

DARE TO STRUGGLE: THE SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL
ROOTS OF THE ILLINOIS CHAPTER OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

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ABSTRACT

DARE TO STRUGGLE: THE SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ROOTS OF THE ILLINOIS CHAPTER OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

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The Black Panther Party emerged in Chicago in the late 1960s and was a direct response to the physical, social, and political environment that African Americans were subjected to in the city. The African American community in Chicago had been geographically restricted and oppressed by both public and private citizens of Chicago which began with the First Great Migration in the early twentieth century. Processes such as redlining, urban renewal, and white flight further solidified the strict segregation and subjugation of the city's African American population during the mid-twentieth century. The establishment of the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party in 1968 was an answer to these environmental inequalities that disturbed the African American community of Chicago. The ideology and the programs of the Black Panther Party in Chicago echoed the frustrations and needs of black Chicagoans who were being exposed to dilapidated environments. The Black Panther Party in Chicago therefore should be viewed as a product of the distinct urban environment of Chicago and quickly became a popular and impactful organization within the city because it reflected and attempted to rectify the dissatisfactions of the city's African Americans.

Introduction

This thesis will examine the social and environmental factors that led to the establishment of the Black Panther Party in Chicago. The Black Panther Party's existence in Chicago was brief but impactful, emerging in 1968 when the city, much like the rest of the nation, experienced great social unrest. More specifically, the African American community in Chicago was being placed into pockets of oppression thanks to the promises of urban renewal from realtors and politicians such as the infamous Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley. The corrupt and systemically racist process of urban renewal in Chicago had been going on for over two decades before the Black Panthers organized in Chicago in 1968. Chicago Black Panthers such as Fred Hampton called out the corruption around them and demanded equality and better quality of life for their fellow African Americans who had endured the tribulations of urban decay for much too long. The social and political factors that shaped the physical environment of urban Chicago in the late 1960s were the driving components for why the Black Panthers were a popular and successful organization in their short existence.

The Black Panthers' impact can be seen through their implementation of programs such as the free breakfast program and their free health clinic which publicly demonstrated that improving African American communities was possible with help from a political organization. For individuals like Fred Hampton, Chairman of the Illinois Black Panther Party from 1968 until his death in 1969, the urban and social environment that he grew up in molded him into the leader he was to become and shaped his desire to improve the lives of black Chicagoans. Understanding the built environment will be crucial for this thesis because it argues that the urban landscape was a main factor for why the Illinois Black Panther Party (ILBPP) was

organized and subsequently impactful on the city and community it represented. Perhaps the earliest example of Fred Hampton pushing back against environmental and social inequality was his crusade for a public pool in Maywood, Illinois. The Chicago summers were much too hot for children to be playing outside all day, so a pool or body of water was almost a necessity. The white kids in Maywood had access to a private pool in the next town over but African American kids were not allowed to swim there because it was segregated, and Lake Michigan was much too far away for them to walk. To fill the need for a summer watering hole, Hampton organized carpools to drive African American kids to a public pool in the Lyons/Brookfield area, about twenty minutes away from Maywood.¹ Hampton saw this injustice in his own community and began to speak out, lead protests, and demand for a public pool to be provided to all citizens of Maywood, black or white. Although this never came to fruition in his lifetime, speaking out on behalf of this environmental and social inequality in his community is what got Hampton the attention of the NAACP who elected him as president of the youth council of the Maywood branch and boosted his civil rights activism.² The public pool he fought for was opened in 1970, one year after his assassination, and today bears his name.

The way the environment influenced the lives of African Americans and shaped their activism is a crucial argument in this thesis. A U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare report from 1968 defined environment as “the aggregate of all the external conditions and influences affecting the life and development of an organism, human behavior, society, etc.”³ For Fred Hampton and the other African Americans in Chicago who the Black Panthers

¹ Jeffrey Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2010), 20.

