

# A history of planning and transportation in Washington Park

In this report, we will seek to get a better understanding of history. Our research is inspired by questions Eve Ewing posed in *Ghosts in the Schoolyard*:

What is the history that has brought us to this moment? How can we learn more about that history from those who have lived it? What does this institution [or institutions] represent for the communities closest to it? Who gets to make decisions here, and how do race, power, and identity inform the answer to that question?

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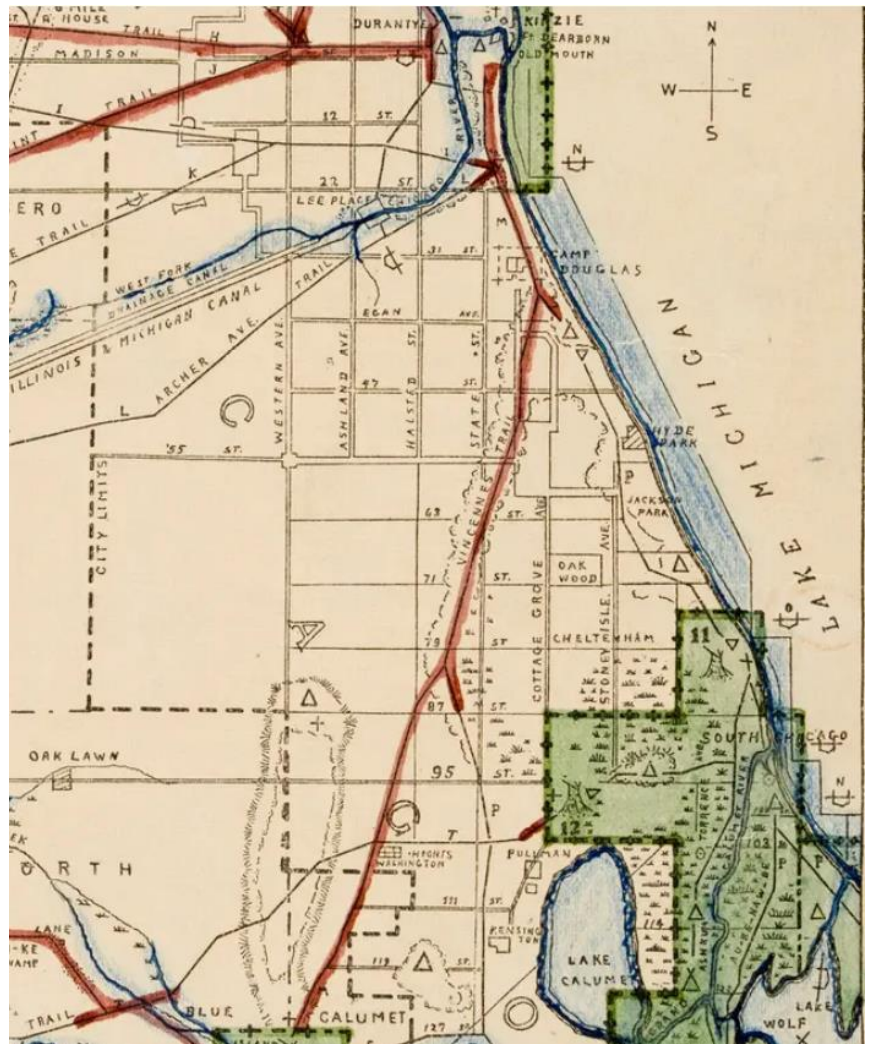
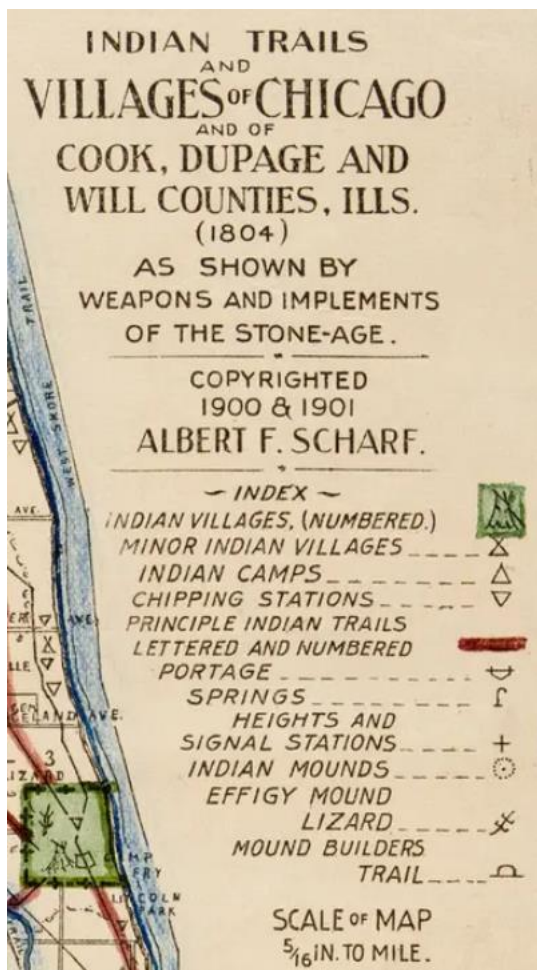
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## Early transportation in Chicago and Washington Park

Prior to Chicago’s incorporation as a village, the low-lying swampy area of Washington Park was on the path of an important native American trail. Glacial melt had formed natural high grounds, sitting just 10 or 15 feet above the swamplier land, which formed some of the pathways used by people who began to inhabit the area about 11,000 years ago.<sup>1</sup> Early maps of Chicago indicate that the path cutting through Washington Park was given the name “Vincennes Trail,” after a French trader in Indiana. The trail connected Camp Douglas (near present-day Ellis Park) to Blue Island. Vincennes Avenue, where it exists today, follows the original path. Several tribes, including the Illini, Potawatomi, and Fox used Chicago as a gathering place.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/jan/17/native-american-routes-the-ancient-trails-hidden-in-chicagos-grid-system>



