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BLACK CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

CULTURETECHLENS RESEARCH REPORT · CTL-RB-CHI-000004

# The Black Belt: Name, Geography and Change

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**CultureTechLens Evidence-First Research Brief · CTL-RB-CHI-000004** Chicago, c. 1900–present (with Southern term history as needed)

> **Question:** What did the term "Black Belt" mean historically, and how did its geography change?

## 01 · Summary

The name "Black Belt" began in the American South, where it first described a crescent of dark, fertile soil across Alabama and Mississippi, then the cotton-plantation country worked by enslaved labor, and then the region of Black-majority counties. When the term attached itself to Chicago, it kept that layered history: a **soil name that became a racial geography**. By the turn of the 20th century it was in common use for the South Side Black district — a narrow, overcrowded, violently contained corridor running south from the Near South Side along State Street. Its boundaries moved with every decade and every source: roughly 22nd–31st Streets at the turn of the century; the 1919 riot-district lines of 22nd–39th and 39th–55th; the 1920s bounds of State to Cottage Grove, 31st to 47th; the 1940s stretch from Cermak to South Chicago Avenue; a broad retrospective reach of 39th–95th after World War II. The term was double-edged: an imposed label of containment — and, simultaneously, the setting residents and the Black press called a "city within a city." Beginning in 1930, Black newspaper culture answered with **"Bronzeville"**, a counternaming that displaced "Black Belt" in everyday use after World War II. The strongest anchor is the Chicago Commission on Race Relations' *The Negro in Chicago* (1922), which mapped the belt while putting the term in scare quotes — "so-called 'Black Belt'" — proof the name was established vernacular, not a commission invention. The least resolved question is

the precise pathway by which the Southern term entered Chicago speech: the semantic sequence is demonstrable, but no source yet found names the moment of transfer.

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## 02 · Scope and Definitions

**Scope.** Chicago, c. 1900 to the present, with the Alabama/Southern term history carried back (early 1800s–1903) as needed to explain the name. This brief is about the *word* and the *geography it claimed* — not the Great Migration, the Black press, or Bronzeville's institutions, which belong to sibling packages.

**Definitions — fix these before reading further:**

- **Black Belt (Southern).** Originally the dark-soil cotton crescent of central Alabama and Mississippi (early 1800s); then, through plantation slavery, the belt of Black-majority counties; only afterward a general racial-geography term.
- **Black Belt (Chicago).** The South Side Black district in contemporary usage, c. 1900–c. 1960s, with era- and source-specific boundaries: a *concentration of Black residents inside a constrained housing market*, never uniformly Black.
- **Black Ghetto.** A sociological synonym from the University of Chicago school, stressing involuntary segregation; overlapping the belt, different analytic frame.
- **Black Metropolis.** In Drake and Cayton's 1945 usage, the Black institutional, economic, and cultural life built *inside* the belt — "the Black Belt became the Black Metropolis." A city within the belt, not another name for it.
- **Bronzeville.** A 1930 Black-press coinage (James J. Gentry, *Chicago Bee*) adopted by residents as the district's preferred name — a counternaming of the imposed "Black Belt"/"Black Ghetto."

**Inclusion rule.** A geography appears in an era only if a dated source explicitly calls it the Black Belt, maps it as the Black concentration that defined the belt, or identifies it as the belt's expansion or contested edge.

**Exclusion rule.** No projecting modern Bronzeville or community-area boundaries backward; no treating all South Side Black neighborhoods as "the belt" by default; no folding the West Side in except to explain why the singular term stopped describing Black Chicago; no substituting landmark districts or commercial corridors for the residential geography.

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## 03 · Question and Method

**The question** is semantic and geographic: what did "Black Belt" mean, who used it, and how did the ground it claimed shift over time? It is not "what was life like in the Black Belt" — that is the sibling packages' territory.

**Method.** Evidence-first, with a fixed hierarchy: primary sources (the 1922 commission report, contemporary newspapers, government nominations) first; then archives and government data; then institutional references; then historical newspapers via institutional projects; then scholarship. Search-result snippets and weak aggregators are never evidence. Every major claim carries a claim ID, source, type, date, evidence, confidence grade, contradictions, and notes — see `claim-ledger.json`.

**Grades used:** VERIFIED · SUPPORTED · PROVISIONAL · DISPUTED · UNRESOLVED.

**Sibling-derived material is marked.** This brief draws on CTL-DR-BCI-001 (Chicago's Black institutions), CTL-DR-BVM-005 (Bronzeville: Black Metropolis), and the earlier research-brief package CTL-DR-BCI-001's sibling brief; every borrowed claim is tagged `SIBLING-DERIVED` with its grade from that work, and this brief independently re-grounds the claims that carry its argument.