² Joseph Boyce, “Friends, Relatives Tell Story of Fred Hampton,” *Chicago Tribune*, 28 December 1969, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy195.nclive.org/docview/169815441/C00848039BC44FCAPQ/1?accountid=14968>.

³ U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, *Environmental Health Planning Guide*, Washington D.C.: 1968, 1.

sought to represent, their environment was exactly this. From Maywood to the Henry Horner Homes resting on the city's Near West Side, the environment for these people consisted of the air they breathed in from local industrial plants, the diseases that ran rampant through their overcrowded neighborhoods, and the run-down buildings they lived in which were either neglected by the Chicago Housing Authority or abandoned because of white flight towards the suburbs. Along with these physical factors, the environment for black Chicagoans also consisted of the societal pressures that came with being an African American in mid-twentieth century Chicago. Issues ranged from a lack of dependable job opportunities and enhanced criminal activity to unjust police patrolling, all of which had roots with the city's systemic racism and were instrumental in creating the environment for Chicago's African American community.

In addition to this, this thesis views the environment in a similar light to how Thomas G. Andrews does in his book *Killing for Coal*. Andrews looks at the coalfield wars of the early twentieth century in Colorado by utilizing the scope of environmental history which he argues "enables us to see the long history of struggle that gave rise to these events in ecological terms."⁴ Much like Andrews, this thesis will seek to demonstrate that the impactful emergence of the ILBPP had roots in the physical landscape that the black community of Chicago lived in. Moreover, Andrews sees his focus as an "attempt to move beyond this intellectual isolation and to advance our understanding of how working people have experienced and transformed the natural world, as well as how they have been transformed by it."⁵ Instead of Andrews' coal miners, this thesis will focus on the black community from the West Side of Chicago and will illustrate how they were transformed by their natural world which subsequently led them to support the ILBPP.

⁴ Thomas G. Andrews, *Killing for Coal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 15.

⁵ Ibid, 16.

This project positions the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party as a political response to the environment of Chicago. The thesis uses terms like neighborhood and community with the analytical intention of describing the environment in which African Americans resided and influenced the Black Panthers' activism. Elements such as urban blight, white flight, and urban renewal fueled African American inequality in Chicago. These practices resulted in both environmental and social inequalities and were so deeply rooted in the city that public officials made legislation and policies that ensured segregation would remain strongly intact. Thinking of the ILBPP as a political response to the environment of Chicago in the late 1960s is central to this research. Using this analytical lens, this thesis argues that Fred Hampton and the ILBPP were products of the specific urban environment of Chicago in the 1960s, which was heavily influenced by political and social factors.

This thesis builds on a similar micro-history argument Simon Balto makes in his 2019 book *Occupied Territory*. Balto asserts "that it is impossible to understand the racialized waging of the late twentieth-century Wars on Crime and Drugs without reckoning with the shifting nature of local-level policing in the decades before."⁶ Rather than focusing solely on policing, however, this thesis focuses on the local-level urban decay that shaped how black Chicagoans responded to their environment. It is impossible to understand why and how the ILBPP became such an impactful organization in Chicago without first reckoning with the tribulations black Chicagoans faced with urban renewal and the other staunch racial inequalities that came with being a black resident of the city in the mid-twentieth century.

⁶ Simon Balto, *Occupied Territory: Policing Black Chicago from Red Summer to Black Power* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 3.

Historiography

By positioning the creation of the ILBPP at the nexus of social and environmental factors, this thesis is situated within three historiographies. The histories of Chicago's civil rights movement and Chicago's urban decay will inform this project. Drawing on these historiographies, I argue that the direct action, radical approach of the ILBPP was a response to the environmental inequalities found in Chicago neighborhoods inhabited by African American residents.

