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POSTWAR AFRICAN AMERICAN URBAN LIFE

The characters in *Goin' to Chicago* recall their amazement upon arriving in Chicago. Clory Bryant said, I thought I had reached the Promised Land. Koko Taylor remembers exclaiming, Good God, almighty, this must be heaven, or . . . Paris.

Chicago had two big attractions for African Americans after World War II. The first was jobs. From 1940 to 1965 the U.S. economy boomed, particularly manufacturing. Timuel Black explains that Chicago was a great manufacturing center and a railroad hub. Northern employers paid African Americans higher wages and schools were better. According to Koko Taylor, even a maid could make \$5 day, and that's a long way from \$3 a week.

The second attraction was a thriving black community on the Southside, often called Bronzeville, home to black doctors, dentists, teachers, and lawyers, black businesses, insurance companies and churches, nightclubs and theaters, shoe stores, dress stores and department stores, and two black newspapers, *The Chicago Defender* and *the Chicago Bee*. Organizations like the Urban League assisted with housing and otherwise helped newcomers adjust to a strange and different city. And of course in the North, African Americans could vote and even run for office.

QUESTION:

Read Carl Sandburg's poem *Chicago* (it can be found in most American poetry anthologies). Compare it to Margaret Walker's *Chicago* (from Margaret Walker, *This is My Century, New and Collected Poems* (University of Georgia Press, 1987). How is the attitude expressed in both poems towards Chicago similar? How is it different? Why?

QUESTION:

Comment on the irony that the racism which segregated most African Americans, including the middle class, behind ghetto walls resulted in the rise of large and vibrant black communities like Harlem and Bronzeville.