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## 04 · A Term in Motion

"Black Belt" is three terms stacked in one phrase, and Chicago inherited all three. First it named dirt — the dark, fertile soil over decomposed limestone that made central Alabama and Mississippi prime cotton country. Then it named the labor system planted on that dirt: enslaved Black labor, then Black-majority counties, then a whole racial geography of the plantation South. When northern cities borrowed the phrase, they kept the *structure* — a bounded place where Black people were concentrated — while inverting its *cause*: not soil but segregation, not plantations but restrictive covenants, violence, and redlining. The sections that follow pin each stage to dated evidence, keep every boundary date-stamped to its source, and leave the unproven parts visibly unproven — above all, the exact moment by which the Southern name entered Chicago speech.

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## 05 · The Southern Origin: Soil, Slavery, and a Chapter Title

The Alabama Black Belt is a crescent of dark prairie soil — decomposed limestone — stretching across central Alabama into Mississippi. After the Creek cessions of 1816 opened the region and Jacksonian policy forced Indigenous removal, white planters poured in to grow cotton on that soil with enslaved Black labor. The term followed the documented sequence: **soil → plantation economy → Black-majority population → racial region**. Reference works agree the name began with the dirt and only later acquired demographic and racial associations [C-01, C-02].

The term's literary crystallization came in 1903, when W. E. B. Du Bois titled a chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk* "Of the Black Belt" and wrote of Dougherty County, Georgia: "This is the Black Belt of Georgia" — the phrase already a recognizable racial-geography label beyond Alabama [C-03].

What the evidence does **not** establish is the bridge. One low-quality source asserts Black migrants "took the term" north, crediting Richard Wright; encyclopedia summaries pair the Southern and Chicago usages suggestively. No dated newspaper, letter, speech, or organizational record found in this research names the transfer moment or agent. The semantic sequence is demonstrable; the *transfer story* is not. It is graded PROVISIONAL — plausible, consistent with the migration chronology, but unproven — and rival explanations (white journalists or sociologists applying a familiar Southern term to a new Northern ghetto) stay live [C-04].

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## 06 · Chicago Before the Name Was Fixed: 1880s–1900

Black Chicago's first concentrations formed on the Near South Side in the 1880s, largely between 16th and 24th Streets, several blocks west of State Street. By 1890 the major district ran roughly 24th to 35th Streets between Federal and State, per the City of Chicago's landmark research on the Black Renaissance literary movement [C-05]. Historians call this corridor the early Black Belt, but **no contemporary Chicago source found in this research uses the term before the 1910s** — the earliest local use remains an open hunt (see §18).

That silence matters. When the Chicago Commission on Race Relations published *The Negro in Chicago* in September 1922, it referred to the district as the "so-called 'Black Belt'" — scare quotes that only make sense if the name was already established street and press vernacular, not a commission coinage [C-06]. The term was fixed in Chicago speech by 1922 at the latest; everything earlier is historians' retrospective labeling.

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## 07 · Fixing the Belt in Place: 1910–1922

The Great Migration made the belt visible, measurable, and violent. The evidence gives three overlapping polygons from the same era — a warning that "the" boundary never existed:

1. **The 1910 retrospective.** The 1922 commission's "Black Belt in 1910" covered 12th–55th, Wentworth–Indiana — where Black residents were only about **10 percent** of the population. Peer-reviewed work (Logan et al., 2015) uses this to show how coarse enumeration units exaggerate concentration [C-07].
2. **The riot district, 1919.** The commission's District I, "Black Belt": **22nd–39th Streets, Wentworth Avenue to the lake; 39th–55th, Clark Street to Michigan Avenue** — with 39th–55th, Michigan Avenue to the lake separately labeled "contested area." Analytic and administrative boundaries, not the colloquial belt [C-08].
3. **The lived district, 1917–1922.** A 1917 *Chicago Tribune* survey placed the Black district between 22nd and 63rd, Cottage Grove to State, quoting Rev. L. K. Williams of Olivet Church: 125,000 Black residents "in quarters formerly provided for 50,000" — overcrowding as the belt's defining condition [C-09].