Civil Rights Historiography

Black Radicalism on Chicago's West Side by Jon Rice is an intricate study of how the ILBPP evolved on the city's West Side which Rice traced back to the 1930s. Rice's dissertation provided key insight into details of the ILBPP's activities as well as their physical presence within the city. Rice conducted numerous interviews with former BPP members from Chicago as well as other historical figures from this era in Chicago's history which provided a strong viewpoint from the subaltern. Rice's focus on the ILBPP combined with his geographical confinement to Chicago's West Side makes his dissertation an invaluable source.⁷

The Assassination of Fred Hampton, written by Jeffrey Haas, is essential for this thesis because of Haas's personal and professional proximity to Hampton. Haas represented Hampton as his lawyer in the trial that accused the government of having a hand in killing the young man. Haas's book does not necessarily make a scholarly argument but instead tries to shed light on who Fred Hampton was as a person and humanize him. Haas reveals certain details about

⁷ Jon F. Rice, "Black Radicalism on Chicago's West Side: A History of the Illinois Black Panther Party" (PhD diss., Northern Illinois University, 1998).

Hampton's past shows the environment he grew up in and how it impacted his eventual activism.⁸

From the Bullet to the Ballot by Jakobi Williams is the quintessential source on the Black Panthers in Chicago and provides a grassroots framework lacking from Anderson and Pickering. Williams' text focuses on the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party which was based in Chicago. Williams argues that the Black Panthers were not a complete breakaway from the Civil Rights Movement but instead a continuation and a response to the social environment in Chicago in the late 1960s.⁹ In addition to this, his book places importance on the Rainbow Coalition established by the Panthers in 1968 which he argues left a lasting legacy on racial coalition politics in Chicago, stretching as far as President Obama's 2008 election.¹⁰ What perhaps makes Williams' book most valuable is his main primary source, the previously sealed records of the Red Squad in Chicago. The Red Squad was a subsector of the Chicago Police Department that played a pivotal role in suppressing the black community with its' illegal surveillance of groups and organizations that looked to disrupt the machine politics of Chicago in the 1960s.¹¹

Black Against Empire by Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr., which was published in 2013, serves as broader context to Williams' work. It analyzes the history and politics of the Black Panther Party and reveals significant information about how the Civil Rights Movement continued on in a much different form after their legislative victories in the mid-1960s. Bloom and Martin explain how the Black Panther Party was only able to attain the political success they did because their ideologies were applicable to the social and political circumstances of the late

⁸ Jeffrey Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton: How the FBI and the Chicago Police Murdered a Black Panther* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2010).

⁹ Jakobi Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot: The Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and Racial Coalition Politics in Chicago* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 14.

¹⁰ Ibid, 13-14.

¹¹ Ibid, 11.

1960s. The political instability brought on by the Vietnam War and its unpopular draft helped the Black Panther Party's ascendance but the driving factor to the party's popularity was its appeal to young urban blacks who felt powerless despite the supposed victories of the Civil Rights Movement a few years earlier. The Black Panther's political stance of armed self-defense resonated with black youths across the country who wished to overcome their oppressed lives and brutal policing of the ghettos they faced on a daily basis. A combination of this local context with the anti-war movement and the international backing of allies shot the Black Panther Party onto the political scene in the late 1960s as a legitimate revolutionary organization that was deemed an internal threat to the U.S. government. The main argument of Bloom and Martin's book deals with justifying why the Black Panther Party experienced the success that they did. In the text Bloom and Martin state:

“The resonance of the Panthers was specific to the times. Many blacks believed conventional methods were insufficient to redress persistent exclusion from municipal hiring, decent education, and political power. Inspired by civil rights victories, young blacks wanted to extend the Black Liberation Struggle to challenge black poverty and ghettoization. As Panthers, they could stand up to police brutality, economic exploitation, and political exclusion. As Panthers, they extended the struggle to break continuing patterns of racial submissiveness.”¹²

Bloom and Martin's book is an important text for this specific research because to fully understand the Black Panther Party in Chicago, understanding the party as a whole is crucial.