Source: South Side section of a map of American Indian trails and villages in 1804. Map by Albert F. Scharf, 1900-1901. Villages highlighted in green; principle trails in red and waterways in blue. Photograph: Chicago History Museum/Getty Images <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/jan/17/native-american-routes-the-ancient-trails-hidden-in-chicagos-grid-system>

The Chicago area was no exception to the custom of using treaties to force indigenous people from land across the US between the years 1778 and 1871. Various treaties laid claim to land in the area beginning with the Treaty of Greenville in 1795, the Treaty of St. Louis in 1816, the Treaty of Chicago in 1821, and two treaties in 1833. After conflicts erupted over disputed treaties, the U.S. government forcibly removed Indian inhabitants under the Indian Removal Act of 1830, pushing them west of the Mississippi River and north to Wisconsin. That same year, surveying for a potential canal to connect the Great Lakes to the Des Plaines River led to wild land speculation whose bubble was burst in 1837, and Chicago's booming growth slowed to a trickle. The City of Chicago was incorporated as a village that same year, but the area around Washington park was not annexed until 1889.

French colonists had brought enslaved Africans from Haiti to Illinois Country (present day Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, and Wisconsin) as early as 1720.<sup>2</sup> In 1783, Virginia ceded the Northwest Territory to the United States and allowed for free inhabitants to have their possessions and titles retained and protected – and that included the enslaved people who were considered to be possessions. In 1787, Congress passed an ordinance for the territory northwest of the Ohio River which declared: "There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in said territory, otherwise than in punishment of crimes, whereof the party shall have been convicted." Angered by this, owners of enslaved people worked to change the laws. Many feared that if Illinois/Indiana did not allow for the ownership of human beings, people would not move to the area.

A transition to indentured servitude was used to get around the law in 1807, allowing people to bring their enslaved people before a court clerk to sign a contract of indenture, typically for a period of ninety-nine years. If the person refused to sign, the owner had to "remove such slave to any state where such property could be legally held."<sup>3</sup> Illinois was admitted into the Union in 1818, at which point the Constitution did not allow for slavery or indentured servitude, and it rendered invalid any terms of servitude that were longer than one year. However, in 1819, the first General Assembly of the state passed what was known as "Black Laws." These laws did not allow for emancipation of Black or "mulatto" people by moving to the state without a certificate of freedom, which cost \$1,000 to secure in a court. Black people that were freed and current Black residents had to enter their names into a court system with evidence of their freedom. Employers were forbidden from hiring Black people without a certificate of freedom, and anyone without their certificate of freedom was subject to arrest and considered a runaway slave.<sup>4</sup>

As an important hub on the Underground Railroad, Chicago was considered a haven for people escaping from the south and west. While the "Black Laws" put restrictions on human rights, many people who escaped slavery were able to find work. With the constitution of 1848 that outlawed both slavery and indentured servitude, Illinois became a truly free state.<sup>5</sup> However, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act gave more rights to slave owners to re-capture people – even if they had certificates of freedom, and many Black Chicagoans continued on to Canada where they were protected by British Law.<sup>6</sup>

### Railroads, development, and Reconstruction

Much of Chicago's history is tied to the railroads, and the expansion of private railroad companies and developers. The Illinois Central Railroad opened its first Hyde Park station at 51st and Lake Park Avenue in 1856. An ordinance passed in 1858 allowing "horse railways" to operate on certain city streets for a period of 25 years.

Early railroads for freight purposes helped move grain and other goods efficiently across the region and helped fuel the hog industry stockyards. Railroad companies working with the Chicago Pork Packers' Association drew up and implemented plans for the Union Stock Yard and Transit Company, which opened in 1865 to the north and west of Washington Park. Enterprises grew around primary activities to

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.museum.state.il.us/RiverWeb/landings/Ambot/Archives/transactions/1901/IL-slavery.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.museum.state.il.us/RiverWeb/landings/Ambot/Archives/transactions/1901/IL-slavery.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.museum.state.il.us/RiverWeb/landings/Ambot/Archives/transactions/1901/IL-slavery.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.museum.state.il.us/RiverWeb/landings/Ambot/Archives/transactions/1901/IL-slavery.html>

<sup>6</sup> <http://encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1281.html>

cater to folks selling goods, animals, and meat. In the 1860s and 1870s, large numbers of Irish and Germans immigrated to Chicago to work in the railroad and meat-packing industries.

With the end of the Civil War in 1865, slavery was abolished but the path forward was difficult and unclear. Three days after suggesting that some Black men and those that had fought in the war should be given the right to vote, President Lincoln was assassinated.<sup>7</sup> Vice President Andrew Johnson took his place and rolled back some of Lincoln's more progressive policies. Land that had been confiscated and distributed to freed slaves was returned to prewar owners, and the southern states were free to govern as they saw appropriate. This resulted in "black codes," like those in Illinois from 1819, that restricted the freedom and movement of freed Black people. In response, Congress passed the Freedmen's Bureau and Civil Rights Bills and sent them to Johnson for his signature. He vetoed the bills, causing a major rupture with Congress, and the Civil Rights Bill of 1868 became the first bill signed into law over a presidential veto with two-thirds majority of Congress in support.

The Civil Rights Amendments (13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup>) passed between 1865 and 1870 abolished slavery, granted citizenship to African-Americans, and outlawed discrimination in voting rights. Unfortunately, there was no enforcement until the 1870 Enforcement Act and the 1871 Ku Klux Klan Act. Many states turned to violence, poll taxes, and literacy requirements to continue the oppression of freed Black people and inhibit their ascension to power. With the brutality of the Jim Crow laws and emergence of the violent Ku Klux Klan in 1865, murders increased and some Black southerners began to move north, often arriving in the Black Belt north of Washington Park.