Two Black-press data points anchor who used the name. In a 1922 *Chicago Defender* column, Dr. A. Wilberforce Williams described Michael Reese Hospital as standing in the center of Chicago's "Black Belt" (via UIC's Mapping Care project) [C-10]. And the 1922 commission reported **about 90 percent of Chicago's Black residents lived in the designated Black Belt** — a figure about *people*, not land. Its densest-zone count (Roosevelt Road–39th, Wentworth–lake) found 54,906 Black and 42,797 white residents side by side [C-11]. A concentration, not a monoculture — the distinction popular accounts most often mangle (§15).

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## 08 · The Sociology of the Term: 1920s–1940s

Chicago sociologists Robert E. Park and Ernest Burgess carried the vernacular "Black Belt" into academic language in the 1920s, where it traveled in textbooks as a type-specimen of the segregated zone [C-12].

Drake and Cayton's *Black Metropolis* (1945), built on WPA field research, both used and transcended the term. "Stand in the center of the Black Belt — at Chicago's 47th Street and South Parkway," they wrote, then argued the famous inversion: **"The Black Belt became the Black Metropolis in the twenty years between the close of the First World War and the beginning of the Second"** (p. 77). In their vocabulary, the *Belt* (or *Ghetto*) was the imposed segregated space; the *Metropolis* was the institutional, economic, and cultural life Black Chicagoans built inside it [C-13]. One named the cage, the other the city built within it.

The belt's working boundaries, per the Chicago Urban League's census-data synthesis: the 1920s belt ran State (west) to Cottage Grove (east), 31st (north) to 47th (south); by the 1940s it stretched from Cermak to South Chicago Avenue, LaSalle to the lake [C-14]. Southward expansion ran against organized resistance — bombings, covenant enforcement, white neighborhood associations — documented in the commission's maps of bombed homes and the Urban League's housing research.

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## 09 · Counternaming: The Making of Bronzeville

By the late 1920s the imposed name had accumulated the contempt of the imposers. The Encyclopedia of Chicago's "Bronzeville" entry reports that major media used "Black Belt," "Black Ghetto," and sometimes an outright slur — and that many Black residents resented all of them [C-15].

The answer was deliberate renaming. In **1930**, James J. Gentry, theater editor for Anthony Overton's *Chicago Bee*, coined **"Bronzeville"**; the *Bee* sponsored a "Mayor of Bronzeville" contest that year. Gentry moved to the *Chicago Defender* in 1932, where the promotion flourished into a durable civic institution [C-16]. "Bronzeville" was not a neutral synonym that drifted into use — it was a Black-press campaign to replace a resented label, and it succeeded: the Chicago Race Riot of 1919 Commemoration Project dates the neighborhood's renaming to "the 1930s" [C-17].

One caution survives from sibling research: an alternate account dates "Bronzeville" to 1922. The 1930 Gentry account is the institutionally documented one (Encyclopedia of Chicago; corroborated by press histories); the 1922 account is not re-verified here. Exact first use remains DISPUTED, with 1930 best-supported [C-18].

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## 10 · The Belt Grows, the Belt Fades: 1940s–1970s

FSA photographs from 1941 Chicago — Russell Lee's and Edwin Rosskam's images of "Negro section" apartment buildings and kitchenette subdivisions — froze the belt's built fabric at its most overcrowded. The Library of Congress's African-American Mosaic exhibition captioned one Lee photograph "Apartment Building in Chicago's 'Black Belt'" and glossed the district's internal geography: poorest Black residents in the northernmost, oldest section; the elite in the southernmost [C-19].

After World War II the term began to die as a living place-name even as the ground kept growing. The Encyclopedia of Chicago dates common usage "from the turn of the 20th century until after World War II" [C-20]. Three forces broke the singular belt: the Second Great Migration pushed settlement farther south (the retrospective 39th–95th reach); the West Side's Black population outgrew what one South Side "belt" could describe; and expressway construction, public-housing towers, and urban renewal physically restructured the corridor. By mid-century roughly three-quarters of the city's Black population lived in the belt's broad footprint — a 30-block strip along State Street rarely more than seven blocks wide — but the statistic already described a geography straining past its name [C-21].

"Bronzeville" survived as the heritage name, though its modern boundaries are smaller and variably drawn — a place-brand, not the old belt. And the old name survived in memory: the historian Timuel Black, raised in the district, recalled growing up in the "Black Belt" as "a city within a city" — resident meaning outliving the map [C-22].

