Race, Space, and Riots in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles

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By 1949, two national programs were in place that would eventually increase racial apartheid in Chicago. During the Depression, well-meaning reformist urban housing experts had recommended clearing the worst urban slums and replacing them with subsidized public housing. (In 1937, federal legislation established the U.S. Public Housing Administration to further this end.) This plan made much sense for that era, characterized as it was by abandonment and vacancies caused by doubling up to economize. In the postwar period, this plan was anachronistically revived, but under drastically different conditions and with decidedly different beneficiaries. The 1949 Urban Redevelopment Act initiated a federal program, ostensibly designed to clear “blighted areas” and to stimulate their rebuilding with improved but still affordable housing. The scheme, however, had several basic defects.

First, clearance was to be undertaken at a time of a critical housing shortage and overcrowding in the so-called blighted areas, which were then disproportionately occupied by minorities. Put into practice in cities throughout the nation, this program became notorious as “Puerto Rican Removal” in New York, as “Negro Removal” in Chicago, and as “Mexican Removal” in Los Angeles. Furthermore, cities were empowered to select, condemn, and clear areas they determined to be “blighted,” which left the criteria vulnerable to decisions that depended more on potential real estate profits than on objective measures of relative deterioration.

Second, private developers were invited to buy the city-cleared land at bargain prices, in return for promising to build decent housing for poor or middle-income tenants. In 1949, a new agency, the Chicago Land Clearance Commission, was established and put in charge of acquiring properties in “slum areas,” clearing the land of structures (and residents), and reselling the vacant land to developers. This opened enormous opportunities for collusion between the city and major real estate interests. Furthermore, there were only loose controls over the uses to which the improved land could be put. Eventually, redevelopers concentrated on more profitable middle-income housing, or even high-income housing and commercial uses, rather than the affordable housing the law had required them to provide in return for their subsidies and generous loan terms.

Third, the law wisely required that persons to be displaced by “slum clearance” were to be relocated in standard housing before their homes were destroyed—a patent impossibility unless new public housing could first be built on vacant land. In actual practice, such vacant land was at a premium within the built-up limits of Chicago and, given the pattern of racial apartheid, was located in zones in or near resistant whites.
In 1949, the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), under a promising reformist administration, proposed to construct some 40,000 federally subsidized dwelling units on vacant sites to accommodate those who would be displaced by slum clearance. This proved impossible, temporally and politically. There was not sufficient time to clear and relocate simultaneously, which meant that residents of cleared zones were simply crowded into adjacent slums. But the political barriers were even more forbidding. Because the Chicago City Council had “veto” rights over site selection and white aldermen were adamantly opposed to introducing black residents into white areas—the only sites that were vacant—virtually no sites were approved.69

The struggle for public housing sites in integrated areas was thus decisively lost in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and Chicago’s efforts to construct public housing ground to a halt over the issue of segregation. Eventually, under new leadership, the CHA proceeded to construct a solid phalanx of projects that “thickened,” without dispersing, the existing black belts.

Of thirty-three CHA projects approved between 1950 and the mid-1960s, only one when completed was in an area less than 84 per cent black; all but seven were in tracts at least 95 per cent black; more than 98 per cent of apartments were in all-black neighbourhoods. The CHA…was building almost a solid corridor of low-rent housing along State Street and near-by streets…. By 1969 a judge found that CHA family housing was 99 per cent black-occupied, and that 99.5 per cent of its units were in black or transitional areas.70

Thus, the South Side black belt was solidified in its thickened form and expanded farther to the south—albeit skipping over the redevelopment efforts in the vicinity of the enclave of the University of Chicago, which created a mostly white interruption in its flow. White flight permitted a steady infusion of mostly middle-class blacks into the formerly Jewish South Shore.71

The West Side ghetto was flanked by public housing projects, divided by major highways and an enclave created for the University of Illinois Circle Campus, which displaced Italians as well as Latinos and blacks.72 A solid phalanx of mostly black-occupied high-rise public housing projects was built along the major east-west corridors of Roosevelt Road and Madison Avenue—the very streets that would later explode in the uprising of 1968.

All these developments were ignored in the Kerner Report issued in March 1968, only a month before the riots that followed King’s assassination. Its references to Chicago were confined to two anecdotes, neither of them accurately reported. The “white riot” that occurred in suburban Cicero in 1951, when whites
set fire to a house recently occupied by a black family and drove them out, is ignored, whereas the black protests in August 1964 in suburban Dixmoor receive coverage. There is only slight reference to a black “minor riot” in July 1966, which the authors attribute to a conflict between the police and West Side youths over the opening of fire hydrants. As we shall see in our next chapter, this account was inaccurate in the extreme.

South Side Border Wars Decline; West Side Tensions Build

By the 1960s, the border wars on the South Side had essentially been “won” by blacks, as white residents decamped. Indeed, the South Side black belt had taken over even more territory than it “needed,” although disinvestment and arson were creating significant zones of desolation, especially in the vicinity of the University of Chicago, which would use its role as the single largest property owner in Hyde Park and Kenwood to begin to “redevelop” the area and to push back the east-west border decisively to Cottage Grove Avenue (later to be renamed Martin Luther King Boulevard!), where it had stood in the 1940s. Some interracial housing was produced in Hyde Park–Kenwood in the aftermath, but under carefully class-controlled eligibility. Only the area south of 61st Street could not be “guarded.” Buildings on 63rd Street (which was by the 1960s a “black” commercial street) eventually were burned down—one of the few South Side arson targets in the 1968 uprising. The brunt of that uprising, however, would be experienced in the Second Ghetto.

Notes

1. Loic Wacquant, in a provocative article, identifies the period between 1915 and 1968 in northern ghettos as the era of free mobile labor, and the post-1968 period as the era of the hyperghetto—a return to semislavery through the imprisonment of chiefly male surplus labor. “From Slavery to Mass Incarceration,” New Left Review 13 (January/February 2002), pp. 41–60. His analysis fits Chicago and Detroit very well, although it may not be so neatly generalized to New York and Los Angeles.

One might use the military phrase “low-intensity war” to describe the interim period between the mid-1950s and mid-1960s in Chicago, during which there were forays and retreats but few confrontations involving great violence. Sporadic battles erupted at the expanding borders of the black belt on the South Side, as the South Shore, formerly the domain of a well-to-do white community including many Jewish residents and institutions, experienced “racial succession.” Attempts to prevent mass white withdrawal were mounted in an ultimately unsuccessful effort to stabilize the area’s interracial composition, but a rear-guard battle was won by the University of Chicago to insulate its Hyde Park vicinity from the entry of too many poor blacks. It would have been difficult to predict that, given the successful achievement of greater space and a strong reconstitution of the black metropolis’s multiclass community, that cumulative resentments might explode into racial warfare. Jobs had not yet disappeared from the area, and Black Muslims, among others, were engaged in rebuilding the commercial infrastructure.
That was not the case on the West Side, the much poorer Second Ghetto, which was absorbing into its ancient housing stock and its newer public housing projects minorities who could not afford the better housing and more organized community on the South Side. It was chiefly on the West Side that low-intensity warfare would be transformed into open hostilities after the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr., in April 1968. The signs of dissent were already apparent in the years before that massive response.

The Antecedents to the Race Riot of April 1968

Between the triumphant mid-1950s and the mid-1960s, the civil rights movement alternated between unrealistic hopes and more realistic despair occasioned by disappointing failures in President Johnson’s “War on Poverty” and escalating suppression of dissent against the war in Vietnam. Waskow’s From Race Riot to Sit-in, 1919 and the 1960s, is a good general source on the early 1960s, even though he failed to predict that, as the wind went out of the sails of the civil rights movement by the mid-1960s, sit-ins would be displaced by the new form of race riot—the ghetto uprising.

By far the best book dealing with the disillusionment of the civil rights movement in Chicago in 1966 and 1967, and thus of the factors that would eventually yield the 1968 ghetto uprising, is Alan B. Anderson and George Pickering’s Confronting the Color Line. Unfortunately, the book’s coverage ends by September 1967, some seven months before the explosive events of early April 1968. But their study demolishes the myths that blacks were “rioting for fun and profit” (one of the most egregiously derogatory characterizations of that dark moment in American race relations) or that the explosions were sudden, surprising, and irrational. They were riots of protest, frustration, and despair.

The somber conclusion of Anderson and Pickering’s detailed analysis of the hopes and mobilizations in Chicago that were unleashed by the civil rights movement (beginning in 1954 with the school desegregation decision and culminating in the 1964 civil rights law) is that by 1966–67 the struggles for open housing and school desegregation in Chicago had failed.

[T]he movement was strained internally and isolated politically. The leadership was uncertain of its mandate, its possibilities, and its support. . . . [T]he path was unclear in every direction. . . . [I]n the open housing marches, the Chicago civil rights movement had mobilized a minority, but it had gained broader civic support more in name than in fact. None of the various combinations of persuasion and coercion it had attempted had proved
effective. The movement had been unable to specify affirmative duties and unable to enact negative ones. The tensions among advocates of integration, desegregation, and black power had become open rifts. Thus, whether the terms were those of black dignity, constitutional duties, or white culture, the Chicago movement was encountering futility in relationship to every aspect of democratic social change.\(^4\)

We must ask how this sorry state had arrived, and why Martin Luther King, Jr., despite his best efforts, was unable to reverse its course. The answer to that question must be sought in the context of an overall “collapse” (or reworking) of the first phases of the civil rights movement.

Douglas McAdam has contrasted what he calls “the heyday of black insurgency 1961–65” with “the decline of black insurgency 1966–70.”\(^5\) He attributes the strength of the early period to the building of a diverse but increasingly organized, unified program by the four dominant organizations seeking reform (the NAACP, CORE, the SCLC, and, to a lesser extent, the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee [SNCC]). The monopoly that the NAACP had had over initiating the legal phase between 1954 and 1960 was broken, and during the next half decade, three-quarters of all initiated events were organized by the NAACP, CORE, or SCLC.\(^6\) McAdam attributes their success to the fact that they focused their activities on the South\(^7\) and on goals that had wide support in other regions of the country. They were therefore able to attract significant financial backing from northern whites.

It was not until movement-initiated actions diversified to other urban regions of the North and Midwest that white liberal support declined and a northern white backlash set in.\(^8\) Furthermore, the North already had numerous more radical (not so compliant and thus more threatening) black organizations, with wider goals and different mechanisms of protest that were not easily disciplined by the more traditional organizations.

Finally, national interest in civil rights was declining. Whereas public opinion polls between 1960 and 1965 placed race relations at or near the top of a list of the most important issues facing America, this priority had been displaced downward as concern with and opposition to the Vietnam War increased.

In spite of the evidence of continued tension and growing polarization, the racial conflict that had seemed to threaten American society soon dropped from its preeminent position in public concern. Vietnam, ecology, inflation, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the energy crisis, and Watergate took their turns in preempting both the headlines of the newspapers and the interest of white Americans.\(^9\)
Civil rights were going out of fashion, and political repression and state force were increasingly accepted as a means to fight dissidents.

It was just during these unpromising times that Martin Luther King, Jr. decided it was time to expand his movement from the South to the black ghettos of the North and to the issue of housing integration, which had accounted for no more than 1 percent of all issues addressed by movement-initiated events in 1961–65 and again in 1966–70. The times, place, and goals were scarcely propitious for King’s decision to move north.

