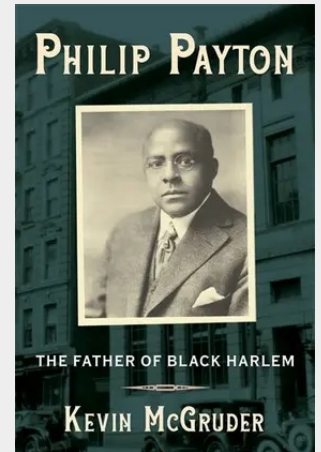


McGruder

Philip Payton

The Father of Black Harlem

At the turn of the early twentieth century, Harlem—the iconic Black neighborhood—was predominantly white. The Black real estate entrepreneur Philip Payton played a central role in Harlem's transformation. He founded the Afro-American Realty Company in 1903, vowing to vanquish housing discrimination. Yet this ambitious mission faltered as Payton faced the constraints of white capitalist power structures. In this biography, Kevin McGruder explores Payton's career and its implications for the history of residential segregation. Payton stood up for the right of Black people to live in Harlem in the face of vocal white resistance. Through skillful use of print media, he branded Harlem as a Black community and attracted interest from those interested in racial uplift. Yet while Payton "opened" Harlem streets, his business model depended on continued racial segregation. Like white real estate investors, he benefitted from the lack of housing options available to desperate Black tenants by charging higher rents. Payton developed a specialty in renting all-Black buildings, rather than the integrated buildings he had once envisioned, and his personal successes ultimately entrenched Manhattan's racial boundaries. McGruder highlights what Payton's story shows about the limits of seeking advancement through enterprise in a capitalist system deeply implicated in racial inequality. At a time when understanding the roots of residential segregation has become increasingly urgent, this biography sheds new light on the man and the forces that shaped Harlem.



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