



A New Deal for Bronzeville: Housing, Employment, and Civil Rights in Black Chicago, 1935-1955

Lionel Kimble

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During the Great Migration of the 1920s and 1930s, southern African Americans flocked to the South Side Chicago community of Bronzeville, the cultural, political, social, and economic hub of African American life in the city, if not the Midwest. The area soon became the epicenter of community activism as working-class African Americans struggled for equality in housing and employment. In this study, Lionel Kimble Jr. demonstrates how these struggles led to much of the civil rights activism that occurred from 1935 to 1955 in Chicago and shows how this working-class activism and culture helped to ground the early civil rights movement. Despite the obstacles posed by the Depression, blue-collar African Americans worked with leftist organizations to counter job discrimination and made strong appeals to New Deal allies for access to public housing. Kimble details how growing federal intervention in local issues during World War II helped African Americans make significant inroads into Chicago's war economy and how returning African American World War II veterans helped to continue the fight against discrimination in housing and employment after the war. The activism that appeared in Bronzeville was not simply motivated by the "class consciousness" rhetoric of the organized labor movement but instead grew out of everyday struggles for racial justice, citizenship rights, and improved economic and material conditions. With its focus on the role of working-class African Americans—as opposed to the middle-class leaders who have received the most attention from civil rights historians in the past—*A New Deal for Bronzeville* makes a significant contribution to the study of civil rights work in the Windy City and enriches our understanding of African American life in mid-twentieth-century Chicago.

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