Crucibles of Black Empowerment by Jeffrey Helgeson looks at how African Americans in Chicago utilized community-based politics to combat the racial inequalities they faced in an array of settings such as the workplace and city institutions. Helgeson's scope spans from the New Deal era to the momentous election of Chicago's first black mayor, Harold Washington, in 1983. Helgeson contests that African Americans learned how to employ community-based

¹² Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 392.

politics by engaging with their neighbors and learning from one another with how to battle the inequalities they faced as black Chicagoans, starting as small as the home sphere, and expanding to as large as Barrack Obama's ascension to the presidency. Helgeson's text provides a street-view analysis of black Chicagoans during the desired era and more importantly, it illustrates how African Americans sought to fight the corrupt policies of urban renewal within their neighborhoods.¹³

The Torture Machine offers additional context for the sort of harassment and violence Fred Hampton and his contemporaries faced. It analyzes racism and police violence in Chicago starting in 1969 and continuing into the next two decades. Written by Flint Taylor, a fellow lawyer of Haas's at the People's Law Office (PLO) in Chicago, this book is essentially a memoir of a former lawyer who saw first-hand the brutalities African Americans faced from Chicago Police officers in the 1960s and 70s. This text provides imperative evidence for what these officers were ordered to do from high-ranking officials. Ample court documents demonstrate how black Chicagoans were treated within their own communities.¹⁴

Simon Balto's *Occupied Territory: Policing Black Chicago from Red Summer to Black Power* looks at the time period from the Chicago Race Riot of 1919 up until the prominence of black power in the city in the early 1970s specifically analyzing at how the Chicago Police Department (CPD) was used to suppress African Americans' rights in the city. Balto highlights how the CPD was unquestionably used to enforce racial segregation in Chicago and also helped created unjust biases of the African American community due to their tactics of over-patrolling and racially profiling African Americans while stripping them of their civil liberties in the

¹³ Jeffrey Helgeson, *Crucibles of Black Empowerment: Chicago's Neighborhood Politics from the New Deal to Harold Washington* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014).

¹⁴ Flint Taylor, *The Torture Machine: Racism and Police Violence in Chicago* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2019).

process. Balto's book closely analyzes one of the largest contributors for the suppression and segregation of the black community of the 1940-1960s, the Chicago Police Department.¹⁵

Urban History Historiography

Making the Second Ghetto by Arnold Hirsch analyzed the period from 1940 to 1960 in Chicago focusing on how urban renewal created the modern ghetto for black Chicagoans. Hirsch argued that the city rebuilding process of the post-World War II era was utilized by Chicago politicians to reinforce segregation and create what he calls the second ghetto of Chicago.¹⁶ Within his analysis Hirsch described the laws, policies, and agencies produced in this era that played key roles in hardening segregation in Chicago. Hirsch also kept a keen eye on how public housing evolved in this time period which was arguably the fundamental creator of this new era of segregation.

Roger Biles' journal article titled "Race and Housing in Chicago" breaks down how both public policies and private white citizens in Chicago systematically enforced a strict segregation of black communities which left African Americans in impoverished areas of the city. Biles discusses how the influx of hundreds of thousands of African Americans during the Great Migration caused concern for Chicago's residents who were staunch supporters of segregation. He demonstrates that money-hungry realtors took advantage of the situation by engaging in a practice known as blockbusting. These realtors would convince white homeowners to sell their properties for dirt cheap to escape encroaching African Americans and then these realtors turned right around and sold these properties at outrageous prices to African Americans making gross profits. Biles also discusses how city politicians such as former mayor Martin Kennelly managed

¹⁵ Simon Balto, *Occupied Territory: Policing Black Chicago from Red Summer to Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

¹⁶ Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 2.

to gain a stranglehold on the process of urban renewal by taking control of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) which decided where new public housing would be established. With control over the CHA, Kennelly assured that segregation would remain intact by wiping out African American ghettos and putting public housing in their place to assure they could contain more African Americans in a smaller vicinity. With the provided evidence, Biles makes the convincing argument that both public and private groups ensured that Chicago remained a segregated city by keeping African Americans in sections of the city that were referred to as the “Black Belt”. Biles’ work demonstrates specifically how the African American communities of Chicago were forced into these pockets of oppression which later would result in the formation of the ILBPP.¹⁷