**Martin Luther King, Jr., Selects Chicago as His Northern “Case”**

Chicago’s ghettos may have been “in need of attention,” but so were those in many other cities at the same time. One must therefore ask: Why Chicago? The answer is recounted in James R. Ralph, Jr.’s detailed book, based on archival and newspaper accounts, as well as interviews with the principals. One could not ask for a fuller and more accurate account. Most interesting is his discussion of how Chicago happened to be chosen as the “test” case, after SCLC decided it was time to expand its activities to some northern city. The year 1964 was pivotal.

The upsurge of northern civil rights protests and the summer rioting prompted King to stress SCLC’s obligations to northern blacks at the organization’s annual convention in the fall of 1964. He did not propose a [specific] northern project, but it was clear that northern racial problems would become more prominent in SCLC’s agenda.

King’s vision was broadening to encompass even more ambitious goals. In October, King was awarded the Nobel Prize. In his acceptance speech, he outlined his expanded agenda, stressing “the necessity of eliminating war and poverty as well as racial injustice from the world.”

By the spring of 1965, because SCLC had attracted considerable contributions after its success in Selma, it could finally afford to staff an expanded operation in northern cities. Initially, five northern cities were considered: Chicago, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and New York. King therefore made an “exploratory, fact-finding swing through the north,” but all except Chicago were eventually eliminated. In the end, it was decided that Cleveland was too small to attract adequate attention; it seemed counterproductive to focus on Washington, D.C., since President Johnson was still seen as a civil rights ally; and neither Philadelphia nor New York welcomed King’s overtures. The black president of the NAACP in Philadelphia was a maverick, apparently threatened by competition. The opposition in New York was far more serious, based on what its
When a New York City riot—the first major black uprising [there] since 1943—threatened to spiral out of control, Mayor Robert Wagner pleaded for King to use his influence to help calm the city. Even though the rioting had already subsided, King acceded to Wagner’s request and traveled to the city, where he quickly found himself embroiled in controversy. As King headed to Gracie Mansion to see Wagner, Harlem leaders lambasted him for neglecting them and for allowing himself to be used by the “white power structure.” It would not be the last chilly welcome King would receive as he became more active in the North. King consulted with Wagner, but he also cooled the tempers of local black leaders by meeting with them and touring New York’s black communities.15

In marked contrast, King was greeted enthusiastically in Chicago. On July 24, 1965, he spoke at churches and neighborhood rallies and even addressed almost 10,000 mostly white listeners on the village green in wealthy suburban Winnetka. Audiences “cheered as King denounced the perpetuation of Chicago’s slums and urged his listeners to dedicate themselves to social reform.” The next day he led 15,000 marchers through Chicago’s downtown.16

Soon after King’s Chicago visit, Adam Clayton Powell, one of black New York’s power brokers, informed reporters that he had recently told King not to visit New York City. Powell . . . sharply criticized King for his role in the aftermath of the 1964 riots . . . . “I told him [King] to go to cities where they had no real Negro leadership—like Chicago, Cleveland, and Washington,” Powell explained.17

Given the enthusiastic welcome he had received in Chicago, there was no contest.

But the decision was reinforced by other considerations as well. Some of the activists in the movement came from Chicago and had links to local leaders; King’s receptions there had always been enthusiastic; and Mayor Daley had such great power that King believed he was capable of instituting reforms, if he decided to. In addition was the challenge. “The enormity of Chicago’s race problems whetted his desire to work there. Attacking the northern capital of segregation would make for better drama.”18

The choice of Chicago was announced on September 1, 1965. The following January, King made two short visits to Chicago to prepare for the coming campaign, to be waged in the Second Ghetto—the West Side.
Why the West Side?

By 1965, two-thirds of Chicago’s black population lived in the more established South Side “ghetto,” which enjoyed well-developed community and religious institutions and contained a wide range of classes. In contrast, the quarter of a million blacks living in the West Side Second Ghetto, many of them poorer and of more recent arrival, were less organized and underrepresented by leaders of their own choice. William Grimshaw refers to the four black wards on the West Side as “plantation wards,” that is, those whose African American aldermen were completely under the discipline of the Irish-dominated “Democratic machine” and whose exclusive function was to produce those wards for the Democratic Party.19

A good account of the demographic changes on the West Side can be found in the 1980 Local Community Fact Book, which reproduces (and updates) earlier historical vignettes about Community Areas 27 (East Garfield Park), 28 (the Near West Side), and 29 (North Lawndale)—the very areas that were involved in the 1966–68 West Side uprisings.20 (See map 3.1.) I summarize these to set the scene for the emergence of the Second Ghetto.

The Near West Side, just west of the Loop across the Chicago River, had a long history of ethnic succession. By the 1850s, the original Irish settlers had been joined by German and Scandinavian immigrants in an enlarged zone that extended from the river to Halsted Street on the west and Roosevelt Road on the south. The population soon peaked at about 160,000.

The area east of Halsted Street, south of Harrison Street had become a slum, which it was to remain for a century....In the decades that followed, new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe arrived, mostly Italians, and Russian and Polish Jews. [Halsted and Maxwell became a Jewish commercial core.]...By 1900 more Greeks were moving in....The Near West Side was completely built up by 1895. Inhabitants were poorly housed and badly overcrowded....After the turn of the century, the Eastern European Jewish community began to break up. As the Jews vacated the Near West Side ghetto, their place was taken by blacks and Mexicans. By 1930, when the population had dropped to 152,000, blacks constituted about a sixth of the total.21

During the depressed 1930s, the population dropped even more, and by 1940 close to 26,000 black residents there constituted a fifth of the total. Then came a new wave of migrants, mostly poor blacks from the South, who could not afford housing on the South Side. By 1950, the population was back up to 160,000, of whom 40 percent were black.
This politically powerless zone was a defenseless and therefore a favored site for public housing construction. Jane Addams Homes, a low-rise project for 304 families, had been built in 1938; the 834-unit Robert Brooks Homes went up in 1942; and in the 1950s “the Chicago Housing Authority built Maplewood Courts, 132 units, Loomis Courts, 126 units, Abbott Homes, 1,218 units, and Governor Henry Horner Homes, 920 high-rise units to which 745 more were added in the

Map 3.1. Community Areas on Chicago’s West Side.

Source: Local Community Fact Books of Chicago. Public domain.
early 1960s.... [By 1980] the Near West Side [would have] one of the highest concentrations of public housing in the city, exceeding 20 percent of its total housing stock.”

Puerto Ricans and even small numbers of Mexican immigrants also vied for locations on the Near West Side, but residential space was disappearing. The number of residential units in the area declined from some 41,000 in 1950 to 37,000 10 years later, and the resident population decreased from over 160,000 in 1950 to 126,610 in 1960.

This was because land continued to be cleared, not only for the projects but also for highways and new institutional uses. By the early 1960s, a wide swath of territory had been cleared to make room for the Kennedy Expressway on the east, and the University of Illinois on the west made plans to preempt even more for the construction of its Chicago campus. The old housing stock was also being cleared for other nonresidential uses, such as a vast Medical Center District, and eight different urban renewal projects initiated in the 1950s by the Chicago Land Clearance Commission, most of them designed for light industrial, commercial, or institutional development.

The biggest cause of displacement, however, was the construction of the Chicago campus of the University of Illinois, beginning in the early 1960s in the Harrison and Halsted redevelopment district. The result was to drive out the former white residents (although new ones associated with the medical and university complexes later moved into protected enclaves)—thereby increasing the proportion of blacks in the reduced total. By then, the long-planned Congress Street highway (now joining the Eisenhower Expressway) had bifurcated the Second Ghetto into two linear strips of public housing into which blacks were crowded.

North Lawndale (Community Area 29), which stretches southwest from the Near West Side to Chicago’s border with Cicero, underwent a similar transition process from white to black occupancy, although slightly later. This area had begun as a separate suburb in the late nineteenth century, but after the elevated lines were extended to it and it was annexed to the city, it became more urbanized and industrial. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, “North Lawndale experienced a tremendous population surge” as Russian Jewish residents moved there from the Near West Side. By 1930, the population had peaked at 112,000, of which 46 percent were Jewish. When that group moved on in the 1940s and 1950s to its “second settlement” area on the North Side (e.g. Rogers Park), blacks began to take their places. By 1960, the racial “transition” was virtually complete. “The white population of North Lawndale dropped from 87,000 in 1950 to less than 11,000 in 1960,” whereas its “black population increased from 13,000 to more than 113,000.” By 1960, some 90 percent of the people crowded into this densely packed and deteriorated quarter were African Americans. (See maps 3.2. and 3.3.)
Map 3.2. Low Proportions of African Americans Living in the Community Areas of North Lawndale, East Garfield Park, West Garfield Park, and Austin in 1940 and 1950. 

In contrast, resistance to the westward spread of the ghetto was greater in the three westernmost community areas of the city: East Garfield Park (Area 27), West Garfield Park (Area 26), and Austin (Area 25), all north of North Lawndale at the City of Chicago’s westernmost boundaries (with Cicero to the south and west and Oak Park due west).25

The expansion of the West Side ghetto was blocked for some time in all but East Garfield Park, a largely commercial zone just north of North Lawndale. Its racial composition had already begun to change between 1950 and 1960. In that decade, the proportion of blacks rose from 17 to 62 percent, concentrated in the blocks closest to North Lawndale. The racial transition was not completed, however, until after the riot. By 1970, 98 percent of its residents were black.

The story of white resistance to black “invasion,” especially in West Garfield Park where no blacks had lived in 1950, has been eloquently told by an empathetic historian, Amanda Seligman, who also suggests that the heightened interest of white residents in housing code enforcement, fighting blockbusting by unscrupulous real estate agents, and devising other mechanisms to slow white flight may not only have reflected the largely Catholic population’s attachments to their homes and neighborhood parishes but may also have provided a more acceptable cover for some blatant racial animosity.26

Nevertheless, as we shall see later, although resistance began to crumble in the 1960s, it did not give way along this “last frontier” until the 1968 riot. As late as 1960, only 16 percent of West Garfield Park’s population was black, concentrated in blocks adjacent to North Lawndale; by 1970, that percentage had increased to 97. Even Austin, whose population was the most insulated and resistant to black residents, would be affected by the riot. Its black population increased from 0 percent in 1960 to almost a third 10 years later.

I return to this discussion below, because this displacement of African Americans from the Near West Side to the Far West Side was one of the most immediate and important consequences of the April riot of 1968. It is ironic that, just as violence during the white-on-black riot in 1919 had served to ingather frightened African Americans within the South Side ghetto, so the explosion in 1968 frightened the white ethnic residents on the Far West Side into flight, thus yielding their defended turf to those who may have been displaced from the Near West Side.

The West Side Heats Up in the Summer of 1966

Significantly, the opening volleys of several hot summers occurred not in the black area of the West Side but in an area just to its north, primarily occupied by Puerto Ricans. During the 1960s, the Puerto Rican population in Chicago had
been increasing rapidly and, due to their displacement by urban renewal projects from various places of their prior residence and the expansion of the black population in other areas, was “ingathering” in “El Barrio” (the West Town/Humboldt Park areas around Division Street) just northwest of “downtown.”

That is where the first explosion occurred.