In 1874, the Grand Boulevard Carriage Path was dug through the Washington Park area, now commonly known as Martin Luther King Boulevard. Expansion of horse-drawn streetcars and cable cars in the 1880s, followed by electric trolleys, both proved to be a boon to developers, who were benefitting from formerly swampy land that had recently been dredged. By 1887, cable cars reached as far south as 63<sup>rd</sup> Street on State Street and 67<sup>th</sup> Street on Cottage Grove.

By the mid-1880s, the 25-year agreement for rail companies using many street rights-of-way was coming to an end. Rather than re-committing to another 25 years, the trend of using aldermanic power to get money and jobs grew; rail companies were forced to shift their business. With money going to bribes and non-rail needs, maintenance and service began to suffer.<sup>8</sup>

From 1890 to 1892, the South Side "Alley L" began to make its way south from the Loop to Jackson Park in time for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. Transit service in Chicago began with a collection of private companies and developers who built most of the existing train lines. With the line to the World's Fair, the South Side Elevated Railroad (originally Chicago and South Side Rapid Transit Railroad and now the green line south) laid some of the earliest sections of the CTA's "L." Growing businesses, industry, and increasing population provided reason to continue to expand train service.

In the 1890s, German Jews had begun to settle in eastern Washington Park and African-Americans began moving to the area south of Garfield, west of State Street. It was an early example of

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<sup>7</sup> Abraham Lincoln and Emancipation, Timeline. Library of Congress website:

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/abraham-lincoln-papers/articles-and-essays/abraham-lincoln-and-emancipation/timeline/>

<sup>8</sup> Barrett, Paul. "Chicago's Public Transportation Policy, 1900-1940s." Historical Research and Narrative. Online: <https://www.lib.niu.edu/2001/iht810125.html>



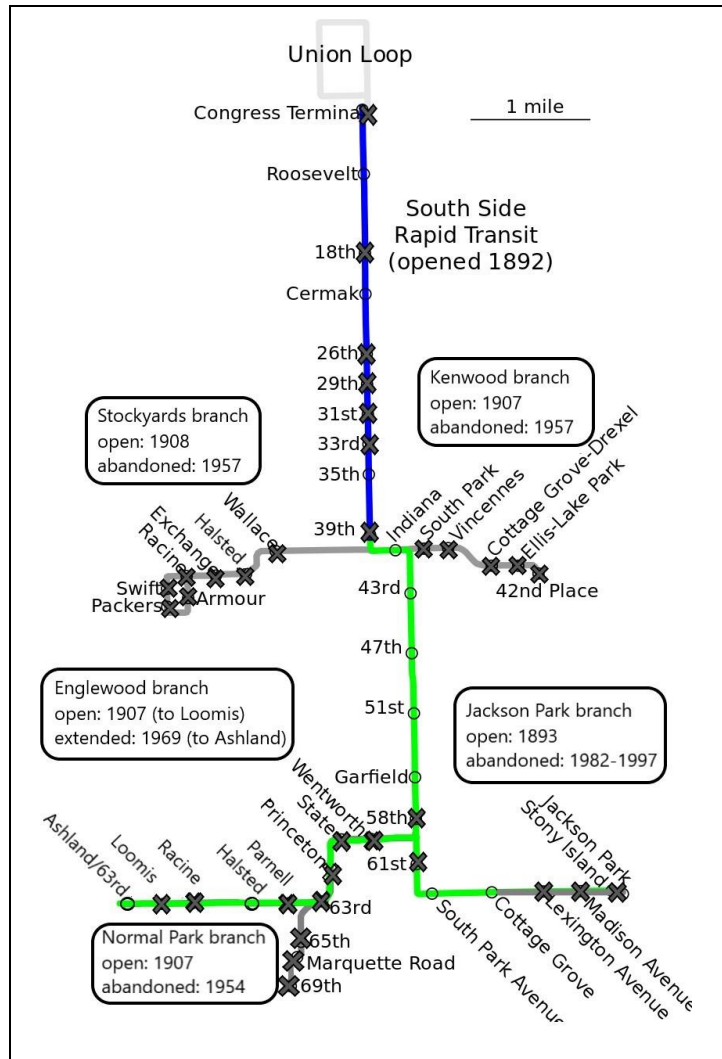
neighborhood diversity, but not everywhere was so welcoming. Many municipalities in Illinois were known to be “sundown towns,” where Black people were not allowed to be when the sun went down. The term came into use in the 1890s and thrived through the 1940s and later.<sup>9</sup> Violence was used as a means of restricting movement of Black people and keeping some areas White.

### Segregation, White violence, and a shift away from transit (1900 – 1920s)

In 1905, Robert Abbott founded the Chicago Defender, a newspaper famous for highlighting racial injustices and encouraging Black Southerners to move north. Railroad companies were busy and over the following three years, four additional branches of what is now the south green line were opened, including the Kenwood branch, the Stockyards branch, the Normal Park branch, and the Englewood (now Ashland) branch.

With the start of World War I, industries in the north faced significant labor shortages and European immigration was restricted. Recruiters looked to the south, encouraging African Americans to move north, where wages could be three times higher than those in the south. Between 1914 and 1919, approximately one million Black people had moved north, in what is known as the Great Migration. The Black population in Chicago grew by 148 percent.

Following the end of World War I, GIs came home to a different landscape and found fewer jobs available. Racially restrictive covenants (and presumably “sundown towns”) limited where African-Americans could live, and much of the available housing was over-priced and over-crowded. At the turn of the century, transportation was the driver for development. The crowded, “soot-filled” central area of the city was a major hub for business and activity. New rail lines helped affluent residents escape the over-crowding to lower density areas,<sup>10</sup> yet Black people were mostly denied this freedom due to a combination of racial covenants and physical violence perpetrated by White neighbors.