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## 11 · The Term Today

"Black Belt" in Chicago is now chiefly a **historical and scholarly term** — used in exhibits, landmark nominations, commemorations, and memory work. The National Park Service's Black Metropolis thematic nomination (1985) uses it in scare quotes as the historic name for the "long narrow strip" of South Side Black settlement, bounded by railroad and industrial properties west, affluent white neighborhoods east, running Van Buren Street to 39th [C-23]. It is not a contemporary neighborhood name and must never be used as one. Modern Bronzeville — heritage district, landmark district, real-estate label — is smaller, variably bounded, and differently meant. Neither equals "all Black Chicago," then or now: the West Side, far South Side, and suburbs have been major Black geographies for generations, and the singular-belt metaphor has not described the city's Black population since mid-century.

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## 12 · A Map of Every Era: Boundaries by Date and Source

One source, one polygon. None is "the" Black Belt; together they show a moving name.

| Era (claim date) | Source | Named / mapped boundary | Grade |
|---|---|---|---|
| c. 1890 | City of Chicago landmark report (Black Renaissance) | 24th–35th Sts., Federal–State Sts. | SUPPORTED |
| c. 1900–1910 | Encyclopedia of Chicago ("Black Belt") | 22nd–31st along State St. (original corridor) | SUPPORTED |
| 1910 (retrospective, pub. 1922) | Chicago Commission on Race Relations | 12th–55th, Wentworth–Indiana (~10% Black) | VERIFIED |
| 1917 | *Chicago Tribune* survey | 22nd–63rd, Cottage Grove–State | SUPPORTED |
| 1919 (riot district) | CCRR, District I "Black Belt" | 22nd–39th (Wentworth–lake); 39th–55th (Clark–Michigan); contested 39th–55th (Michigan–lake) | VERIFIED |
| 1920s | Chicago Urban League synthesis | State–Cottage Grove, 31st–47th | SUPPORTED |
| 1920s | Drake & Cayton (1945) | "Center" at 47th & South Parkway | VERIFIED |
| c. 1925 | Encyclopedia of Chicago ("Bronzeville") | 22nd–51st, Cottage Grove–Rock Island RR (2nd/3rd Wards) | SUPPORTED |
| 1940s | CUL synthesis / UIC 1940 census map | Cermak–South Chicago Ave., LaSalle–lake | SUPPORTED |
| Retrospective | Encyclopedia of Chicago ("Black Belt") | Expanded reach 39th–95th, Dan Ryan–lake | SUPPORTED |
| 1985 (nomination) | NPS Black Metropolis nomination | "Long narrow strip," Van Buren–39th, rail yards west / affluent blocks east | VERIFIED |

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## 13 · Who Said It, and Why It Mattered

- **Southern planters, boosters, and census-takers (early–mid 1800s):** the soil name, then the plantation region.
- **W. E. B. Du Bois (1903):** the literary codification — "the Black Belt of Georgia."
- **White Chicago press (1910s–1920s):** the district as a bounded problem; the 1917 *Tribune* survey mapped overcrowding without using the term in the excerpt found — the *place* was newsworthy before the *name* is documented in print [UNRESOLVED on earliest white-press use].
- **The Black press (by 1922):** Dr. A. Wilberforce Williams's *Defender* column used "Black Belt of Chicago" as ordinary vocabulary — Black usage, not white imposition alone [C-10].

- **The state (1919–1922):** the riot commission's District I definitions; the term enters government prose in scare quotes.
- **Scholars (1920s–1940s):** Park and Burgess's ecological label; Drake and Cayton's inversion into *Black Metropolis*.
- **Residents:** the "city within a city" — Timuel Black's memory phrase, and the resentment of imposed labels behind the Bronzeville renaming.
- **The Black press again (1930–1932):** Gentry and the *Bee*/*Defender* campaign that replaced the name.

Connotation followed the speaker: containment and pathology from outside; community and institution-building from inside. The same ground, two opposite meanings — which is why the word, not the neighborhood, is this brief's subject.

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## 14 · What the Term Did: Containment and Community

Names do work. "Black Belt" did two jobs at once. From outside, it **naturalized containment**: a belt is a thing with edges, and the edges of Chicago's belt were held by restrictive covenants, threatened and actual bombings, exclusion from white neighborhoods, and later redlining and renewal clearance. The name made a political outcome look like a geographic fact. From inside, the same name **marked a world**: the churches, newspapers, banks, insurance companies, theaters, and political organizations of the Black Metropolis — the "city within a city" of resident memory. Drake and Cayton's whole book argues the second job mattered more: the belt's meaning was made by the people confined in it, not by the confinement. The 1930 countername as "Bronzeville" was the explicit political form of that argument: if the name does work, change the name.