Richard Rothstein’s *The Color of Law* contributes to the study of urban development with his analysis of *de facto* and *de jure* segregation in urban areas. Within his text, Rothstein dispelled the myth of *de facto* segregation and argued that within urban cities it was *de jure* segregation that kept neighborhoods racially disparate. *De jure* segregation is the idea that the racial division of urban areas was supported/controlled by the government. This idea demonstrates how government officials such as mayors and aldermen utilized their governmental powers to ensure the city of Chicago remained rigidly segregated.¹⁸

Environmental Historiography

Martin Melosi’s 1993 journal article, “The Place of the City in Environmental History”, asserted that it was important to study the city in the context of environmental history because it is a part of the physical world even if it is man-made. Melosi used his article as an opportunity to highlight how the city has been analyzed overtime in this historical subfield and contended

¹⁷ Roger Biles, “Race and Housing in Chicago”, *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* vol. 94, no. 1 (2001): 31-38, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/40193533>.

¹⁸ Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017).

that urban environmental history has yet to reach its full potential because it is still too deeply rooted in the history of technology, architectural history or other specialized fields of urban history that do not strictly focus on the city from an environmental history perspective.¹⁹ Melosi's article demonstrated how easy it is to veer away from an urban environmental history if the focus isn't clearly set out to look at the city as a physical environment that effects humans such as much as a natural environment would.

Another important work of environmental history from the 1990s was Andrew Hurley's *Environmental Inequalities* (1995) which was a case study on Gary, Indiana that specifically focused on how the city's industrial pollution effected the population. Hurley's scope was 1945-1980 which is just a bit wider than the one this thesis utilizes but more importantly he analyzed how both the work and home environment of African Americans in Gary were affected by industrial pollution. Hurley's approach to his subject matter is a useful model for analysis of the African American communities on Chicago's West Side. Despite the fact that Gary was a predominately industrial city, Hurley still viewed it as a physical environment which was affected by air pollution, water pollution and other physical conditions that shaped the geographic areas in which Gary's citizens lived.²⁰

David Naguib Pellow's *Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago* is a book that analyzes Chicago from an environmental history perspective. Pellow focuses on the waste industry in the city but also carefully considers social factors that contributed to Chicago's environmental degradation. Pellow sheds light on the environmental

¹⁹ Martin V. Melosi, "The Place of the City in Environmental History," *Environmental History Review* Vol. 17, No. 1 (1993): 11, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3984888>.

²⁰ Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

inequalities brought on by Chicago's waste management. He makes the clear argument that the minority community of Chicago experienced environmental racism due to the city's waste management. Pellow's work has a wide chronological scope and demonstrates just how environmentally dangerous African American communities were compared to white ones.²¹

Jeff Wiltse's *Contested Waters* (2007) was a social history of American swimming pools but for the purposes of this thesis it fits into the environmental historiography. Wiltse focused his book on the transformation of northern U.S. public pools from the late 19th century to the early 20th century which saw segregation became more of an issue as time went on. Although the scope of Wiltse's book is before the desired time period of this thesis, his focus highlights and enhances the very important aspect of this thesis concerning Fred Hampton's push for a community pool. Wiltse's in-depth analysis of pools in the northern U.S. provides context as well as support for why Hampton thought it was important from an environmental standpoint that his community built a pool for the African American residents to use.²²

Finally, *Toxic Communities* by Dorceta Taylor, published in 2014, focused on how poor, minority communities have been affected by environmental inequalities and industrial pollution. This alone makes Taylor's book extremely important to this project, but she also dedicates a decent portion of her book to racial zoning, residential mobility and other concepts which directly correlate with urban renewal and Taylor skillfully connects this with environmental history. Taylor also spotlights Chicago a few times in her text directly addressing how certain neighborhoods within the city were subjected to environmental racism which she describes as "minority and low-income communities facing disproportionate environmental harms and

²¹ David Naguib Pellow, *Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002).

²² Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

limited environmental benefits.”²³ Taylor’s analysis of environmental inequalities, especially those existing in Chicago, serves as a template for this study’s analysis of how it looks at the physical environment of the ILBPP.

²³ Dorceta Taylor, *Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, and Residential Mobility* (New York: NYU Press, 2014), 2.

Chapter One: “Stranger Blues” and the Establishment of Chicago’s Black Belt²⁴

Looking at an aerial map of the Chicagoland area, it is hard not to notice the intricate system of highways and roads that weave in and out of the city forming its modern geographic borders on their way. One such highway is the Eisenhower Expressway (I-290), which runs from the heart of downtown Chicago directly west into the suburbs carving through neighborhoods that are over a century old. Driving down the eight-lane highway, motorists can catch only glimpses of the era of urban renewal such as the Irene McCoy Gaines Apartments which exhibits the high-rise design and is synonymous with that era. Besides this one building, there are hardly any reminders for modern travelers of urban renewal, the monumental era which had its roots in the 1940s and continued on through the 1960s that drastically changed the landscape of Chicago and other cities across America. Modern citizens of the Windy City, including many of my relatives and friends, surely take for granted that the neighborhoods on the West and South Sides of Chicago “naturally” became areas of decay and nefarious activity. As this thesis will demonstrate, this was not the case at all. Analyzing Fred Hampton’s early life and the physical environment he grew up in – one created by neglect and the racist policies of urban renewal – will help illustrate the world that created a suitable environment for the Black Panthers to emerge as an impactful organization in Chicago.

Frederick Allen Hampton was born on August 30, 1948 in the southwest suburb of Argo, Illinois.²⁵ Like many African Americans during this era, Hampton’s parents, Francis and Iberia Hampton, were participants in the Great Migration and came to Chicago from rural Louisiana. Shortly after Fred’s birth, his family moved to nearby Blue Island, Illinois where they stayed

²⁴ Elmore James, “Stranger Blues,” Track B, *Fire Records*, 1962.

²⁵ Jefferey Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2010), 15.

until he was ten when they ultimately settled in Maywood, Illinois, a western suburb of Chicago.²⁶ When the Hampton's moved into 804 South 17th Avenue the racial composition of Maywood was 80.5% white and 19.1% black. It was one of the few suburbs of the time that was integrated.²⁷ Despite this racial disparity and the racial discrimination that plagued America during this era, the Hampton's managed to plant themselves in an environment that allowed young Fred Hampton to thrive. Their Maywood home was directly across the street from Irving Elementary School, where Fred attended and also found his love for improving his community. As Fred's mother Iberia recollected on her son's time in elementary school, it was evident that even as a young boy Fred was drawn to bettering the lives around him. As Iberia stated, "On Saturday mornings Fred would round up the neighborhood kids. They would buy food and come back to the house, where they would cook breakfast together for themselves and all of us. Fred knew some of the children didn't get much to eat at home."²⁸ From a young age Hampton was aware of his surroundings and was already looking to provide solutions. Living close to the elementary school gave Hampton an easy outlet to connect with his peers as well as provide a physical space where he could orchestrate and act upon his desire for change. This was demonstrated with his weekly gatherings of fellow students to eat breakfast at his house, but it was only the beginning for Hampton.

Hampton's knack for bringing his community together grew as he did when he graduated from Irving Elementary and continued on to Proviso East High School. Venturing 16 blocks east on Madison Street to attend Proviso East changed Hampton's route to school, but more importantly it widened his view of the community. The 20-minute walk Hampton took to high

²⁶ Ibid, 16.

²⁷ *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, "Maywood, IL", last modified 2005, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/796.html>.