[Map](#) of the South Side Elevated Railroad and its branches as it appeared in 1921. The first section of the line that opened in 1892 is shown in blue; existing active rail shown in green; abandoned rail lines shown in grey. © 2008, Jeremy Atherton, modified to show closed stations.

<sup>9</sup> <https://news.wttw.com/2019/11/18/shedding-light-sundown-towns-propublica-illinois-investigates>

<sup>10</sup> <https://americanhistory.si.edu/america-on-the-move/essays/chicago-transit-metropolis>

Violence erupted across the country and the Ku Klux Klan revived its terror through lynchings across the south. After a young Black boy in Chicago was drowned for swimming in the White area of the beach in 1919, and police refused to arrest the White man identified for causing the drowning, a week of violence ensued as White gangs sought to prevent any encroachment on “their” land. In response, Black gangs formed to defend themselves. Sixteen days of violence became known as the “Red Summer” and the Chicago Commission on Race Relations found that the rioting was the result of several key issues: competition for jobs, inadequate housing options for Black people, inconsistent law enforcement and pervasive racial discrimination.<sup>11</sup>

While Irish organized crime had long ruled the streets of Chicago, young Sicilian boys on the near north side brought the ways of the Sicilian mafia to Chicago and built off the tactics of the Irish organized crime. During increasingly violent periods, the Irish realized that they needed to enlist other White Europeans to brutalize the African-Americans who ventured out of their lanes. Some even took to setting fire to Polish and Lithuanian neighborhoods, dressed in blackface, to bring Poles and Lithuanians to hate Black people.<sup>12</sup> When Prohibition pushed the production and sale of alcohol underground, the Italian Mafia and other gangs stepped in to fill the needs of thirsty Chicagoans. The gangs transformed into sophisticated criminal enterprises that excelled at bribing politicians.

In the 1920s, Chicago’s “Black Belt” began extending south into Washington Park as Whites fled the chaos of the city. The area south of 55<sup>th</sup> (Garfield Boulevard) was primarily White when Jesse Binga, founder of the first African-American bank in Chicago moved his family into a home just south of the park. The Washington Park subdivision and nearby White neighborhoods violently defended their exclusivity and Binga’s home was bombed 5 times in two years.<sup>13</sup> The subdivision’s racial covenants were eventually struck down by the Supreme Court in 1940 *Hansberry vs. Lee*.

As White people left the central city, they closed many businesses. In 1924, the multiple companies running various train lines merged into the Chicago Rapid Transit (CRT) Company. Despite being in poor financial standing and seeing ridership losses, the CRT continued expanding. In 1926, they built a line to suburban Westchester, which was later abandoned. At the same time, many people were shifting from transit to driving, with the popularity and low cost of Ford’s Model T. Through the 1920s, the number of cars in Chicago quadrupled.<sup>14</sup> Transit ridership peaked in 1926, and as it fell after that point, city leaders began to look for ways to adapt the city for the private automobile. That same year, racially restrictive covenants were upheld by the Supreme Court.

In the decade that followed, increasing car usage led to high levels of congestion on city and suburban streets. The Chicago Motor Club, with assistance from the business-friendly Chicago Tribune, began to mobilize for the construction of urban highways.<sup>15</sup> In 1927, the Chicago Plan Commission proposed a system of highways radiating from the Loop that harkened to the arterial plans recommended in the 1909 *Plan of Chicago*.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/chicago-race-riot-of-1919>

<sup>12</sup> <http://encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1033.html>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/4134057.pdf?seq=1>

<sup>14</sup> <https://americanhistory.si.edu/america-on-the-move/essays/chicago-transit-metropolis>

<sup>15</sup> <https://americanhistory.si.edu/america-on-the-move/essays/chicago-transit-metropolis>

During the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs included assistance to the homeowners, whose mortgages were threatened. The Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) was a government-sponsored corporation that was part of the New Deal, created in 1933, to save homes from foreclosure. While there were Black homeowners, they were limited in number and the huge protective measures to save people from losing their homes were benefits that extended primarily to White people.

As more African-Americans continued to move north to Chicago, housing was stressed even further and some families pushed the restricted boundaries of where to live. Most simply moved from one slum to another - where there was least resistance.<sup>16</sup> The over-crowded and unhealthy conditions in many tenements led to the formation of the Chicago Housing Authority in 1937. At the Federal level, the Federal Housing Act classified "any area where dwellings predominate which, by reason of dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangements or design, lack of ventilation, light or sanitation facilities, or any combination of these factors" as a "slum." The exact conditions that resulted from exclusionary policies were given a name.

### Mid-century: highways, planning and urban renewal

While the depression slowed growth, it did not squelch the desire for auto-mobility. In 1940, the city council approved a plan for highways "radiating from downtown Chicago that is nearly identical to what was eventually built."<sup>17</sup> However, World War II pulled resources from that effort and growth slowed. With unabated housing challenges, a neighborhood on the north side, known as "Little Hell" saw the city's first public housing project, named after Francis Cabrini, the first American-born saint. It was an integrated project: 75% White and 25% Black. Yet, post-war migration from the south continued with an additional 200,000 African-Americans and the need for housing grew stronger. Around the same time period, there were two government programs to relocate people to Chicago: in the mid-1940s, interned Japanese Americans were placed in interior cities; and in the early 1950s, the policy to urbanize and "decommunalize" American Indians by encouraging those of the Plains and Upper Midwest to move to the city.<sup>18</sup>

In 1940, the federal Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) created the first "redlined" maps of Chicago, identifying areas by racial composition for risk in home security mortgages, making it extremely difficult for Black people or anyone in integrated neighborhoods to secure loans or generate wealth from home ownership. This created even more housing challenges for Black people in the area. Developers, real estate leaders, and professionals from the Metropolitan Planning and Housing Council (MHPC, now MPC) saw a potential opportunity to address the so-called "blight" by clearing slums and opening areas up for new development.<sup>19</sup> The Neighborhood Redevelopment Corporation Act (NRCA) of 1941 was passed with this intention, but it required landowners to acquire 60 percent of the properties in an area to use eminent domain and that proved to be too challenging.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1985-03-31-8501180279-story.html>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/440.html>

<sup>18</sup> [https://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=urban\\_pubs](https://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=urban_pubs)

<sup>19</sup> Dyja, Thomas. "The Third Coast: When Chicago Built the American Dream." Penguin Press, New York, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> The 1941 NRCA law was amended in 1953 to allow for use of eminent domain with the approval of 60 percent of the owners, rather than ownership.