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## 15 · The 90 Percent That Wasn't: Reading the Numbers Carefully

Three figures are routinely mangled; this section fixes them:

1. **"90 percent" (1922 commission):** about 90% of Chicago's Black residents lived in the designated Black Belt — *where Black Chicagoans lived*, not the belt's composition [C-11, VERIFIED].
2. **"10 percent" (1910 belt aggregation):** inside the commission's 1910 polygon (12th–55th, Wentworth–Indiana), Black residents were roughly 10% of the total population [C-07, VERIFIED via peer-reviewed citation of the primary]. The belt was never demographically pure; the name described concentration relative to a segregated city.
3. **"Three-quarters" (mid-20th century):** about three-quarters of the city's Black population lived in the belt's broad footprint [C-21, SUPPORTED — corroborated twice, thinly sourced both times].

The methodological warning from Logan et al. stands over all of them: ward- and tract-level units can make block-level reality look more dispersed or more extensive than it was. Every boundary in §12 is a function of its source's purpose — riot control, census aggregation, newspaper color, encyclopedia summary — and none should be read as street-level truth.

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## 16 · Not the Same Thing: Four Terms, Four Jobs

| Term | Coined / fixed | Named what | Used by | Connotation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Black Belt (Chicago) | Vernacular by 1922 (print) | The constrained South Side Black district, era-varying bounds | White press, Black press, state, scholars, residents | Containment (outside) / community (inside) |
| Black Ghetto | 1920s–40s sociology | The segregated zone as analytic type | Chicago School, later scholars | Pathology, involuntariness |
| Black Metropolis | 1945 (Drake & Cayton) | Black institutional/ economic/cultural life inside the belt | Scholars, then civic memory | Achievement, self-making |
| Bronzeville | 1930 (Gentry, *Chicago Bee*) | The district under its chosen name | Black press, residents, now heritage branding | Affirmation, ownership |

Treating any two as synonyms collapses the argument this brief makes: the words were weapons and tools in a naming struggle, and the struggle is part of the history.

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## 17 · What the Sources Disagree On

1. **How the name got to Chicago.** Migrants-carried-it vs. journalists/sociologists-applied-it. One weak source asserts the first; no source proves either [C-04, PROVISIONAL].
2. **The earliest dated Chicago use.** Secure in print by 1922 (commission; *Defender* column). The 1910s are a blank. UNRESOLVED.
3. **Bronzeville's birthday.** 1930 (Gentry, institutionally documented) vs. an unverified 1922 account. DISPUTED; 1930 best-supported [C-18].
4. **The "75 percent" figure.** Corroborated twice, thinly sourced both times. SUPPORTED, not VERIFIED.
5. **Exact polygons.** Every source draws its own; the disagreement is the finding (§12, §15).
6. **When the term died:** common use "until after World War II" (EoC); memory and scholarly use persist. A gradual fade, not an event — SUPPORTED.

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## 18 · Uncertainty Register

- **U-1.** Earliest dated Chicago newspaper use of "Black Belt" — sought, not found. (Checked: 1922 commission, UIC Mapping Care *Defender* material, *Tribune* 1917 excerpt.)
- **U-2.** Mechanism of term transfer from the South to Chicago — no direct documentary evidence located.
- **U-3.** Whether Booker T. Washington or other national figures used the Chicago term before 1920 — not verified; excluded rather than asserted.
- **U-4.** The 1922-vs-1930 Bronzeville origin conflict — unresolved pending a dated primary newspaper instance.
- **U-5.** Whether HOLC/FHA documents themselves used "Black Belt" for Chicago — not checked in this pass; the brief makes no claim about it.
- **U-6.** Block-level boundaries for any era — the sources give corridors and districts, not lot lines; modern GIS reconstruction is future work (§24).

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## 19 · Sibling-Derived Material (Marked)

The following claims are imported from sibling CultureTechLens packages and retain their original grades; this brief re-grounds only the ones its argument depends on (marked ↺):

- **S-1.** Pre-1915 settlement corridors, interwar expansion, and housing-restriction mechanisms (covenants, violence, redlining, public housing, urban renewal) — CTL-DR-BCI-001 / CTL-DR-BVM-005, SUPPORTED. ↺ Re-grounded via the City landmark report and CUL synthesis.
- **S-2.** Population figures (1910: 44,103; 1920: ~110,000; 1970: 1,102,620) — sibling VERIFIED; cited for scale only.
- **S-3.** The sibling corpus's South Side/institutional bias warning — applied as standing caution: this brief must not let "Black Belt" stand for all Black Chicago (§11).
- **S-4.** The Bronzeville 1922-vs-1930 origin conflict — inherited as DISPUTED [C-18].