The Puerto Rican outburst, dubbed the Division Street riot (since most of the damage to property occurred on Division Street between Western and California avenues) but also known as the Humboldt Park riot, began on Sunday night, June 12, 1966. The day before, the first Puerto Rican parade in Chicago’s history had been held downtown, with the mayor leading the march. But the next night, police were called to break up a fight among teenaged males (alleged to be gang members) holding a rally at Humboldt Park. The police, claiming to have been threatened by a gun, shot one of the youths, and then matters escalated, as 100 to 150 policemen were called to the scene and faced off against a putative 1,000 angry residents. Each side claimed that the “other” was responsible.

The journalist M. W. Newman identified the zone on the near Northwest Side (from Ashland to California and Haddon to Potomac) as “the Ghetto That Nobody Knew,” an area that by 1966 housed an estimated 35,000 Puerto Ricans—their largest concentration in the city. Newman alleges that nobody realized there were that many, and nobody expected any hostilities. “A week long carnival had just ended and the neighborhood was in a state of elation. On Saturday June 11th, the Puerto Rican community had organized a downtown parade—the first such display in the city’s history—with Mayor Richard J. Daley at its head.” Still exhilarated, large numbers congregated in Humboldt Park the following night for a rally. Apparently in response to a fight between young men, possibly from rival gangs, police were dispatched to break it up. But matters were soon out of hand, as a crowd of perhaps a thousand angry neighbors fought 100 police sent as reinforcements. No one was killed, but one policeman and two in the crowd suffered gunshot wounds, 13 more persons received minor injuries, and four police cars were rocked and set afire. The climax came when the police brought in the K-9 unit (police dogs), which was viewed as a total affront. On Monday the 49 persons arrested appeared in court. That night, crowds again gathered at the park and then took off along Division Street, breaking some 200 shop windows and looting stores.

Newspaper accounts are hardly the most accurate and unbiased sources. Nevertheless, the main outlines are not disputed, and the grievances presented on June 28 by some 200 Puerto Ricans who marched from their neighborhood to City Hall to meet with the mayor stressed that: “the recent occurrences in the Puerto Rican community have indicated very strongly that the poverty program
in this city has not touched our people.” Among their other complaints were:
first, the insult of the use of dogs, which really charged their emotions, and
second, the lack of Spanish-speaking policemen, which had led to misunder-
standings. In response, Mayor Daley offered them some concessions.

One month later, blacks on the West Side followed suit, but unlike the
Puerto Ricans, they received no satisfaction from Mayor Daley.30 Activist Kath-
leen Connolly is bitter in her account of what happened. She recalls that although
“in the case of the embarrassing Puerto Rican riot, calm came about through the
promise of a redress of grievances, the Negro riot was put down with 4,000
National Guard troops.”31 How had this happened? One would be hard pressed to
answer that question if one consulted the Kerner Report, which attributed the
July 1966 riot to a struggle between the police and neighborhood youths over an
open fire hydrant.32 This was hardly the case. The stakes were much higher, and
the struggle between King and Daley was at its roots.

From the beginning, there was a subdued “war of wits” between Mayor Daley
and Reverend King. When the latter moved into his North Lawndale apartment in
early 1966, he took over an “illegal trusteeship” of the building to fix it up for its six
other families. An embarrassed Mayor Daley countered with his own “plan” to send
in exterminators and repairmen to the North Lawndale ghetto.33 Then followed a
series of nonviolent marches into nearby white neighborhoods, met routinely by
catcalls and, on occasion, by thrown stones, but no police actions. But King was
only in Chicago for relatively brief visits, and it seemed that the movement was
stalling, confined to a small set of regular marchers.

To reinvigorate the campaign, a massive rally was organized for July 10,
1966, in the enormous lakefront Soldier Field (usually used for athletic events), at
which King addressed a crowd of some 40,000 (estimates vary).34 After the rally,
King led 30,000 followers in a march on City Hall, where he posted

“The Program of the Chicago Freedom Movement (for) An Open and Just
City” with scotch tape and withdrew.35 A ceremonial encounter with the
Mayor ensued the next day. Daley agreed with the bulk of the thirty-five
demands and insisted that his reforms were already affecting those areas.36

But the self-justifying claims of the canny political “boss” were not to be believed. The
following night, Chicago’s West Side erupted in violent protest.

Interestingly enough, the Kerner Report omits any mention of the Soldier
Field rally and its open housing demands. Instead, it attributes rising tensions to
the heat and a consequent fight between the police and neighborhood youths
over an illegal opening of a fire hydrant! Its brief account reads in its entirety as
follows.
On the evening of July 13, 1966, the day after the fire hydrant incident, rock throwing, looting and fire-bombing began again. For several days thereafter the pattern of violence was repeated. Police responding to calls were subjected to random gunfire. Rumors spread. The press talked in highly exaggerated terms of “guerrilla warfare” and “sniper fire.” Before the police and 4,200 national guardsmen manage to restore order, scores of civilians and police had been injured. There were 533 arrests, including 155 juveniles. Three Negroes were killed by stray bullets, among them a 13-year-old boy and a 14-year-old pregnant girl.\(^\text{37}\)

King had evidently failed to cool out “his masses,” more radical than he. In Connolly’s words,

Pleading for concessions to end the violence, Dr. King seemed outmaneuvered again as Daley bought peace for the price of one portable swimming pool and ten hydrant sprinklers. As the water cooled off West Side youngsters, the Chicago Freedom Movement picked up all the broken pieces and put together the action phase of the Movement. The goal—open housing.\(^\text{38}\)

Despite this partial defeat, King continued to lead a series of open housing marches into the heavily ethnic, white areas that circled the massive black districts. Marchers were attacked with rocks and bottles, and King himself was struck while walking through Gage Park on the Southwest Side. Furthermore, Daley obtained a court injunction limiting the demonstrations and then convened a summit conference with King to discuss open housing.\(^\text{39}\) The much-publicized August 1966 open housing “summit” meeting between King and Daley proved a deep disappointment, and blacks felt betrayed by the lack of any tangible gains.

The title of chapter 11 of Anderson and Pickering’s analysis says it all: “The Politics of Failure: January–April 1967”\(^\text{40}\)—although it would be easy to invert the terms to “the failure of politics.” The momentum was going out of the local voter registration campaign, possibly because that political path had yielded too little fruit, and while the white media pointed proudly to “progress,” its views were shared neither by black leaders nor their constituents.

One year later, his promise not yet fulfilled, King was gunned down at a motel in Memphis—far from Chicago. His assassination touched off the largest black protest riot in that city since the “white riot” in 1919; its reverberations were felt in hundreds of other cities in the United States. Psychologically, it was as if the Kerner Report’s belated warning of the growing chasm between two “separate” nations was already being revealed. The only analogy I can think of is the death of Lincoln: deep mourning in the North, jubilation or at least modest or passive
responses in the South. The isolation African Americans felt in their grief and anger, and the fears and precautionary measures taken by white local governments (who recognized the grief and anger but did not share it), exacerbated the cleavage. Insensitivity and lack of empathy may not have “caused” the riots, but they confirmed the existing distance between the two “nations.”

The Riot of April 1968: “Ethnic Cleansing” on the Near West Side

It is remarkable that, in contrast to the detailed documentation of the Chicago race riot of 1919, no scholarly reconstructions exist of the riot in April 1968 that destroyed an enormous swath of territory in the Second Ghetto on the West Side after King’s assassination. While reactions of despair and anger triggered demonstrations in virtually all areas of Chicago where blacks lived, only in the West Side Second Ghetto did events spin out of control in arson and looting, leaving some 20 square blocks along West Madison Street and Roosevelt Road in rubble. At the risk of sounding paranoid, I am tempted to suggest that, because this area stood in the path of white “desire,” this consequence may have been intended.

Given the lack of reliable secondary sources, I have depended on newspapers accounts of the time, which vary drastically by source, and on the far from neutral post-mortem Report of the Chicago Riot Study Committee to the Hon. Richard J. Daley, which is largely based on police records and interviews and is oriented toward policy recommendations for how to avert but also how to suppress future uprisings more effectively. All of these sources are too close to the events. They provide no long-term perspective on the growing frustrations within Chicago’s black community, as the civil rights movement was reaching a dead end by 1966–67. Nor do they convey the rising animosities between blacks and City Hall—tensions that would reveal themselves at the height of the 1968 riot in Mayor Daley’s bald directive to his police chief “to shoot to kill arsonists and shoot to maim looters” (see below).

The “murder” (the unambiguous term used by the Chicago Defender) of Martin Luther King, Jr. on the evening of April 4 set off reactions in black communities throughout the country, and it was scarcely unexpected that one of the most violent would be manifested in Chicago, given its large black community and the uneasy race relations that were endemic to the city. The only puzzling anomaly was that rioting on the South Side, which contained by far the largest proportion of African Americans in the city, was relatively sporadic and quickly suppressed, whereas the much smaller Second Ghetto of the West Side went up in flames.
I try here to reconstruct the sequence of events from the emotional, almost hysterical, day-by-day newspaper accounts and the day-by-day bland summaries of official actions, chronicled later in the Mayor’s Riot Study Committee report. It should be obvious that there are discrepancies among these accounts, both in terms of fact and interpretation, some arising innocently from limited information, some more self-serving. I shall try to identify these discrepancies, not only because they reveal perspectives but also because they lay bare the struggle—not just for turf but for truth.

Thursday Evening, April 4, and Friday Morning, April 5: How and Where the “Riot” Began

According to the April 5 edition of the Chicago Daily News, the riot began on the West Side the morning of April 5, when black high school students walked out of their classes en masse and marched to nearby schools to disrupt their “normal routines.”

Contrast this with the Chicago Defender’s account (weekly edition of April 6–12), which reported that on the night of April 4, within one hour of the announcement of King’s death (the headline, in large bold type, reads “King Murdered”), the South Side experienced the first responses. There were arson attempts at Dunbar High School (at 3000 South Parkway), windows were broken at 39th, 41st, and South State streets, and at 47th and South Calumet; damage was also done to a beauty parlor at 47th and South Parkway. Police reinforcements were sent to both the south and west sides that first night.45

South Side leaders were certainly not quiescent. Another Defender article in the same issue reported on a hastily called memorial service that evening at the Liberty Baptist Church at 4949 South Parkway “where black power advocates openly defied moderate ministers who were calling for peace…. The minister was interrupted by shouts of ‘Black Power,’ ‘Damn the Hunkies,’ ‘No more Hunkies by Sunday.’”46 Evidently, the clergy had lost control of the ceremony.