After World War II, new highways and roads opened neighborhoods and suburbs not easily accessible by public transportation. The “result was white flight and the expansion of the South Side's African American neighborhoods well beyond the confines of the old Black Metropolis.”<sup>21</sup> When Mayor Martin Kennelly took office in 1947, the business community and MHPC supplied him with a legislative agenda for slum clearance and public housing. The business community, realtors, developers, and MPDH also lobbied at the state level. The Illinois General Assembly passed the Illinois Blighted Areas Redevelopment Act in 1947, creating a new agency called the Land Clearance Commission with the power to acquire “blighted” land by force and sell it to private developers at a steep discount.

Within twelve square miles in and around Chicago’s Bronzeville neighborhood, three major projects were taking shape: Mies van der Rohe’s Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) campus, Michael Reese Hospital, and the Lake Meadows housing development. Developers, business leaders, and MHPC created a coalition to advance the projects simultaneously: The South Side Planning Board, which did not include a single Bronzeville resident.

Continued shifts from transit to driving was creating two distinct problems in the 1940s: increased traffic congestion and financial troubles at transit companies. In 1945, an inter-governmental agreement created the Chicago Transit Authority to unify the privately operated rail lines. By 1947, CTA had purchased all assets and began operations and decisions about where service would be cut, and stations closed. Nearly 100 stations that had low ridership or were “uneconomical” were closed. While the city was spending money building highways, transit was required to be financially self-sufficient. The Garfield station was designated a “B” stop in 1949 when the CTA instituted A/B skip-stop system for low ridership routes. Maintenance and upgrades to service had to be paid from the fare box revenue. A combination of continued fare increases and service cutbacks pushed even more people into cars.

By the 1950s, three of the branches of the green line south were closed. In total, the green line south went from having 5 branches and 47 stations in 1910 to two branches and only 12 stations today. No north side lines have spacing as distant as the green line. The city moved forward clearing slums and, according to the Chicago Tribune, their programs created a model for the Federal Housing Act of 1949 to build “cheap, clean, modern projects throughout the city.”<sup>22</sup>

The traffic problems of the 1940s led to an emergence in the field of highway engineering. By the mid-1950s, 288 miles of highways had been built around Chicago, but concern was growing that there was not enough technical study for the highways to be done well – and be beneficial for the community. In 1955, Cook County Chairman Daniel Ryan secured passage of a major bond issue, and increased federal funding sources helped to expedite costly highway construction.<sup>23</sup> That same year, the City of Chicago and three other governmental agencies, created the Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS), and charged it with the task of planning the future transportation system for the Chicago metropolitan area.

The goal of CATS was to ensure desirable development of land, achieved through the following objectives: to increase [roadway] speed, increase safety, lower operating costs, economize on new construction, minimize disruption, and promote better land development.<sup>24</sup> While CATS was not heavily

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1177.html>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1985-03-31-8501180279-story.html>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/440.html>

<sup>24</sup> [https://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=urban\\_pubs](https://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=urban_pubs)



staffed with engineers, they followed in the path of prominent engineers to use data to guide decisions about how and where to build transportation infrastructure. Engineers of the time had been criticized for catering to “middle-income motorists who paid gasoline taxes over residents who paid bus fares and rent.”<sup>25</sup> Data bias favored the suburban White families driving to downtown while Black families could not move to many of those suburban communities for fear of violence.

The population of Washington Park peaked at 56,000 in 1950, prior to significant clearing of overcrowded homes. A 1955 Amendment to the Blighted Areas Redevelopment Act allowed for clearing land for non-residential uses, including highways. One major highway, whose construction cleared slums and created a clear divide between White and Black neighborhoods on the south side was the Dan Ryan Expressway. Initial plans for the Dan Ryan had its path going through the Bridgeport neighborhood, but in 1956, “Mayor Richard J. Daley and the city council moved the route to Wentworth Avenue along the eastern edge of Armour Square and Fuller Park,”<sup>26</sup> to go through a Black neighborhood, rather than the White one. The Dan Ryan Expressway opened to 95th Street in 1961–62. The Dan Ryan has 14 lanes in one section, including express lanes, making it one of the world's widest roads.<sup>27</sup>

While the low-rise housing development in Little Hell was considered a success, that style of development was expensive and the CHA shifted to lower cost high-rise construction on a massive scale, with large expansions to the Cabrini homes and huge new projects along the State Street Corridor. The State Street Corridor included the Robert Taylor Homes, Stateway Gardens, Harold Ickes Homes, Dearborn Homes and Hillard Homes. The Robert Taylor Homes were ironically named after a CHA Board member who resigned in 1950 when the City Council would not place homes in racially integrated locations. The project included 28 buildings of 16 stories each in U-shaped clusters that stretched for two miles. It was completed in 1962, casting its shadows upon the newly built Dan Ryan.