Nothing in §§05–11 that carries this brief's original argument rests on sibling authority alone.

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## 20 · Claims by Grade

| Grade | Count | Share |
|---|---|---|
| VERIFIED | 14 | 48% |
| SUPPORTED | 11 | 38% |
| PROVISIONAL | 1 | 3% |
| DISPUTED | 1 | 3% |
| UNRESOLVED | 2 | 7% |

| Grade | Count | Share |
|---|---|---|
| **Total** | **29** | |

(See `claim-ledger.json` for the full register.)

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## 21 · WHAT THE EVIDENCE ESTABLISHES

1. "Black Belt" began as a Southern soil name (Alabama/Mississippi dark-soil cotton crescent), became a plantation-slavery and Black-majority-county term, and was a recognized racial-geography label by Du Bois's 1903 "Of the Black Belt."
2. By 1922 the term was established Chicago vernacular for the South Side Black district — proven by the riot commission's scare-quoted "so-called 'Black Belt'" and a *Chicago Defender* column's ordinary use of "Black Belt of Chicago."
3. The belt's boundaries moved by era and source: c.1890 (24th–35th, Federal–State); c.1900–1910 (22nd–31st, State corridor); 1919 riot district (22nd–39th / 39th–55th, with contested zone); 1920s (State–Cottage Grove, 31st–47th); 1940s (Cermak–South Chicago Ave., LaSalle–lake); retrospective postwar reach (39th–95th).
4. The belt was a concentration, never a monoculture: ~90% of Black Chicagoans lived in it (1922) while Black residents were ~10% of its 1910 polygon's population.
5. "Black Ghetto," "Black Metropolis," and "Bronzeville" named different things: imposed zone, Black institutional city, chosen name.
6. "Bronzeville" was a deliberate 1930 Black-press counternaming (James J. Gentry, *Chicago Bee*; *Defender* from 1932) that displaced "Black Belt" in living use after World War II.

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## 22 · WHAT THE EVIDENCE SUGGESTS

1. The Southern term likely reached Chicago with the Great Migration's people and their Southern vocabulary — but the documentary chain is missing; white journalists and Chicago School sociologists are equally plausible vectors.
2. Common Chicago use likely predates 1922 by several years (the scare quotes imply established vernacular), with the 1910s the most probable decade of fixation.
3. The postwar fade tracks the Second Great Migration's geography: once Black Chicago could not fit in one South Side strip — West Side growth, farther-south expansion — the singular "belt" stopped describing reality and survived as history and memory.
4. The 1930 Bronzeville coinage is best-supported, but the unresolved 1922 account leaves the door open for earlier informal use.

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## 23 · WHAT REMAINS DISPUTED OR UNKNOWN

- The transfer mechanism (migrants vs. media vs. sociologists) — PROVISIONAL at best.
- The earliest dated Chicago use — UNRESOLVED; the 1910s are unsearched in primary newspapers.
- Bronzeville's exact first use (1922 vs. 1930) — DISPUTED.
- Whether federal housing agencies' own documents used the term for Chicago — UNRESOLVED in this pass.
- Block-level historical boundaries — beyond what the sources give; a GIS reconstruction task, not a reading task.

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## 24 · WHAT CTL SHOULD RESEARCH NEXT

1. **Primary-newspaper sweep, 1915–1925:** date the first *Defender*, *Bee*, *Tribune*, and *Daily News* uses of "Black Belt" for Chicago; settle U-1 and sharpen the transfer story.
2. **Transfer-chain research:** Southern Black newspapers, migrant letters (e.g., *Defender* "Letters from the South"), and Chicago Urban League case files for the phrase in migrants' own vocabulary before Chicago print use.
3. **GIS boundary reconstruction:** build block-level polygons per era from census EDs, the 1922 commission maps, and the 1926 Social Base Map of Chicago — with source-purpose metadata on every polygon, per the graph rule that only VERIFIED relationships ingest as verified.
4. **HOLC/FHA document check:** determine whether federal agencies used "Black Belt" for Chicago or only the mechanisms that enclosed it.
5. **Bronzeville first-use verification:** locate a dated 1922 or 1930 primary newspaper instance to close the naming dispute.
6. **Oral-history layer:** expand the Timuel Black-class testimony file — resident uses of the term across generations — so the "city within a city" meaning is evidenced beyond a single voice.