The Chicago administration was also actively preparing for violence the night of April 4, although they apparently did not realize that it had already begun. According to the Mayor’s Riot Study Committee report, April 4 was when their work began. Although King was shot (they use the term assassination, not murder) about 6 p.m. Chicago time and died an hour later,

during the night and early morning hours of April 4 and 5, the citizens residing in the near north Cabrini-Green housing complex, the west side areas surrounding West Madison Street and West Roosevelt Road, and the south side area including 63rd Street from Stony Island Avenue to Halsted Street were off the streets watching television, listening to the radio or
discussing Dr. King’s death quietly among themselves. . . . During the balance of the night of April 4, and into the morning hours of April 5, the black communities were on the whole abnormally quiet.\textsuperscript{47}

In contrast to this “abnormal quiet,” all through that night, government officials were in panicky communication with one another, “alerting appropriate personnel of the possibility of civil disorder.” Officials also debated about whether to close the schools. Underestimating the depth of grief and despair in the black community, they decided to open the schools but to order them to organize “a service in memory of Dr. King.” But by the time schools opened on Friday, absenteeism was unusually high in the ghetto high schools. . . . Early in the school day, the first of numerous false fire alarms were set off in some of the schools by students especially bent upon disrupting the normal routines. With each succeeding alarm and the resulting evacuation of high school buildings, the high school population dwindled as many students failed to return to classes. Throughout the morning, beginning around 9:00 o’clock, principals of a number of the high schools in the black communities were forced to call upon the police for assistance in quelling vandalism and responding to some few actual and threatened physical assaults by black students on whites. . . . By noon, most of the Chicago public high schools with predominantly black populations were closed.\textsuperscript{48}

School walkouts were not restricted to the West Side. On the South Side that morning, students from Hirsch, South Shore, and Chicago Vocational high schools gathered at the grounds of the latter, then moved west to Stony Island Avenue, “breaking some store windows as they went.” Police intercepted students from Hyde Park High School who were moving “in large numbers toward nearby predominantly white Mt. Carmel High School.” In fact, an article in the \textit{Chicago Daily News} reported that the violence occurring on the South Side was as bad as, if not worse than, that on the West Side. It noted that eight South Side schools from 63rd to 87th streets and Blue Island to Ashland avenue were closed and that about 400 students broke the windows of 100 stores as they moved along West 63rd street. “Most were students from Harper High School, joined by others from Lindbloom. . . . Police reported students from Parker were wrecking windows near 63rd and Woodlawn.”\textsuperscript{49}

Despite this, attention focused almost exclusively on the West Side—in large measure because expansion of the riot from there could possibly threaten nearby white businesses in the Loop, whereas on the enormous South Side it could be contained. This assumption proved well founded:
As early as 9:00 A.M. on April 5 some white businessmen along West Madison Street began to close their stores and shops and leave the area. They continued to do so throughout the morning. By noon many had left… [They] sensed that the trouble would be manifested largely by acts of vandalism and violence directed against white businessmen.\(^50\)

But the movement of the growing protest march was initially westward rather than toward downtown. When it reached Austin High School, the march encountered police resistance, which inevitably intensified the building anger.\(^51\)

Shortly after 11:00 A.M. a large group of students, mostly from Marshall High School, proceeded west on Madison Street toward Austin High School in relatively peaceable fashion but with the avowed intention of causing the dismissal of Austin. On its way to Austin this group stopped in Garfield Park [where speeches were made that left the group] in a more violent and angry frame of mind. When this group reached Austin, it was met by a small contingent of police. There was then some confusion during which *shots were fired in the air by the police*. The group then left Austin High School and proceeded east on Madison. As the group moved east on Madison, and particularly in the neighborhood of Madison and Kedzie, it did considerable damage to stores and shops.\(^52\)

Note that it was only after the police fired that the march changed course, proceeding eastward along West Madison Street toward the Loop, the central business district, passing City Hall and the Civic Center area. Groups of ex-marchers then “wandered about the Loop and near Loop areas, making considerable noise and causing some minor property damage… [and using] abusive language… [until they were] dispersed…early in the afternoon.”\(^53\)

Police protection of downtown was massive, intimidating the crowd but also signaling businesses and banks to close early. A headline in the *Chicago Daily News* the following day read “Rush Hour Early: Loop Empties as Rumors Spread Fear.” Perhaps partly as a result of this show of force, few arrests were made downtown; instead, window breakage, looting, and eventually arson were reported principally back along unguarded West Madison Street within the ghetto.

**Friday Afternoon and Evening, April 5, through Early Saturday Morning, April 6**

It was during the afternoon of April 5 that the mass media began to construct its image of “rioting for fun and profit.” The *Chicago Daily News* of April 6 reveled in
its description of “bedlam.” The Mayor’s Riot Study Committee report narrative begins with “looting.” It describes how “crowds began to gather and to encourage each other to participate in a more and more open and organized fashion in the looting of stores . . . [such as] clothing and appliance, general merchandise, liquor stores, grocery stores and pawn shops operated by whites.” It was not until “about quarter of four . . . [that] fire broke out in . . . [a previously looted] furniture store . . . [on] West Madison Street near Western Avenue . . . apparently begun by a Molotov cocktail thrown into the building from the street.”54 (See map 3.4 for the extent of fires.)

How well the fire department handled the spreading fires is a matter of debate. The Mayor’s Riot Study Committee report claims that the usual contingency plans were immediately put into place, as fire trucks from city stations raced to the scene and suburban firefighters moved into the city to cover “partially vacated outlying fire stations within the city limits, so that at all
times during the weekend the overall fire protection being accorded the city outside the areas affected by the disorders remained adequate.” The fire chief claimed that 40 percent of the city’s firefighting equipment was eventually deployed in the West Side. But apparently the contingency plans did not work. *Chicago’s American* on Saturday, April 6, reported on the fires that had raged through the preceding night. A front-page article by William Garrett called it “a night of hell for Chicago firemen” and quoted the fire commissioner as saying “This was the worst night in the history of the fire department since the great fire of 1871.” Another front-page article by Don Harris in the same paper has the subhead “9 Die. Hundreds Injured in Night of Fires, Looting.” The article describes how troops were called from outside the city to dampen the fires and stop the looting on the West Side. Headlines on page 2 for the story’s continuation read “Police Outnumbered, West Side Looters Run Wild.” Another article on the same page is headed “Newsmen Flee Mobs, Tell of W. Side Terror.”

Why 4,000 firemen found the fires “too much” remains unexplained. Firefighters claimed they were under attack by snipers. However, the picture just above McHugh’s critical article in the *Chicago Daily News* shows a national guardsman threatening bewildered passersby with his bayonet rather than any threats from a mob or even snipers.

**Mobilizing the Troops and Cordonning Off the West Side**

By April 5, the Illinois National Guard was fully mobilized and authorized to use tear gas to disperse the rioters/looters. More details were provided in the *Chicago Daily News* edition of April 6. The bold front-page headline reads “1,500 New Troops Here,” which brought the number of troops on duty in Chicago to almost 7,000.

As early as the evening of April 4, Brigadier General Richard Dunn, commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, had been in touch with the deputy superintendent of Chicago police but had been assured that the Guard would not be needed. However, as troubles escalated on Friday, the mayor changed his mind. “About 2:00 P.M. Mayor Daley called Acting Governor Shapiro to advise that the National Guard would be needed.” (The acting governor called the riot an “insurrection.”)

The afternoon of the 6th, General Dunn requested the mobilization of additional National Guard…. At the same time, the Acting Governor at Mayor Daley’s request asked for federal troops, whereupon President Johnson immediately signed the necessary executive proclamation federalizing
the Illinois National Guard (thereby placing them on the budget of the federal rather than the state government) and ordered regular troops to duty in Chicago.59

The guard was mobilized and began to be dispatched within the next hour or two. But the same traffic jam that had delayed exit from the Loop also slowed down the assembly and movement of troops. It was midnight by the time the first national guardsmen appeared on the streets and well into the next morning before the force had risen to 6,900, joining an estimated 5,000 army troops already in Chicago from nearby camps.

In the meantime, the fires spread and the looting continued. In the meantime also, the isolation of the West Side grew more extreme. Bus service to 12 square miles of the West Side (from Chicago Avenue to Cermak Road and from Ashland Avenue to Cicero Avenue) was suspended by 6:30 p.m. for fear of snipers and smoke. Weary firemen, unable to control the fires, with their hoses on fire or losing water pressure and their trucks running out of fuel, began to give up. Electricity service “in portions of the west side area was interrupted for a number of hours during the evening and night.”60 By then, substantial numbers of (the first) arrestees arrived at Central Police Headquarters for processing. Their numbers would rise to thousands by the end of the outbreak. The morning edition of Chicago’s Sunday American carried photos of the West Side destruction on the front page and, in a box, reported that fatalities had risen from 9 to 18 (incorrect), that hundreds had been injured, and that fires and looting had cost millions of dollars of property damage.

Who was responsible? According to the authors of the Mayor’s Riot Study Committee report,

the Committee [found] that…[a] relatively small number of so-called “natural leaders” among the young blacks of high school age were generally the catalysts and leaders of the April disorders….A few older blacks joined them in this destructive “leadership” role…. [D]uring the first hours of the disorder on April 5 the followers…were predominantly young people. Later on April 5 and on April 6 many older residents of the riot areas joined in the looting. The handful of riot arsonists were apparently older than high school age; some if not all were in their twenties. Throughout the weekend some leaders and followers merely had in mind that Dr. King’s death provided a handy excuse for lawlessness, destruction and violence [!]. Many others were principally motivated by a sense of rage and a resulting desire to strike back; their targets became “whitey” in general
and white-owned and operated business establishments in particular…. But there was no conspiracy.\textsuperscript{61}

The report does not raise the question of whether there could have been a “conspiracy” on the part of the city officials to inflame tempers on the leaderless West Side by mobilizing their weapons of war and their massive “shows of force.” It is worth noting that police, army, and national guard forces were lighter and relatively less provocative on the South Side, where order was more easily restored.\textsuperscript{62} The Mayor’s Riot Study Committee report claimed that “during the afternoon on the south side there was relative peace and calm, though tensions were high,” and noted that “the 63rd Street area and the South Side generally were free from uncontrolled vandalism and looting.”\textsuperscript{63} Protests also sputtered out quickly at Cabrini Green housing project, isolated on the north side in an area so poor that there was nothing the police thought needed to be protected.\textsuperscript{64}

**The Day and Night of Saturday, April 6**

Between 2 a.m. and 8 a.m. on April 6, “vandalism, looting and arson activity in the west side area was substantially reduced. Beginning after 8:00 A.M., looting activity increased again and some additional fires were set.”\textsuperscript{65} The police and national guard made a substantial number of arrests. On the Near North Side, limited acts of vandalism and some looting occurred on Saturday morning. On the South Side, and particularly near the corner of 63rd and Halsted streets, “looting began to occur late in the morning, increased during the afternoon and late in the day became fairly widespread…. [But it was] highly selective and directed almost entirely toward white-owned and operated business establishments, especially those known for or thought to engage in sharp sales and credit practices.”\textsuperscript{66} That afternoon, Daley announced a curfew “on all residents of the city under the age of 21, effective each night from 7 P.M. to 6:00 A.M. the following morning.”\textsuperscript{67}

**Sunday, April 7: More Troops and the Curfew**

The US Fifth Army brought in federal troops from Texas and Colorado; these arrived by April 7, but not all were deployed. Some remained in their bivouac areas at O’Hare Field and Glenview Naval Air Station, while others, assigned to patrol in the South Side area, were bivouacked in Jackson Park. Relative calm was restored by means of the federal troops and the “federalized” Illinois National Guard. On the West Side, demolition of unsafe buildings and cleanup began. The curfew was extended for the second night.\textsuperscript{68}
Monday, April 8, through Wednesday, April 10: Winding Down

On Monday, schools were reopened, and some held the memorial services that had been scheduled for the previous Friday, although attendance was low in some areas. Security remained heavy, especially on the West Side, where large numbers of police and national guardsmen continued to patrol. The court system continued to struggle with the processing of approximately 3,000 riot-related arrestees.