“Urban renewal took various forms, but the South Side's landscape was most dramatically affected by public housing; institutional expansion in the form of IIT, the University of Chicago, and various hospitals; and the construction of the Dan Ryan and Stevenson Expressways.”<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Barrett and Rose 1999, 418

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/11536.html>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/440.html>

<sup>28</sup> <http://encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1177.html>

[https://publications.newberry.org/makebigplans/plan\\_images/aerial-view-dan-ryan-expressway-1964](https://publications.newberry.org/makebigplans/plan_images/aerial-view-dan-ryan-expressway-1964)

Even with over 27,000 residents, not everyone who wanted housing could be placed in the Robert Taylor Homes. Priority was given to families with children, which created a new pressure on local schools. There were so many children at the projects, that kids had to wait “seven and eight deep” to use playground equipment. As Eve Ewing writes, “Rather than allow students to enroll in White schools, district officials created ‘double shifts’ where Black students attended school for only part of the day, then traded off with a second group.”<sup>29</sup> Between 1953 and 1966, Chicago Public Schools constructed 208 elementary schools and 13 high schools. In 1960, CHA officials told CPS to expect an increase of 10,000 students from the Robert Taylor Homes. CPS built schools, but not enough, insisting that the number was inflated; they built enough schools to accommodate only 7,765 students.<sup>30</sup>

The clearly inferior, overcrowded and under-funded schools in the Black community added to the growing frustrations in the early 1960s for basic civil rights. A protest in 1963 culminated in a mass walkout with over 220,000 students staying out of school. A 1964 report on CPS found that 90 percent of Black students were enrolled in schools that were at least 90 percent Black, with 26,000 vacant seats in White schools, and the report recommended transporting kids to those seats from over-crowded schools. The recommendations were never implemented.<sup>31</sup>

In 1965, community organizers filed a civil rights complaint alleging racist and discriminatory practices at CPS, which prevented the city from receiving federal funding. Continued marches protesting unequal and segregated schools, led by Black schoolteacher and convener of the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations (CCCCO), Al Raby, kept the pressure on Mayor Daley. Because of the civil rights complaint, Mayor Daley had to meet personally with President Lyndon Johnson to negotiate a release of federal funds. Raby and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) worked with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to bring national attention to their plights in Chicago. Their demands expanded to fair housing and the Chicago Freedom Movement was born.<sup>32</sup>

That same year, the city and park district rolled out plans to widen South Lake Shore Drive to eight lanes from 47<sup>th</sup> and 67<sup>th</sup> streets and reroute it directly through Jackson Park.<sup>33</sup> The city had already cut down approximately 500 trees when Hyde Park activists clung to remaining trees to stop the chainsaws. Remarkably, Mayor Daley backed down and called for a better plan. The field of planning was growing in importance. The city’s new Planning Department had unveiled the 1966 Comprehensive Plan of Chicago following the 1957 Zoning Code. The 1966 Plan expanded the city’s growth focus outside of the central core and was focused on policies.

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<sup>29</sup> Ewing, E. L. *Ghosts in the schoolyard: Racism and school closings on Chicago’s South Side*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Ewing, E. L. *Ghosts in the schoolyard: Racism and school closings on Chicago’s South Side*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Ewing, E. L. *Ghosts in the schoolyard: Racism and school closings on Chicago’s South Side*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2018.

<sup>32</sup> <http://encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/221.html>

<sup>33</sup> Hunt and Devries. *Planning in Chicago* page 49.

The Chicago Freedom Movement, known as the “most ambitious civil rights campaign in the northern United States,” continued with marches and pressure on city government through early 1967 when an exhausted Mayor sat down with Dr. King and various housing boards with promises to improve housing: reduce segregation, build public housing in White neighborhoods, and fair lending practices. While promises made were not necessarily kept in Chicago, the agreement is credited with providing inspiration for the Fair Housing Act passed by the U.S. Congress in 1968.<sup>34</sup>

### Failures of urban renewal and the War on Drugs

An early critique of Chicago’s urban renewal efforts indicated that there was not enough attention to housing the most vulnerable in our society. While urban renewal efforts claimed to address the horrendous living conditions of over-crowding, the plans for clearing and building anew did not significantly increase the number of housing units and failed to improve conditions. And as Black people were cleared from densely populated areas, with few neighborhoods amenable to their arrival, the over-crowding simply intensified – albeit in different locations.

On the other side of globe, the U.S. was in the midst of the Vietnam War, with growing opposition and unrest over our country’s involvement. In a Chicago speech in March of 1967, Dr. King publicly condemned the Vietnam War, aligning the anti-war movement and the civil rights movement. While hippies were celebrating the Summer of Love, the poor housing conditions, abusive policing, and institutionalized unemployment in the Black community culminated in uprisings across the United States in the summer of 1967 – the “long, hot summer.”

The Kerner Commission investigating the causes of the “rioting” found that persistent societal inequalities were to blame. Specifically, it said that White racism was to blame; White institutions created ghettos and maintained them.<sup>35</sup> The report preferred the term “rebellion” over “riot” because they felt that riots were irrational and this involved rational people who had no choice to get the government’s attention. The researchers trying to identify who was most likely to riot were surprised to find that poverty was not what made a person more likely to riot; rather, having experienced or witnessed police brutality was the factor that made someone most likely to “riot.”<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, most of the recommendations from the Kerner Commission to address civil unrest were ignored.

The following year, Chicago erupted with “rebellions” again following the assassination of Dr. King in Memphis. Destruction of property began on the West side, along West Madison Street. Forty-eight hours of protests and rioting spread to other parts of the city. Two South Side gangs that had worked with Dr. King in 1966, the Blackstone Rangers and the East Side Disciples, are credited with limiting destruction in their neighborhoods as they came together in peace.<sup>37</sup> Mayor Daley gave orders to police to kill any arsonist or people holding Molotov cocktails.<sup>38</sup> Across the US, 39 people were killed – all but five were Black.

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/chicago-freedom-movement-1965-1967/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.history.com/news/race-riots-kerner-commission-findings-suppressed-lbj>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.history.com/news/race-riots-kerner-commission-findings-suppressed-lbj>

<sup>37</sup> Risen, Clay (2009). "April 5: 'There are no ghettos in Chicago'". [A nation on fire : America in the wake of the King assassination](#). Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons. ISBN 978-0-470-17710-5.