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## 25 · About This Brief

**ID:** CTL-RB-CHI-000004 · **Title:** The Black Belt: Name, Geography and Change · **Question:** What did the term "Black Belt" mean historically, and how did its geography change? · **Scope:** Chicago, c. 1900–present, with Southern term history as needed. **Method:** evidence-first; primary sources → archives → government/data → institutions → historical newspapers → scholarship. **Grades:** VERIFIED / SUPPORTED / PROVISIONAL / DISPUTED / UNRESOLVED. **Package:** `brief.md`, `claim-ledger.json`, `entities.json`, `relationships.json`, `visuals.md` (+`visuals/`), `sources.md`, `red-team.md`. **Companion files:** the claim ledger holds every graded claim; the red-team report holds the adversarial audit. **How to cite:** CultureTechLens Research Brief CTL-RB-CHI-000004, "The Black Belt: Name, Geography and Change" (2026-09-28). Grades travel with claims: do not cite a SUPPORTED claim as VERIFIED. **Limitations:** earliest Chicago print use and the term-transfer

mechanism are unresolved; boundary polygons are source-specific, never definitive. **Branding:** CULTURETECHLENS · "Culture, Clearly Seen." · Black Cultural Intelligence.

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*Word count (§§01–22): 3,999 — within the 1,500–4,000 range.*

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## References

Evidence hierarchy: primary sources → archives → government/data → institutions → historical newspapers → scholarship. Search snippets and weak aggregators are never evidence; they appear below only in the "rejected/consulted" list.

### Primary sources


1. **Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot* (University of Chicago Press, September 1922).** Public-domain transcription via Project Gutenberg (derived from Internet Archive scan). Supplies the scare-quoted "so-called 'Black Belt,'" the 1919 riot-district definitions, the ~90% residency figure, the Roosevelt–39th/Wentworth–lake population counts, and the 1910/1920 Black-population, riot-geography, bombed-home, church, housing, and institution maps. URL: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/57343/57343-h/57343-h.htm
2. **W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Chapter VII "Of the Black Belt" (1903).** Full text via americanliterature.com. Literary codification of the Southern term as racial geography. URL: https://americanliterature.com/author/web-du-bois/book/the-souls-of-black-folk/vii
3. **National Park Service, Black Metropolis Thematic National Register Nomination (received 1985-11-07).** Uses "Black Belt" in quotes for the historic "long narrow strip" (Van Buren–39th); distinguishes the Black Metropolis commercial/institutional core. URL: https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/NRHP/64000173_text
4. **St. Clair Drake & Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (1945).** Full-text excerpts via Everand; p.77 quotation corroborated by a Harvard dissertation. "The Black Belt became the Black Metropolis"; "center of the Black Belt — at Chicago's 47th St. and South Parkway."


### Archives


1. **Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division — FSA-OWI Collection.** Item records: Russell Lee, "Apartment building in Negro section of Chicago, Illinois" (1941-04, LC item 2017743610; rights: "No known restrictions"); Edwin Rosskam, "Apartment building now subdivided into 'kitchenettes,' Chicago, Illinois" (1941, LC item 2017729580; "No known restrictions"); Russell Lee, "Vacant lots and apartment buildings in Negro section of Chicago, Illinois" (1941, LC item 2017743630; "No known restrictions"). Item URLs: https://

www.loc.gov/item/2017743610/ · https://www.loc.gov/item/2017729580/ · https://www.loc.gov/item/2017743630/

2. **LOC African-American Mosaic exhibition, "Chicago: Destination for the Great Migration" (2003).** Captions a Lee photograph "Apartment Building in Chicago's 'Black Belt'" and glosses the district's internal class geography (poorest north, elite south). Mirror accessed: igmlnet.uohyd.ac.in (LOC exhibition page).
3. **University of Chicago official YouTube channel, "Growing up in Chicago's 'Black Belt' — Timuel Black."** Oral-history testimony ("a city within a city"); credits: Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xqn5OmF23HY

## Government / data

1. **City of Chicago, *Chicago Black Renaissance Literary Movement* landmark report (PDF).** Pre-1900 settlement geography: 1880s (16th–24th, west of State); by 1890 (24th–35th, Federal–State); 1920s expansion into Grand Boulevard/Washington Park. URL: https://www.chicago.gov/dam/city/depts/zlup/Historic_Preservation/Publications/Chicago_Black_Renaissance_Literary_Movement_Report.pdf
2. **Chicago Urban League, *CULtivate Part 1: Residential Segregation and Housing/Transportation* (2019, PDF).** Synthesizes census data into working polygons: 1920s (State–Cottage Grove, 31st–47th); 1940s (Cermak–South Chicago Ave., LaSalle–lake); 1950s West Side growth. URL: https://chiul.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/CULtivate-Part-1_Residential-Segregation-and-Housing-Transportation_Full-Draft_FINAL.pdf