²⁸ Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton*, 16.

school every day gave him a tour of the typical Chicago suburb. On his way Hampton would have seen double flats just like the house he lived in along with Craftsman homes, Bungalows, and other architecture commonly found in the suburbs. These homes were complimented by spacious lawns which were home to large, shady trees of many species such as oak and ash. Almost all of these yards had concrete sidewalks cutting through them, providing a safe distance from the street for pedestrians such as Hampton on his journey to Proviso East. As Hampton continued to grow and venture further east into the heart of Chicago, the comparison of these living conditions with those that many Black Chicagoans experienced certainly struck a nerve with the young man. Hampton became involved with the NAACP while attending Proviso East and subsequently became the president of the West Suburban youth chapter. Hampton quickly used his position within the organization to address issues at the school he saw every day. As former West Suburban NAACP president Donald Williams remembered, “Fred apprised me of some conditions at Proviso East... a discipline policy which was not equitable... not fair as far as African American students were concerned. He also indicated that the lunch program was unsatisfactory.”²⁹ These observations from Hampton were not typical of a common high school student. In addition to this, Hampton observed the lack of black representation among the teachers/administrators at Proviso East and openly demanded that this was corrected.³⁰ Charles Anderson, a former black administrator at Proviso East, attested that “Fred was the reason I was hired at Proviso East High School as dean in charge of attendance. Until that time, I had been applying for six years and never had been given an interview.”³¹ These examples demonstrated

²⁹ William Hampton, *The Essence of Fred Hampton* (Chicago: Salsedo Press, 1989), 8.

³⁰ Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton*, 19.

³¹ Hampton, *The Essence of Fred Hampton*, 15.

that Hampton was a young man who was willing to call out injustice within his community but more importantly he was willing to act upon it.

Before Hampton rose to national prominence and joined the Black Panther Party, his most outstanding act towards bettering his community was his tenacity towards getting a pool/recreation center for the youth of Maywood. As a fellow community activist and friend of Hampton's, Paul R. Smith said it best when he stated:

"Long hot summer days and sweating nights caused minds to look at the whole system. Fred was one who fought for change. Fred was quick to point out the ills of this society and the band-aid approach to solving the problems. Fred was a young, articulate person who gave his life to identifying and working to help others, not only to be able to eat, but to be able to live a better life through this system."³²

One of the prominent ills Hampton saw within his community was a lack of recreational activities for the black children of Maywood during the summer months. Temperatures rose up to the 90s during the Chicago summers and air conditioning units were uncommon in the 1960s, especially in African American homes. The best way to escape the heat and still enjoy being a kid during these heat waves was cooling off in a pool. Only a few blocks away from Hampton's childhood home was Memorial Park Pool in neighboring Bellwood. That pool, however, was segregated and didn't allow black children to swim there. Hampton's immediate solution to the issue was to organize carpools which would take black children to pools like the one in Lyons where they could swim and enjoy the refreshing water that soothed the scalding heat of the summer sun.

Yet Fred Hampton was unsatisfied with this solution and urged and appealed to the village of Maywood to build a pool and recreational center for all children of the community to enjoy, regardless of their race. Hampton, as a teenager, led marches and attended town meetings

³² Ibid, 13.

urging Maywood to provide this service to the community because he understood that improving the environment would in turn improve the lives of those in his community. The importance Hampton placed on his community receiving an outlet to beat the summer heat was not unique. A few years before Hampton's crusade for a swimming pool in Maywood, a group of Civil Rights activists in 1960 and 1961 led by twenty-one-year-old Velma Murphy Hill sought to end the unofficial segregation of Rainbow Beach in Chicago.³³ Near 77th Street on the city's South Side, Rainbow Beach was one of the few beaches in Chicago that was still segregated in 1960. Inspired by nonviolent protests such as the Greensboro sit-ins, Murphy Hill led a group of activists on the morning of August 28th onto the Lake Michigan beach to perform a wade-in to protest the segregation of the beach. The protest was met with violence from a white mob that formed, and Murphy Hill was struck in the head with a rock and her injury required seventeen stitches.³⁴ Various wade-ins were performed after this initial effort which eventually led to the successful integration of Rainbow Beach. The purpose behind the wade-ins though was very similar to Hampton's crusade. Rainbow Beach was directly adjacent to the African American neighborhood's on the city's South Side and was an outlet of escape from the summer heat but perhaps more importantly a safe space to swim for African American children. Well into the twentieth century African American children had drowned in unsafe waters. Rainbow Beach, however, had a lifeguard. Here was a location where Black Chicagoans could beat the heat and swim in a safe environment. Murphy Hill and her fellow activists were pushing for integration of the beach because they understood the importance of having access to a safe, cool body of water in the hot summer months in Chicago.

