentious but by no means diffident way. I learned a great deal and enjoyed myself for many evenings.

I'm a student teacher in history and this great volume will help educate and inspire my students. Personal accounts are always more interesting than a historian's view after the fact.

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