## Institutional references

1. **Encyclopedia of Chicago, "Black Belt" entry.** Usage period "from the turn of the 20th century until after World War II"; original corridor 22nd–31st along State; retrospective expansion 39th–95th (Dan Ryan–lake). Bibliography: CCRR 1922, Drake & Cayton, Philpott. URL: http://encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org:80/pages/140.html
2. **Encyclopedia of Chicago, "Bronzeville" entry (Christopher Robert Reed).** Media labels ("Black Belt," "Black Ghetto," slur) and resident resentment; Gentry 1930 coinage; Bee 1930 Mayor contest; 1932 Defender move; c.1925 Second/Third Ward bounds (22nd–51st, Cottage Grove–Rock Island RR). URL: http://encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org:80/pages/171.html
3. **Chicago Race Riot of 1919 Commemoration Project.** "A narrow strip that came to be known as the 'Black Belt'"; "In the 1930s, this neighborhood came to be called Bronzeville"; 1917 Tribune survey excerpt (22nd–63rd district; Rev. L. K. Williams overcrowding quote).
4. **UIC Mapping Care project, "A Man Steps Into Nursing Field…" page.** Reproduces/cites Dr. A. Wilberforce Williams's 1922 *Chicago Defender* column describing Michael Reese Hospital in the center of Chicago's "Black Belt"; includes a March 8, 1952 Defender citation (not independently verified as term evidence). URL: https://www.mappingcare.digital.uic.edu/page/man-steps-into-nursing-field-and-finds-his-opportunities-plentiful-the-chicago-defender

## Historical newspapers (via institutional projects)

1. ***Chicago Defender*, 1922 (A. Wilberforce Williams column)** — via source 13.
2. ***Chicago Tribune*, 1917 (district survey)** — via source 12's excerpt. Note: the excerpt found does not contain the term "Black Belt."

## Scholarship / journalism

1. **Logan, J. et al., "Emergent Ghettos: Black Neighborhoods in New York and Chicago, 1880–1940" (peer-reviewed; PMC4597788, 2015).** The 1922 commission's 1910 "Black Belt" aggregation (12th–55th, Wentworth–Indiana, ~10% Black); enumeration-unit effects on perceived concentration. URL: https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4597788/
2. **Chicago Magazine (2019, centennial coverage).** 1919 Black Belt summarized as 22nd–39th (Wentworth–State). Reputable journalism; corroborates the commission's northern riot polygon.
3. **ResearchGate, "Reconsidering the Southern Black Belt" (peer-reviewed article).** Soil-first origin of the Southern term; plantation/demographic layering.
4. **ResearchGate, Chicago School sociology article (secondary).** Park and Burgess's application of "Black Belt" to Chicago's South Side territory.
5. **MDPI *Land* (2026), Black Belt counties study.** Plantation slavery giving the region its demographic signature.
6. **WTTW (Chicago PBS), "Chicago's South Side with Geoffrey Baer."** Institutional documentary covering South Side neighborhoods including Bronzeville; geographic context. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5s-_v8lsS8

## Sibling CTL material (marked SIBLING-DERIVED in the brief)

1. **CTL-DR-BCI-001** (research-brief.md, gaps.md, red-team.md) — settlement corridors, housing-restriction mechanisms, population figures (1910: 44,103; 1920: ~110,000; 1970: 1,102,620), corpus-bias warnings, Bronzeville 1922-vs-1930 conflict note.
2. **CTL-DR-BVM-005** (Bronzeville: Black Metropolis flagship) — commercial-corridor and institutional context.

## Consulted but rejected as evidence

- A weak general website asserting migrants "took the term" north, citing Richard Wright — rejected (no date, no primary citation); the transfer claim stays PROVISIONAL.
- Search-result snippets for any factual proposition — never cited.
- Wikipedia ("Black Belt (Chicago)") — consulted for leads only; its 75%-figure citation to the Encyclopedia of Chicago is noted but not independently relied on.
- AI-generated "documentary" videos about Bronzeville (e.g., a 1955-recreation video carrying an explicit AI notice) — excluded per the video directive.

- Unknown-provenance YouTube essay channels on Bronzeville/Great Migration topics — excluded despite plausible sourcing, per the channel-authority rule.