On Tuesday, the Chicago public schools were finally closed in memory of King, and many shops in riot areas were shuttered all or part of Tuesday. By Wednesday, Mayor Daley declared the official emergency terminated, and the departure of federal troops and the demobilization of the national guard began. The curfew was lifted, but the “war” between Mayor Daley and the black community was to continue.

The Controversy Reignited: “Shoot to Kill Arsonists and Maim and Detain Looters”

It is hard to imagine why, once he had ruthlessly suppressed what he called an insurrection of lawlessness, Mayor Daley chose to further inflame the black community by petulant (but threatening) remarks he delivered at a press conference less than a week after “order” had been restored. The ostensible purpose of the conference, on Monday, April 15, was to announce his appointments to a committee charged with investigating the riot. Nevertheless, he also publicly expressed his annoyance that the superintendent of police (James Conlisk) had not followed his orders to “shoot to kill arsonists and maim and detain looters” when the riot first started. He is quoted as saying, in his usual awkward English,

I have conferred with the superintendent of police [Conlisk] this morning and I gave him the following instructions, which I thought were instructions on the night of the 5th that were not carried out. I said to him very emphatically and very definitely that an order be issued by him immediately and under his signature to shoot to kill any arsonist or anyone with a Molotov cocktail in his hand... and to... maim or cripple anyone looting any stores.

Daley expressed distress that Conlisk had not carried out his earlier orders to issue these instructions to his police; instead, he said, “I found out this morning” that Conlisk had told police to make their own judgments, “so I am again telling him to issue my instructions! In my opinion, policemen should have had instructions to shoot arsonists and looters—arsonists to kill and looters to maim and detain.”
Incendiary remarks! They were immediately greeted with horror by New York’s Mayor John V. Lindsay, who, by restraining police and (the myth says) walking through New York’s ghettos in his shirt-sleeves to offer his condolences, had single-handedly averted a riot in his city after King’s death. Lindsay was quoted as saying: “In times of trouble we intend to respect human life as much as our obligation to maintain public order. We are not going to turn public disorder into chaos through the unprincipled use of armed force. In short, we are not going to shoot children in New York City.”

Tuesday’s editorial in the Chicago Daily News, under the heading “Daley’s Dubious Order,” complimented the mayor for appointing a committee to pay special attention to the role of police in the recent riot but asked why “he has already prejudged the police department and found it guilty of laxity” because it ignored his draconian order to shoot and maim? The editorial reminded its readers (and indirectly the mayor) that the Kerner Report had “warned specifically against the excessive use of deadly weapons in a civil disorder” because it “may be inflammatory and lead to even worse disorder.”

By Wednesday, April 17, the mayor had “backed up” a little. In the text of a statement read to the city council, he announced that he “stood corrected,” but then he only made matters more obscure. His amplification did little to influence either praise or condemnation from a polarized citizenry. According to a City Hall operative, a Mr. Reilly, 584 telegrams, 3,164 letters, and 753 phone calls were received on Wednesday endorsing the mayor’s directive, while only 90 telegrams, 221 letters, and 93 phone calls opposed it.

On the other hand, as might be expected, Daley was strongly reprimanded by the NAACP, which called on him to apologize to the Negro community. In his telegram to the mayor, Sydney Finley, field representative of the NAACP, called the mayor’s statements irresponsible and untimely. . . . His second, and supposed toned down statement still gives license to law enforcement to act as judge, jury, and executioner. . . . [W]e of the NAACP believe the personal affront and abasement to the black citizens of America is deserving of a public apology.

The front-page editorial in the same issue of the Chicago Defender attacked Daley for his callousness and lack of understanding. The large banner headline that day read: “NAACP Leader [Sidney Finley] Hits Daley, Calls for Public Apology,” with the subtitle “Thinks Negroes Should Remember At Vote Time.”

There is a deepening realization that slum uprisings are caused by despair, frustrations, mental anguish, hopelessness and stark poverty. Against this
background of tragic deprivations, it is difficult to understand the circumstances that led to Mayor Daley’s inhumanly harsh “shoot-to-kill” orders against arsonists. Though he had modified the statement as a concession to the storm of resentment that it provoked, the people of the black community in particular are still broiling over the intent and effect of the original dictum.75

He added that even the board of governors of the conservative City Club of Chicago criticized the mayor’s statement as deplorable, conflicting with standing police orders. “Intemperate exhortations to greater violence render a disservice to the effort to maintain order,” and “shooting, killing and maiming are not the proper tools of authority except as other means completely fail.” The members of the Riot Study Committee did not entirely agree.

The Recommendations of the Riot Study Committee

In light of these criticisms of Daley’s statements, one might ask whether the police were really as “restrained” as Daley claimed, and would the Mayor’s Riot Study Committee report urge greater restraint? Hardly. Less than three months after the riot, the report not only “whitewashed” the police of culpability but focused on recommendations for how the police might “improve” their performance by becoming more effective. After acknowledging the grievances that had led to the protest riot and making some positive suggestions for “studying” its causes, the committee’s report concentrated on more and better police fighting!

The report’s final chapter (pp. 15–21) includes a summary of its 39 principal recommendations. The first three deal with schools, recommending that they be immediately closed in the ghetto areas if any triggering incidents like the King assassination should recur. They also advised improving rapport with black students and funneling more resources and special education programs to ghetto schools. The recommendations managed to be both threatening and condescending at the same time! The fourth and fifth recommendations deal with the national guard, recommending that it be called in early and kept in constant touch with the police and other city authorities.

Recommendations 6 through 18 are a strange mix of pious hopes and nitty-gritty equipment improvements to help the police do their job. The police department should regulate deadly force by continuing General Order 67-14 (coming down on the side of Conlisk, not Daley’s intemperate order). It should be given more radio frequencies to improve coordination. It should be given more vans and squadrols to transport arrestees. It should review its procedures for handling looted goods to prevent police from being falsely accused of looting. Instead of making sweeping arrests, police should go for the leaders “whose arrest
would have a sobering effect on . . . other persons in the area.” Whites and blacks should be treated equally. A backup auxiliary force should be developed for emergencies. “Overwhelming manpower rather than fire power should be used except in rare circumstances” (italics added), thus leaving the riot committee sitting on the fence in the controversy between Daley and Conlisk. There should be intensive study of the use of chemicals for riot control, but until that is done, tear gas should be used rather than mace. Communication between police and the community should be improved. “Police must increase their understanding of the degradations and frustrations which the very poor, black and white, feel” and why these lead to crime. Disarming and granting of annual amnesty for turning in guns are recommended. The police should “aggressively . . . implement the recommendations contained in the report of the 1967 Citizens Committee to Study Police-Community Relations.”

The next two recommendations concern the fire department. It needs a better “alert” system, and there must be better cooperation between fire and police departments to protect firemen entering riot areas. A laundry list of assorted suggestions follows, none of them particularly original. The Commission on Human Relations should improve its capacity as a center for rumor control. The Urban Progress Centers should handle food and clothing distributions in emergencies. Ghetto aid programs should involve more Negro participation, especially among “young people.” It would be desirable to train “ghetto area residents for more self-determination and local community control. The skill, experience and financial support of downtown institutions (private as well as public) must be made available to the ghetto communities in this connection.” Citizens’ organizations should work to establish or strengthen “autonomous community organizations in those ghetto areas, such as the west side of Chicago, where they are desperately needed.” Businessmen and merchants should increase efforts to develop black ownership and expand franchises to blacks in ghettos. There should be better government policing of and “Better Business Bureau” enforcement against fraudulent merchandising practices by ghetto merchants. More consumer education in schools is needed.

Singling out the insurance industry, the report recommended full implementation of new state and federal legislation making available casualty insurance coverage in ghetto areas. And turning to the role of the media, the committee urged journalists “to dispel rumors” and give correct information during large-scale civil disturbances.

The next eight recommendation raise judicial issues: how the courts should handle riot arrests, attorneys, bonds, complaints, mass arrests, disposal of cases in district police stations in future riots, public defenders, decentralized detention
and processing centers. These recommendations stress the need for an overall plan of coordination of judicial procedures.

The committee concluded its report with the question: “Are the April Riots Likely to Recur?” Worried that they might, given the deep-seated resentments in the ghetto communities, their political impotence, and their communication isolation from City Hall, the authors repeated their earlier recommendation that a new “standing commission” be appointed with the sole purpose and function of examining into the needs of the ghetto areas, determining the appropriate and necessary methods of meeting those needs and checking upon the extent to which governmental and non-governmental agencies are taking steps to meet such needs; such a commission should be composed of representatives of the ghetto areas and of the general community, as well as of organizations within and outside the ghetto which are committed to ghetto improvement. It is recommended that such a commission have a full-time, paid Negro as its executive director.\(^7^6\)

This bypassed the by then impotent and financially strapped Mayor’s Committee on Race (Human) Relations, set up initially in 1943 to do this job.

And finally,

Chicago should not tolerate violence and disorder, property destruction, theft and assault as a means of rectifying injustices in the ghetto areas. At the same time, the problems of the ghetto are real and serious and have brought this city as well as the rest of the country to a crisis of relationships between peoples so serious that the Committee calls upon our fellow citizens to support the leaders of our city in finding the necessary new and radical solutions to the unprecedented circumstances which confront us.\(^7^7\)

You would think that this resounding if florid call to “arms” and to research-based ameliorative programs designed to integrate marginalized blacks into mainstream power organizations, coming as it did from his handpicked advisers, would have made an impression on the mayor to whom it was directed. But outside of its support for more and better equipment for the police department and advice on strategies for “nipping a riot in the bud,” the report’s recommendations were ignored.

**Contrasting the Black and White Riots of 1968**

Earlier I noted how surprised I was not to find any independent secondary account of the April 1968 Chicago riot. Whenever I searched library catalogues,
the only entries I found under “Chicago, Riots, 1968” were to the Grant Park antiwar protests of August 23–28, held in clear view of the Democratic Party Nominating Convention. This riot was covered in great detail in a document variously named Violence in Chicago: The Walker Report but also Rights in Conflict: The Violent Confrontation of Demonstrators and Police in the Parks and Streets of Chicago during the Week of the Democratic Convention. I shall refer to it under its shorter name, The Walker Report.

This dense 362-page study was produced with a massive and, we can only assume, well-paid staff. From Max Frankel’s introduction we learn that Daniel Walker’s resources were virtually unlimited.

Starting with the F.B.I.-trained staff of his Chicago Crime Commission—a distinguished citizens group that has devoted itself to fighting gangsterism and exposing the links between business interests and crime syndicates—Mr. Walker built a study team of 90 full-time and 121 part-time interviewers and researchers. Many lawyers and trained investigators were lent to him, at no cost, by prestigious law firms and banks. Together they took 1,410 statements from eyewitnesses, reviewed 2,017 others provided by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and studied 180 hours of motion picture films, more than 12,000 still photographs and thousands of news accounts. They began work on September 27, 1968, and... completed the Report 53 days later, on November 18.78

Frankel’s introduction starts from the unexamined preconception, perhaps drawn from the earlier report to Daley, that “when Negroes rioted in April, 1968, his [Daley’s] policemen handled the situation efficiently and with restraint.” But in handling that riot, the Chicago police had been too restrained and were later chastised by Mayor Daley in his famous “shoot to kill arsonists, shoot to maim looters” statement. It was here that, according to The Walker Report, much of the trouble began, which “culminated in the riot of the police themselves” in the Democratic Convention riot.79

In the section identified as Summary, the same myth about how “restrained” the police had been in the April 4–10 riot (a myth to which no one who observed it could have subscribed) is repeated. The Walker Report blames Daley’s rebuke of the superintendent of police in April 1968 for unleashing an uninhibited display of police brutality, not only several weeks later on April 27, when the police attacked demonstrators, bystanders, and media representatives at a Civic Center peace march, but eventually at the Democratic Convention protests in late August.