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.chicagotribune.com/nation-world/chi-chicagodays-kingriots-story-story.html>

In the aftermath of the unrest, President Lyndon B. Johnson urged Congress to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1968 – an expansion of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. A day after Dr. King’s funeral, the Fair Housing Act was passed, prohibiting discrimination concerning the sale, rental, or financing of housing based on race, religion, national origin, and sex. Despite legislative successes, increased deindustrialization, food shortages and newly unhoused people had Chicago on edge in the summer of 1968. Robert F. Kennedy, who had lambasted Dr. King’s assassination two months prior, was assassinated in June after winning two states as the Democratic presidential candidate.

As the site for the Democratic National Convention that summer, Mayor Daley’s police were called out again with tensions high against the Vietnam War and racial injustice. When the mayor refused to issue permits for protesters, and instead called in 12,000 cops, 6,000 soldiers and 6,000 members of the National Guard, there was nothing the protesters could do legally and the police responded with teargas and clubs.<sup>39</sup> The brutal attacks on protesters were seen on television across the nation and sparked widespread opposition to the War.

In the fall of 1968, the Black Panther Party (BPP) of Chicago emerged on the city’s West Side denouncing racism, capitalism, and police brutality. The party quickly grew in numbers and aligned efforts with White and Latino allies – called the “Rainbow Coalition.” Beginning with a successful run in Oakland, the BPP expanded free breakfasts for schoolchildren in cities across the US, feeding tens of thousands of kids and providing a model for today’s government-led school breakfast programs.<sup>40</sup> On the night before the program’s launch in Chicago, police officers raided the church where the children’s food was being stored, mashed it up and urinated on it.<sup>41</sup> The Chicago BPP was decimated in December of 1969 when the FBI assassinated party leaders Mark Clark and Fred Hampton, who was asleep in his bed.

The high-rise housing projects that were built as a “solution” to over-crowded housing, quickly deteriorated with neglect. When elevators failed, walking to the 16<sup>th</sup> floor – or any high-level floor—was exhausting and dangerous. Upkeep of the projects had not been sufficiently budgeted for, and they were left to crumble. As history seems to repeat itself, the miserable living conditions fueled much of the local civil rights activity. Passenger traffic on the Jackson Park branch of the green line began to decrease dramatically in the late 1960s. The Dorchester station was closed on January 13, 1973 in one of several rounds of cost-cutting that year that included multiple station closures and service reductions.

President Nixon took office in 1969 amid tumultuous national conditions. Nixon saw drug use as a major public health concern and budgeted more money for treatment than criminalization. However, as reelection edged closer, anti-war hippies and civil rights activists were seen as barriers to his victory. Officials turned to drugs as a scapegoat for criminalizing both: hippies were associated with marijuana and LSD, Black people with heroin. Government crack-downs would disrupt the respective communities, providing reason to arrest leaders, break up meetings, and vilify them. A top Nixon aide later admitted that they had been lying about the drugs with these nefarious motivations.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> <http://www.todayfoundout.com/index.php/2015/08/this-day-in-history-august-28th-the-battle-of-michigan-avenue/>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.history.com/news/free-school-breakfast-black-panther-party>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00045600802683767>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.beaconbroadside.com/broadside/2019/05/when-the-war-on-drugs-devastated-atlanta-black-neighborhoods-teachers-filled-in-the-void.html>

In 1974, the federal funding program supporting urban renewal ended and was replaced by the Community Development Block Grant program. Two years later, Mayor Richard J. Daley died of a heart attack and was replaced by Michael A. Bilandic, a Daley supporter and Bridgeport alderman. Bilandic's waning popularity and a poorly handled snowstorm led to his upset in the Democratic primaries by Jane Byrne in 1979. Byrne reached out to the African-American community and her progressive politics and frustration with corruption led to a landslide victory.

Byrne tried to bring attention to housing conditions by moving into the Cabrini Green projects with her husband. "By moving into one of the most deprived areas she hoped to shine a light on the neglected side of the city and in turn hopefully prove that Chicago was a city worth investing in."<sup>43</sup> Her three-week stay raised awareness of the issues in the projects, but little change resulted, and some criticized the move as a "publicity stunt."

After a routine inspection of the bridge over the Illinois Central Railroad in 1982 found serious defects, CTA suspended service south of 61<sup>st</sup> Street on the Green Line's Woodlawn branch. By the end of the year, service had been restored to the University station through Mayor Byrne's \$2 million renovation. Mayor Byrne was criticized for not following through on her progressive platform and catering to the machine politics toward the end of her term. The primary race included Richard M. Daley and U.S. Representative Harold Washington. A massive campaign in the city's "Black Belt" to elect Harold Washington led to him edging out incumbent Byrne in the primary.

Washington's election in the fall was just as close, with racist themes running strong, and many White Democrats unsuccessfully backing a White Republican candidate. Washington sought to change the patronage system in Chicago but found himself at odds with his city council and unable to make significant changes. The national War on Drugs had continued under President Reagan, who passed the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act establishing mandatory minimum sentences for drug crimes with huge disparities in punishment for crack (more commonly used by Black people) versus cocaine (more commonly used by White people). The law also "channeled \$2 billion into antidrug policing, permitted the death penalty for some drug crimes, and militarized narcotics control."<sup>44</sup>

Washington won re-election but died in office of a heart attack just a few months into his second term in 1987. Eugene Sawyer was contentiously selected to replace him as Mayor. He lost his reelection in 1989 to Richard M. Daley. A strong War on Drugs in Chicago in the mid-1990s focused on street gangs and targeted gang leadership. After arresting and convicting many people, the leaderless organizations fractured, and more gangs evolved. While the large, organized gangs of the 1980s maintained a semblance of order and protection for the community, smaller cliques were more concerned with respect and reputation.<sup>45</sup> The Robert Taylor Homes, whose residents were largely unemployed, suffered concentrated drug and gang activity and became a symbol for America's failed housing policies.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> <https://www.headstuff.org/culture/history/cabrini-green-mayor-jane-byrne/>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.beaconbroadside.com/broadside/2019/05/when-the-war-on-drugs-devastated-atlanta-black-neighborhoods-teachers-filled-in-the-void.html>

