

The Making of *Black Metropolis*

Henri Peretz, Université Paris VIII

Background

Black Metropolis emerged from the Horace Cayton – Lloyd Warner Project during the 1930s at the University of Chicago.

- Supported by the WPA, Rosenwald Foundation, and Church of the Good Shepherd, the project's ostensible focus was black juvenile delinquency, but its true ambition was to study the entire structure of the black community in Chicago.
-

The Team

A large team was set up to undertake the Cayton-Warner project.

- About twenty research assistants were recruited among graduate students and another 150 people helped with the project.
 - The scale of the project entailed considerable personnel management.
 1. Cayton had to establish a balance between the different union and political factions exerting pressure on the organization of the research.
 2. He also had to maintain a balance between the white and black researchers.
 - St. Clair Drake trained team members in the conduct of ethnographic research.
-

The Book Project

In the early forties, Warner, Cayton, and Drake decided to write a book based on the research project that would be written for both professional and lay audiences and seek to throw light on the conditions of blacks in urban America.

- A plan for the book included four segments:
 1. The arrival of blacks in Chicago at the turn of the century.
 2. The relations between blacks and whites, mainly between 1935 and 1943.
 3. The black community.
 4. The future.
 - Richard Wright, the author of *Native Son*, wrote the preface; Warner contributed a methodological note to the volume, which was written largely by Drake and Cayton.
-

The Book

Black Metropolis has endured as an exemplary monograph on the black community.

- It remains an extraordinary book because of the diversity of themes it covers and the wealth of data upon which it drew.
- The description of social life in the area of Bronzeville will remain as a testimony of a past state of the black community.