Since there is no evidence that police brutality was greater against white “protesters” than against black “rioters” and, in fact, the opposite was true, this
alerts us to a double standard of judgment and helps to explain why the Democratic Convention received such detailed study, whereas the causes of the larger and more lethal black riot were ignored. It also explains why potential black participants were reluctant to join in planning for the convention demonstration.

In early February 1968, there was an attempt to merge peace and black movements via a meeting in Chicago to which Tom Hayden and Rennie Davis invited leaders of SNCC, CORE, and the Black Caucus. In early February 1968, there was an attempt to merge peace and black movements via a meeting in Chicago to which Tom Hayden and Rennie Davis invited leaders of SNCC, CORE, and the Black Caucus.80 “But shortly after the Lake Villa meeting [in March], prospects for the demonstration of a united black-white front in Chicago disintegrated. The change of direction may, perhaps [sic], have been related to the assassination of... King and the ugly aftermath of riots, including the use of guardsmen and federal troops to quell disturbances.”81 Nevertheless, the National Mobilization for the antiwar demonstration still tried to involve blacks in their planned demonstration. They largely failed.

Many blacks felt that demonstrations like those planned for Chicago, focusing on the war in Vietnam, were traditionally conducted by whites and were remote from the problems which plagued the black man—problems which have to be dealt with by blacks themselves. Still others feared the heavy security forces which were expected to be amassed in Chicago and wanted to avoid what they thought could develop into a massacre of blacks.... Many black leaders expressed dismay at the prospect of a march through the ghetto which might bring troops with them—a grim reminder of the April riots.82

And indeed, “one leader of a black community organization said that complaints of police brutality received by that organization increased dramatically in the week or so before the convention.” Nevertheless, the Black Panthers urged participation, although the leaders of other organizations, such as the Blackstone Rangers, actually left the city to avoid more crackdowns, especially since they had been under “preventive surveillance.”83

The antiwar demonstration/riot did include some blacks, but in overwhelming numbers participants were young, white, and middle-class. And despite the allegations that the police had been more brutal than during the King “black protest riot,” casualties and arrests were considerably lower.84 First, no one was killed by police guns, and despite the public outrage and media alarms, only a relatively small number of demonstrators were injured by police batons. The records of injuries are of course incomplete, but the police reported 192 police injured, most hit by flying objects at the height of battle on Wednesday, of whom 49 were hospitalized. Most police injuries occurred at Balbo and Michigan and
the vicinity of the Hilton, 78 percent occurred on August 28 (Wednesday), and 63 percent were from thrown objects. There was a less complete enumeration of injured demonstrators, but Chicago area hospitals reported 101 demonstrators admitted (of whom 58 were from Chicago and 43 from more distant locations; 23 were 16–19 years old, 48 were 20–24 years old; only 6 were 40 or older). Some 668 persons were arrested, most of whom

were under 26 years of age, male, residents of Metropolitan Chicago, and had no previous arrest record. Two-thirds of the arrests were made of persons ranging in age from 18 to 25, with those under 17 comprising 9.6 of the total. Men outnumbered women almost eight to one. . . . Forty-three per cent of the arrested were employed, 32.6 per cent were students, and 19.9 per cent were unemployed. The employed represented a wide range of occupations including teachers, social workers, ministers, factory laborers and journalists.85

Given the large size and prolonged duration of the confrontation, these figures seem modest indeed, especially when compared to those of black protesters after King’s assassination.

The Echo Riot of 1969: Relative Police Brutality

It would be foolish to argue that police behavior, independent of the race of rioters, had changed either for better or for worse. True, only nine persons arrested in the Grant Park demonstration carried knives or guns, and most police were threatened by thrown bottles, not snipers. But there seemed to be one set of “rules of engagement” for police dealing with whites and an entirely different set for dealing with young and equally unarmed blacks. This was demonstrated only eight months later on the first anniversary of King’s murder, when the city administration reverted to the old but “improved rules of engagement” deemed suitable for its black citizens.

Given that between April 4, 1968, and April 3, 1969, no rebuilding of the West Side took place and very little economic assistance, much less political power, was extended to those most hurt by the uprising of April 1968, it is not surprising that on the first anniversary of King’s death an “incipient riot” was again threatened. Although in the interim the mayor still had not learned from the Kerner Report to give help to troubled minority communities (as he had been reminded by his committee’s report), the police department had taken seriously the set of final recommendations directing it to counteract any threat with dispatch and with maximum force. Thus, this “echo” riot, which repeated
many of the activities of the prior year, was ruthlessly and even more efficiently suppressed by a city administration that immediately deployed maximum manpower, including the national guard. (Possibly those extra communications networks, better coordination with the national guard, and more patrol cars and decentralized booking courts did the trick.)

Discouraging Conditions on the West Side before the Echo Riot Began

The Chicago Tribune of March 30, 1969, carried an article by Michael Smith that included the following observation: “In a tour of the area hardest hit, a Tribune photographer team found dozens of square blocks totally vacant. Even the smallest heaps of rubble had been taken away. Not one of the buildings that once filled these blocks has been replaced.” The article showcased two photos of the 3300 block on West Madison Street, one taken when the fires were raging in April of 1968, the second showing the same extensive area, now cleared and absolutely empty. Another article by Lois Wille in the Chicago Daily News of March 28, 1969, came to the same conclusion.

Nothing has been built in the two main areas destroyed by flames last April…. Madison St. between Kedzie and Homan is largely a barren field of glass and rubble. Roosevelt Road from Kedzie to Homan is just as desolate. Only one building stands on the block between Spaulding and Homan—a tavern with apartments upstairs that was spared by the flames. On April 9 [1968], two days after the riots subsided, city housing and planning officials announced [a] crash rebuilding program to begin “immediately.” But… [no] specific construction plans have been drawn. The burned-out land has not yet been acquired by the city. It still belongs to the original owners, who have no intention of rebuilding in an area they consider hostile.

Wille noted conflicts between city agencies and black neighborhood groups over future developments, with the city favoring a shopping mall, whereas blacks wanting more housing—and with their input.

Two initial steps for rebuilding the Madison-Kedzie area have been completed in the year since King’s death. On Jan. 16 the city received a $38,989,954 federal grant for improving 24 areas, including the burned-out site. Ten months after the riots, on Feb. 11, the City Council declared the area a slum—a necessary step before the city can draw urban renewal plans…. The Chicago Housing Authority is building 186 three-story apartments on scattered sites in Lawndale near some of the burned-out areas. [But these] were planned before the April riots.
Is it any wonder that, given these daily reminders of the city’s neglect of their interests, tensions should have resurfaced on the anniversary of King’s murder?

How the Echo Riot Began

On Thursday, April 3, 1969, students of Crane High School on West Madison Street met in their lunchroom to protest a decision by the faculty not to hold a school-wide ceremony to mark the anniversary of King’s death. The next day, the Chicago Daily News published a menacing-looking multicolumn photo in its “Third Page Section,” showing some of the “100 heavily armed policemen” chasing students near Crane High School (on West Jackson) after police cleared and closed the school on Thursday, April 3; the caption identified the protest as “a lunchroom rampage.”

An accompanying article under Henry De Zutter’s byline was a bit more helpful. He pointed out that Crane was one of the few all-black city schools where teachers and administrators had decided against holding a special assembly, preferring to “honor Dr. King by conducting observances in each classroom.” Crane also housed a branch of Chicago City College, and the college conducted its own memorial service in the high school auditorium, at which Charles Hurst, a black psychologist and newly appointed president of the Crane branch, and two members of the Black Panther Party spoke under heavy police guard. Armed police (who had been stationed in the school since the troubles of the previous year!) barred high school students from joining the service, an action students took as clearly provocative.

We shall never know exactly what happened next. The police accused the invited members of the Black Panthers of starting a riot by breaking windows and overturning furniture, although according to De Zutter, “Hurst and one of the Black Panthers invited to speak... denied that any panther was responsible for the violence.”

The version of the “story” that appeared in the Friday, April 4, edition of the Chicago Sun-Times was somewhat different. That paper reported that students of seven high schools on the west and north sides had walked out of their schools on Thursday, and that “after incidents of window-smashing, looting, scattered shooting and attacks on motorists and policemen,” almost 5,000 national guard troops were ordered to active duty and another 2,000 troops were held at the ready in armories outside the Chicago area. It was evening, however, before motorized patrols of guardsmen could be deployed on the West Side and around the Cabrini Green housing project. (The accompanying photo shows an armored truck with armed guardsmen patrolling West Division Street on Thursday night.) Tear gas was used at one point “to disperse a group of youths.
Mayor Daley once again imposed a curfew for all persons under 21 from 8 p.m. until 6 a.m. He also imposed restrictions on the sale of firearms, ammunition, gasoline and liquor.” By 10:30 that evening, “both the West and North sides were relatively calm,” and bus service was restored. Emergency mass-arrest court procedures handled the 243 persons, mostly juveniles, who had been arrested.

By Saturday night, “emergency restrictions enforced since disorders broke out Thursday on the West and Near North sides were called off [and] . . . the 7,000 Illinois National Guardsmen . . . were deactivated.” The mayor said proudly, “The calm over the last 36 hours . . . has clearly shown that all [sic] of the citizens of Chicago have a fervent and genuine desire for peace in their neighborhoods and city.”

The attentive reader may feel a bit of déjà vu, and an inattentive one may be tempted to check whether he has lost his place. The echo riot began in much the same way as the original, but it was “better handled,” taking to heart the real advice given by the mayor’s committee. The incipient riot had been “nipped in the bud,” largely by applying the tactics of suppression that had been the major focus of the recommendations in the Mayor’s Riot Study Committee report, submitted in response to the previous year’s events. The authorities put all of them into operation, including the draconian call-up of the national guard and the intimidating use of surveillance helicopters.

**Did the Riots Achieve Anything?**

The riots (the originals of 1966 and 1968 and the echo riot of 1969) did have certain effects, but not necessarily those intended by the participants. Three major consequences can be singled out.

**Reclaiming Formerly Black-Dominated Zones**

First, the fires left a cordon sanitaire between a much-reduced black ghetto on the Near West Side and the rest of the city, thus furthering the reconquest that had been initiated in the 1960s (by the siting of the intersection of the east-west Congress Street highway, now called the Eisenhower Expressway, and the northsouth route of the Kennedy Expressway, further clearing of land for the University of Illinois Chicago Circle Campus and the expansion of a medical facility to its west). The areas nearer the Loop in the Second Ghetto, destroyed in the 1968 riot, were easily cleared and being rebuilt with glistening office towers and high-priced condos. Only one “problem” remained “unsolved.” A reduced and isolated black ghetto, primarily housed in the phalanx of public housing projects along the main avenues involved in the 1968 riot, constituted a residual impediment to West Side gentrification. A solution to this “blight,” however, had to await federal
funding. In this, Chicago would be rewarded, years later, for its sorry history of having constructed and then neglected hypersegregated public housing. I reserve this discussion for the epilogue to this chapter.