<sup>45</sup> <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2016/09/is-chicagos-ghastly-murder-rate-the-result-of-its-1990s-anti-gang-policies.html>

<sup>46</sup> <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/national/090698public-housing.html>



In 1992, the City of Chicago combined the Department of Urban Renewal with the Commercial District Development Commission to create the Community Development Commission. The younger Daley focused on revitalizing the downtown core for the business community but worked harder to build bridges in the Black community than his father had done. However, in the neighborhoods, tearing down high-rise housing projects and addressing school failures did little to improve life for Black Chicagoans.

Twelve years after the bridge deficiency discovery on the green line, a major renovation was planned in 1994. The project was controversial with debates over station closings, retention of nighttime “owl” service and when the reopening would occur. Rather than address the infrastructure needs in a piecemeal fashion as is currently being done on the Red-Purple Modernization project, the city closed every station on the green line for two years, leaving commuters out of luck. When the Green Line reopened, the “Jackson Park” branch was renamed the East 63<sup>rd</sup> Street branch, as it no longer serviced Jackson Park. Owl service was retained, but the fate of the tracks to the east remained in the air for another year.<sup>47</sup>

The CTA unveiled a plan to demolish the eastern section of the green line in 1996, rather than replace the bridge. While there was community opposition to the plan, one pastor, rumored to be on the receiving end of city property,<sup>48</sup> supported the track removal. Officials cited public opinion polls supporting demolition by 56 percent. Jacky Grimshaw of the Center for Neighborhood Technology was quoted by the Chicago Tribune: “To lose a fight on dishonest information, inaccurate information and outright lies is extremely disappointing. There is no way we can feel good about it.”<sup>49</sup> The following year, CTA moved forward with its plan to demolish the line. They gave less than 24 hours’ public notice before dismantling the 105-year-old train line.

From 1991 to 1997, federal support for transit fell by 59 percent – from \$41.5 million to \$17.2 million, and in 1998, it went to zero. CTA hired Booz-Allen Hamilton to study and propose network modifications to cut costs. The CTA Board adopted the report in June of 1997. Recommendations in the plan included eliminating “owl service” on the green line between the hours of 1:00 am and 4:00 am, which went into effect in 1997.

### African-American Exodus

While the Black population in Washington Park had been declining steadily since the 1970s, other parts of the city felt the population decline later – and more intensely. With the disappearance of so many of the neighborhood’s residents, schools became “underutilized” and there were fewer people to patronize local shops. Many of those who could afford to leave did and in the 2000s, the city saw the largest drop in African-American population in the country. By 2016, Chicago’s Black population had declined by 350,000 from its peak of nearly 1.2 million in 1980. A UIC report cited rising inequalities as a major reason for the “exodus.”<sup>50</sup>

The 2011 election of Rahm Emmanuel continued to bring attention to the downtown loop and prospective businesses without significant improvements for those living in the Washington Park area and surrounding neighborhoods. Later that year, Mayor Emmanuel announced school closures,

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.chicago-l.org/operations/lines/jacksonpark.html>

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.chicago-l.org/articles/woodlawn3.html>

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.chicago-l.org/articles/woodlawn3.html>

<sup>50</sup> [https://irrpp.uic.edu/pdf/publications/IRRPP\\_StateOfRacialJustice\\_FutureOfBlackChicago.pdf](https://irrpp.uic.edu/pdf/publications/IRRPP_StateOfRacialJustice_FutureOfBlackChicago.pdf)

including Dyett High School, which in 2008 had seen the largest percentage increase in students attending college in the entire CPS system.<sup>51</sup> The phased closures would result in all current students finishing their high school but no new students enrolling, with complete closure by the 2014-2015 school year.

In response, a coalition of parents, teachers, community members and organizations created the Coalition to Revitalize Dyett. Students filed a Title VI civil rights complaint. The Coalition developed a plan to keep Dyett open with a focus on global leadership and green technology. Under pressure from the community and a publicized hunger strike, CPS agreed to reopen Dyett for the 2016 academic year. CPS returned to the community for suggestions on a reimagined Dyett High School. After several contentious community meetings, the pleas for a focus on global leadership and green technology were ignored and CPS announced Dyett's opening with a focus on arts. The hunger strike continued, asking that the community's plan not be ignored. The hunger strike ended in September of 2015, after 34 days, although the community was not successful in getting CPS to use their plan.

In October of 2014, a teenager was shot by police at 41<sup>st</sup> and Pulaski. The city quietly paid the victim's family \$5 million. Under pressure from a whistleblower, a Cook County judge ordered release of police dashcam video in November of 2015, and the murder caught the attention of the nation. Hours before releasing the video, CPD Officer Jason van Dyke was charged with murder. The video showed him shooting Laquan McDonald 16 times as he walked away from officers, with many bullets still flying after he was down. Pent up anger and frustration led people to take to the streets to demand justice again.

Many point to the murder and associated cover-up as the turning point for Mayor Emmanuel's reelection possibilities,<sup>52</sup> and he decided not to run for a third term. A guilty conviction inevitably prevented further rioting in 2018. Mayor Lori Lightfoot was sworn into office the following year, promising reforms to the embattled police department. However, the CPD has been slow to change. Even with a new police chief, the protests and looting in the wake of George Floyd's murder are a reminder of how little progress has been made since the city's founding 183 years ago.

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<sup>51</sup> Ewing, Eve L. "Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and School Closings on Chicago's South Side." The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2018.

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-sudden-but-well-deserved-fall-of-rahm-emanuel>