**Improved Riot Control Procedures**

Second, the riots galvanized Chicago’s police to develop better (more oppressively “efficient”) techniques of riot control. While this did not end riots (see my discussion of the 1992 Bulls riot below), it certainly cowed potential participants. In the process, many black leaders, especially of the South Side community that was no longer under pressure from “white resistance,” were coopted into the system and, as they had done in 1968 and 1969, were willing to help restore order quickly to their “own” turf.

**Racial Succession on the Far West Side and Expansion on the South Side**

A third consequence was the further flight of resisting, but now fearful, whites to other parts of the city and especially to the (mostly white-) collar counties. For the West Side, the most important “unintended” consequence was the expansion of the West Side ghetto all the way to the city limits at still-resistant Cicero (see maps 3.2 and 3.3 above and table 3.1). Ironically, the very areas where white residents had offered the greatest resistance to King’s marches for integrated housing have now turned into equally segregated zones, but for black residents. To some extent, this has been a Pyrrhic victory, since the zone is now devoid of the factories and workplaces that had supported its former working-class white residents. The results of this racial succession can be seen on maps 3.5 and 3.6.

Grieving for lost homes, displacement, and denied job opportunities accumulated in Chicago’s ghettos of despair, despite some undoubted mobility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1 Racial Change on the Far West Side, Chicago, 1930–80.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage White Occupancy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Garfield Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Garfield Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Figures have been assembled by the author from sequential editions of Local Community Fact Books.*
for the growing black middle-class population that was spreading to the city limits and beyond on the South Side. Grievances over deteriorating conditions would surface in an unlikely time and place—during Chicago’s 1992 celebrations over the repeated triumphs of Michael Jordan’s great basketball team. But other than that, Chicago has thus far been spared a massive race riot. Why?

**Reviving the Atlanta Solution—on the Wider County Scale**

By the early 1990s, the city of Chicago had undergone a cycle of political power realignment and had experienced significant racial/ethnic changes. After the brief
capture in 1983 of the mayor’s office by Chicago’s first and only black mayor, Harold Washington, his five-year interregnum was cut short by his untimely death one year into his second term, and power reverted to the Irish and, eventually, to the son of Boss Daley. The old white growth machine was restored— involving further territorial conquest of areas immediately south and west of the Loop for white institutions, businesses, and housing, even though the proportion of whites residing in the city of Chicago and its containing Cook County has continued to decline.
**Table 3.2** Distribution of Various Racial/Ethnic Populations (in Percentages) in Chicago and the Surrounding Area, 1990. Based on 1990 U.S. Census Data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>CMSA</th>
<th>PMSA</th>
<th>Chicago</th>
<th>Suburban Counties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White NH</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>82.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black NH</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amerind NH</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian NH</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other NH</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NH = Non-Hispanic. The area covered is Chicago, Ill.-Ind. and Wisc. CMSA; the Chicago PMSA; the City of Chicago and Cook County; and the surrounding Illinois counties (Cook Co. minus city of Chicago, Du Page, Kane, Lake, and Will counties). Calculations mine. I have calculated so as to separate the portion of Cook County that falls within the city limits of Chicago from that portion outside the city. This suburban Cook County residual has been added to Will, Kane, Du Page, and Lake counties, and the composite of these suburban regions immediately surrounding the city has been summed and then calculated.


**Table 3.3** Racial/Ethnic Composition of the City of Chicago, Chicago PSMA (Chicago Plus Cook County), and the Surrounding (Collar) Counties, 1990 (%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>City of Chicago</th>
<th>Chicago PSMA</th>
<th>Collar Counties</th>
<th>Total CMSA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White non-Hispanic</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black non-Hispanic</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian non-Hispanic</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be seen in tables 3.2 and 3.3, by 1990, the new Maginot line of apartheid had moved outward to the line dividing Cook County from the four surrounding Illinois counties (called the “collar”) of Du Page, Will, McHenry, and Kane, although portions of Cook County near the northern and northwestern borders adjoining the wealthy and white suburbs remained unwelcoming to blacks and Hispanics. Even these figures overestimate the degree of suburban integration, because blacks remain largely concentrated in the five suburban “towns,” associated originally with railroad construction, that were known for their early and exclusive black occupancy.

The separation of the “races” is therefore virtually complete, as the South Side “Black Metropolis” has expanded even beyond the city limits and the West Side “Second Ghetto” has retreated westward up to the city limits. The populations in both zones are more than 95 percent black, and both areas have experienced the draining away of employment opportunities. Black unemployment rates in the city are three times higher than those for whites. If Chicago is “spared” further ghetto uprisings, it is because apartheid writ large has made it easier for whites to reclaim the valuable land on the Near West Side while abandoning the enlarged South Side and Far West Side ghettos to the African American community.

**Epilogue**

**The Bulls Riot of 1992: Echo of Rodney King**

Chicago experienced no immediate repercussions of the April 1992 Los Angeles South Central riot until the evening of Sunday, June 14, 1992, the night the Chicago Bulls basketball team won the National Basketball Association championship for the second year in a row. All over the city, celebrations began, with people of all shades of skin taking to the streets.

Outside the downtown area [where police were trying to calm whites who were rambunctiously celebrating by getting drunk], in the South Side and West Side ghettos of Chicago, however, the night took a different turn: hundreds of stores were looted, more than 1,000 people were arrested, and 90 police were injured. . . . Data gathered from court records shows that 98% of those arrested for felony looting that night were black. . . . The quantity of arrestees and extent of the property damage easily place the Bulls riot of 1992 into Spilerman’s (1976) category of most severe riots, although the apolitical nature of the precipitating incident (a basketball game) naturally raises questions.

Rosenfeld rightfully attributes the events that occurred in isolated portions of the south and west side ghettos to the interaction of several factors. The most
basic and persistent variable was the level of ongoing disaffection and resentment growing out of the continued neglect of the problems of housing and jobs. This anger was exacerbated on April 1, 1992, “when the largest welfare cut in Illinois history went into effect,” despite the angry opposition of Chicago’s black leaders. Closer to the event, however, was the acquittal on April 29 of the Los Angeles policemen who had been accused of beating black motorist Rodney King. The beating and the subsequent trial had been heavily covered in the media, and the outrage at the verdicts stoked anger in black communities throughout the United States. The outbreak of rioting in Los Angeles itself was immediate and was graphically portrayed on television. In Chicago, Korean storekeepers in ghetto areas braced themselves for similar attacks, closing their stores on May 1, anticipating riots and looting—that did not occur. They were merely postponed.

In the window of opportunity provided by the chaos of the celebrations of the Bulls’ victory and temporarily deflected by the attention police were devoting to out-of-bounds white behavior in the bars of “Old Town,” the ghettos again erupted. The causes were familiar ones: mounting resentments over persisting poverty, lack of opportunities, and the presence of alien shopkeepers in the ghettos (notably Arabs and, more recent comers, Koreans). The “rioters” on the west and south sides employed the by-now-familiar repertoire of actions honed since the 1960s. Much may have changed in the distribution of whites and blacks in the Chicago metropolitan region, but apartheid has not diminished, nor has the brutality of the police (as measured by arrests and injuries) in putting down civil disorders in Chicago’s black ghettos decreased. Hopelessness fueled protest, and fear fueled response.

The Paradox of Police Reforms and More Prisons

As in other cities, there have been efforts in Chicago to reform the police, sparked by the black patrolman’s organization, and there have been academic and governmental studies, as well as experimental programs seeking to strengthen community policing and other suggested panaceas for Chicago’s problems. But so long as minorities remain disproportionately poor, underserved at best, harshly disciplined at worst, it is not unlikely that “ghetto uprisings” and “police riots” may recur in Chicago. Alternatively, the police may “cull” the potential rioters (young unemployed minority males) by remanding them to the expanding prison-industrial complex. I return to these themes in chapter 8.

Dispersing Poor Minorities by Destroying Public Housing

I have noted above the impediment to further West Side gentrification posed by the selective postriot survival of the massive public housing projects along
Indeed, this is perceived by many in local government to be only part of a more general problem, for which a “solution” is now being tried. Since the original text of this chapter was written, a new strategy has appeared in Chicago that seeks to avoid future “riots” or insurrections, not by eliminating the causes of black dissatisfaction and distress but by destroying the “breeding grounds” that presumably have allowed the riots to ignite in and spread from the “infamous” public housing projects.

Ironically, federal subsidies for public housing had initially been defended in the 1940s and 1950s on the grounds that replacing teeming slums with sanitary and safe housing would not only improve the physical health of the “deserving” poor but also improve their social behavior. The assumption was that “respectable” tenants would be selected, those who had the will and funds to maintain their apartments in decent condition. Over the years, however, admissions became less selective, maintenance was neglected, and occupants were drawn almost exclusively from nonwhite minorities. Although these changes occurred in many places, in few other cities (with the exception of New York, which has not sought to tear them down) were facilities so concentrated in high-rise apartment complexes.

Disdainful of its tenants, the Chicago Housing Authority, over the years, neglected maintenance and managerial control, especially because the projects primarily served poor minorities with little power and had been carefully “insulated” from white territory. So bad did the CHA’s reputation become that it was ranked the worst public housing authority in the country and was finally placed into federal receivership.

Enter HOPE VI. Misdiagnosing the problems of poverty, welfare (now to be redefined as workfare for single mothers), the disappearance of jobs, and localized economic implosion as due to poor housing and the isolation of the poor from the good “moral” influence of their betters, HUD opened the door to a new opportunity—to once again clear the “sick” slums, remove their inhabitants, and, in the words of the old urban land economists, reclaim land values and restore the tax base.

In 1989, a National Commission was appointed by Congress to evaluate severely depressed public housing. Three years later, HOPE VI (Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere!) was set up and funded, and by 2003, HUD had already approved some 135,000 public housing units for demolition, far more than the commission had anticipated. Chicago became one of the most enthusiastic applicants.

By 1997, Chicago had its required “Plan for Transformation” in place, that included the destruction of Cabrini Green on the highly desirable and mostly...
white North Side, the clearance of multiple projects west of the Chicago River, also on prime land, and even the enormous Stateway Gardens, Robert Taylor Homes, and Ida B. Wells projects on the less desirable Near South Side. When the money came, the plan was put into action. Now those projects are being leveled to return the land to the tax rolls and more profitable uses. An early September 2005 special edition of the Chicago Reporter estimated the number of units already destroyed and the relative booms being experienced in prices, values in new mortgage loans, and racial changes from black to white within a few blocks of each of the districts where housing projects have been leveled.

Relocation of the displaced project residents is a disaster, as history might suggest. Funds for those “eligible” will come from Section 8 (the only remaining form of housing subsidies), but the number of units in Chicago or its immediate vicinity is far below what will be needed, their quality is not assured, and most of the new “refugees” are already crowding into remaining poor areas of existing ghettos.102 There is evidence that many displaced families have already left the city for more depressed small towns in southern Illinois or Wisconsin where Section 8 units may be more plentiful. Rebuilding at half the densities means that even if the displaced meet the stringent eligibility requirements (e.g., have a valid lease, are current with rent and utility charges, and, if on welfare, participate in workfare and have a “good housekeeping record”), it is estimated that “fewer than 20 percent will be able to return to their old neighborhoods, and most will continue, if not to “grieve for a lost home,” at least to suffer from the uprooting from familiar turf and support networks. To my mind, this has all the markings of a new Atlanta Solution, as the reconquest of inlying districts of central Chicago is extended to land that can now be redeveloped, thanks to the destruction of the “projects” and the scattering of their “dangerous” tenants. Whether intentionally or not, this may serve to postpone, if not prevent, Chicago’s next race riot.

Notes

2. Space for new university-sponsored housing was cleared in Hyde Park in the aftermath of arson and neighborhood blowout. For a sympathetic account of the university’s activities, see Peter Rossi and Robert Dentler, The Politics of Urban Renewal: The Chicago Findings (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1961).

5. These are the titles, respectively, of chaps. 7 and 8 of Douglas McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

6. Ibid., p. 154, table 7.4.

7. Some 71 percent of movement-initiated actions were in the South and were directed to expanding voting rights and to dismantling Jim Crow. Ibid., p. 190, table 8.3.

8. Between 1965 and 1970, the number of movement-initiated actions in the South dropped to only a third of the total, whereas the proportion in New England and the Middle Atlantic region rose to about a third, and to 21 percent in the East North Central region. Ibid., p. 190, table 8.3.


10. Ibid., p. 187, table 8.2.

11. See James R. Ralph, Jr., *Northern Protest: Martin Luther King, Jr., Chicago, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), on which the following account is based.

12. Ibid., p. 32.

13. Ibid., p. 33.

14. Ibid., p. 34.

15. Ibid., p. 32.

16. Ibid., pp. 34–35.

17. Ibid., p. 35.

18. Ibid., p. 39.


22. Ibid.; italics added.

23. Gerald Suttles’s *The Social Order of the Slum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) captured this turf war in full swing, as residents of this multiethnic area failed to unite behind a dynamic Italian American woman who sought to block displacement by the campus.


25. For the nineteenth-century origins of the Far West Side as a suburban flank and its transformation in the early decades of the twentieth century into an industrial and commercial zone hospitable to Catholic working-class residents, see Amanda Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago’s West Side* (Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 18–30. Her book focuses primarily on the resistance of West Garfield Park’s white residents to African American newcomers prior to the riot, although she also includes some material on Austin. Only the final three pages, added belatedly to her excellent book, mention the riot of 1968. She is now researching a book on that riot.


29. I assembled this account from photocopied Chicago newspaper clippings for June 13–16, 1966, in the files of the special Chicago Municipal Reference Collection (formerly Library), now housed in the Harold Washington Main Chicago Public Library, not all of which were fully identified.

30. David J. Garrow, ed., Chicago 1966: Open Housing Marches, Summit Negotiations, and Operation Breadbasket, with a preface by Garrow (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1989). The interior title page reads Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement. This work contains, inter alia, an informative article by Mary Lou Finley, “The Open Housing Marches: Chicago, Summer ’66” pp. 1–48.


34. Taylor Branch, in his much-honored At Canaan’s Edge: America in the King Years: 1965–68 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), devotes only brief pages to the activities of Martin Luther King, Jr., in Chicago, and he may not have checked primary sources. See his chap. 30, “Chicago, July–August 1966,” pp. 501–22, where he minimizes the size of the crowd and the subsequent march to City Hall.

35. The parallel to his namesake was not unintentional.


37. Kerner Report, p. 39. Interestingly enough, the 1966 Puerto Rican riot received no mention.


41. A modest parallel to the split reactions in the two communities might be the O. J. Simpson trial. I am not suggesting that no whites mourned King’s death, but merely that the depth of their response was incommensurate.

42. I was shocked to find that this was the case. I therefore had to reconstruct the course of the riot from newspaper and other primary documents. My account here combines
(and distinguishes between) these sources and the official Mayor’s Riot Study Committee report. Since this chapter was written, a few other reconstructions have come to my attention. See, for example, Adam Cohen and Elizabeth Taylor, \textit{American Pharaoh: Mayor Richard Daley: His Battle for Chicago and the Nation} (Boston: Little Brown, 2000), which depends heavily on Gary Rivlin, “The Night Chicago Burned,” \textit{Chicago Reader}, August 26, 1988. I am grateful to D. Garth Taylor for calling them to my attention. I have not attempted to revise my own reconstruction but offer it as an independent account, based on not only my sources but also my independent observations, since I was in Chicago, teaching at Northwestern University, when the riots occurred.

43. The chief contrast is between the accounts of white newspapers, and particularly the conservative \textit{Chicago Tribune}, which, as might be expected, simply exaggerated and condemned the uprising, and the \textit{Chicago Defender}, the leading black newspaper in the city, which was more sympathetic to the causes but hardly “inflammatory,” counseling calm and compromise. I am grateful to Michael Rosenfeld, who sent me some of the clippings from the \textit{Defender}. I have been unable to access more radical black informal papers, which would require considerable search. Existing studies contrasting newspaper coverage of the 1968 events, such as they are, similarly lack the more fugitive material. Among the relatively thin studies I have been able to locate are: Robbin E. Washington, Jr., “The \textit{Chicago Defender} and the \textit{Chicago Tribune’s} Coverage of the West Side Riot of April 1968” (master’s thesis, Governor State University, 1980) (26 pages); James Flannery, “Chicago Newspapers’ Coverage of the City’s Major Civil Disorders of 1968” (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1971), which concentrates most heavily on the 1968 Democratic Convention riot of October; and Thomas J. Kelley, “White Press/Black Man: An Analysis of the Editorial Opinions of the Four Chicago Daily Newspapers toward the Race Problem: 1954–1968” (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, 1971).

44. The report, dated August 1, 1968, was only 121 pages of large type with wide margins and focused chiefly on diagnosing where the police had gone wrong and how they might respond better to future threats to law and order. Unlike Johnson’s voluminous work \textit{The Negro in Chicago}, the Mayor’s Riot Study Committee report treats the event as “essentially uncaused” and dismisses it as “unproductive.” The conclusions appear up front, on p. 2, where the authors call the “disorders . . . clear and plain violations of law,” “shocking events” that “solved nothing.” The authors admonish “Chicago’s black citizens” to recognize “that riots are destructive for everyone including themselves” (Mayor’s Riot Study Committee report).


47. Mayor’s Riot Study Committee report, pp. 5–7. This committee was appointed by Daley and instructed “to conduct a complete and detailed factual investigation into the events immediately preceding, on and subsequent to April 4, 1968, in Chicago in order to determine precisely ‘what, why and how’ the disorders of April 5–7 occurred, without repeating the studies made by (i) the National Advisory Commission on
Civil Disorders, known as the Kerner Commission, and (ii) the Citizens Committee to Study Police Community Relations (in Chicago), known as the Mulroy Committee.” The committee held 10 days of hearings and heard 47 witnesses, whose testimonies yielded “approximately 1,900 pages of transcript [never released]. In addition, the volunteer staff of the committee, headed by Chief Counsel Charles A. Bane, estimates that more than 900 persons were interviewed, exclusive of members of the police department. . . . With respect to the police, the Committee’s staff submitted a detailed, lengthy questionnaire to, and received answers from approximately . . . 476 policemen. Personal interviews were conducted with the Superintendent of Police and his staff, as well as with commanders of the three police districts in which the principal April disorder occurred” (p. 1).

48. Ibid., pp. 6–7, 9, italics added. “Normal routines” for abnormal times?


50. Mayor’s Riot Study Committee report, p. 7.

51. The role of the police in triggering or at least intensifying riot behavior has been confirmed by many studies summarized in Joe Feagin and Harlan Hahn, Ghetto Revolts: The Politics of Violence in American Cities (New York: Macmillan, 1973), esp. pp. 151-59.

52. Mayor’s Riot Study Committee report, p. 8; italics added.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid., pp. 9–10.

55. Ibid., p. 10.

56. Clippings from Chicago Municipal Reference Collection files.


58. Mayor’s Riot Study Committee report, p. 12.

59. Ibid., p. 16.

60. Ibid., p. 15.

61. Ibid., p. 3; italics added.

62. An article by Dorothy Collin, “United Gangs Patrol for Peace on City Streets,” Chicago’s American, Monday April 8, pp. 1, 7, suggested that the Blackstone Rangers and the East Side Disciples were “patrolling for peace” on the South Side.

63. Mayor’s Riot Study Committee report, p. 15. This claim is belied by witnesses who saw the burning of S. 63rd Street, of which substantial remnants exist to this day.

64. According to the Mayor’s Riot Study Committee report (p. 15), there was very little looting or arson on the Near North Side “dominated by the Cabrini-Green Housing complex. . . . This looting and arson activity was . . . principally directed toward white-owned and operated business establishments.” During the late evening, some sniper fire came from Cabrini, but the police did not respond.

65. Ibid., p. 16.

66. Ibid., pp. 16–17.

67. Ibid., p. 18.

68. Ibid., p. 18.

69. Ibid., p. 19.

75. Ibid.; italics added.
76. Ibid., pp. 120–21. I think they are reinventing the inquiry of Johnson’s The Negro in Chicago!
77. Ibid.
78. Max Frankel, introduction to The Walker Report, p. x. The only reason it wasn’t published earlier or officially was its inclusion of obscenities!
79. Ibid., p. viii.
80. This meeting seems to have been observed by the F.B.I., since knowledge of it is revealed in The Walker Report (p. 25).
81. Ibid., pp. 28.
82. Ibid., pp. 55–56; italics added.
83. Ibid., p. 57. The reluctance of blacks to participate made enormous sense, given that as early as January 1968, confidential sources were already playing on racial paranoia. “Examples are: 1. Reports that black power groups were allegedly meeting to discuss the convention and the assassination of leading political figures. 2. Unnamed black militants in the East were reported to have discussed renting apartments near the Amphitheatre for use as sniping posts. 3. An organization was reportedly organized to secure weapons and explosives and to plan a revolution to coincide with the convention.” The list continued with another six “rumors,” culminating in a plot to put LSD in the Chicago water supply (p. 97).
84. For a breakdown of those injured and arrested, see “Supplement to the Walker Report,” pp. 351–58.
85. Ibid., p. 356.
88. Ibid.
89. April 4 that year fell on Good Friday, when schools were to be closed.
91. Henry De Zutter, Chicago Daily News, April 4, 1969. Title and page number are missing from the file in the Chicago Municipal Reference collection.


96. To the south was the renovation of Dearborn Station and development of expensive loft dwellings in what used to be Printers’ Row; to the west, new glass office edifices and upscale condominiums such as Presidential Towers were constructed on the western side of the Chicago River, formerly beyond the pale of the Loop.


98. Ibid., p. 484.


100. In the 1950s and 1960s, to forestall greater integration and still avail itself of federally subsidized redevelopment programs and public housing, Chicago had won a concession—to clear dense but low-rise “slums” in its two major ghettos, and to construct in their place and along their margins massive high-rise public housing projects where poor minorities could be stacked and basically neglected.