³³ John Keilman, "Rainbow Beach 'Wade-Ins' Broke Down Racial Barrier", *Chicago Tribune*, 13 July 2011, <https://www-proquest-com.proxy195.nclive.org/docview/876177752?pq-origsite=summon>.

³⁴ Ibid.

Just 10 miles away from Maywood on Chicago's West Side, a group of African Americans were providing their own solutions to escape the summer sun despite their lack of public swimming pools during the same time as Hampton's campaign for a pool. As Jeff Wiltse stated in his book *Contested Waters*:

"On a hot, mid-July afternoon in 1966, several teenagers opened a fire hydrant near the corner of Roosevelt Road and Loomis Street on Chicago's West Side. As was common, they crowded in front of the wide-mouth spout and let the cool water gush over their bodies. Before long, patrolmen Melvin Clark and Arthur Secor arrived in their police cruiser and shut off the hydrant. Opening hydrants was prohibited in Chicago although, according to the Chicago *Defender*, the city only seemed to enforce the ordinance in black neighborhoods. A local community leader, Chester Robinson, implored the officers to leave the hydrant open, explaining that it was the children's only source of relief from the heat."³⁵

Despite Robinson's appeal to the patrolmen's humanity, the hydrant remained closed until a disgruntled man from the crowd defied the ordinance once again and reopened the hydrant. The patrolmen were quick to arrest the man but the crowd that had gathered around the hydrant became physically upset with the police officers and began protesting by throwing rocks and other debris at the patrolmen. A riot erupted on the West Side for the next three days which illustrated the frustrations black Chicagoans had with their environment's lack of facilities to relieve them from the summer heat.³⁶ The frustrated reaction from the man who reopened the hydrant knowing good and well what would happen to him with the police officers still being at the scene reflects upon the importance of a cool source of water for Chicago residents during the summers. The reopening of the fire hydrant served as a protest in front of two city employees which demonstrated that this man would willingly be arrested in an effort to provide relief for his community from the perils of the environment to which they were subjected. Hampton's efforts were more diplomatic in conveying that his community of Maywood needed a swimming pool

³⁵ Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 185.

³⁶ Ibid, 186.

but still held this same sense of urgency and importance. Although Hampton did not live to see the pool's construction, his efforts were certainly not forgotten. At the village board meeting in 1970 which decided the name of the swimming pool Ted Elbert stated: "All who followed the progress of the swimming pool must agree that without Fred Hampton there would be no swimming pool."³⁷ Thus the pool still holds his name today and stands as a small representation of the dreams Hampton had of revitalizing his community.

By the time Hampton became chairman of the ILBPP in late 1968, he had ventured across all of Chicago, experiencing the city's African Americans neighborhoods firsthand. As the Red Squad surveillance reports indicated numerous times, Hampton and his fellow Panthers were seen driving all over the Chicagoland area. A drive that Hampton frequently made was from his parent's home in Maywood to the ILBPP Headquarters at 2350 W. Madison Street in Chicago. This particular drive would take Hampton from his hometown of Maywood, through the neighboring suburb of Oak Park before entering Garfield Park and finally arriving in the Near West Side where the Panthers headquarters were located. As Fred pulled away from 804 South 17th Avenue and eventually made his way onto Madison Street, he saw familiar homes and buildings such as his alma mater Proviso East. If he had his window down, it's likely that Hampton could smell the aroma of Italian beefs and steamed hot dogs coming from Al's Drive In as he crossed the intersection of Madison and 1st Ave. As Hampton continued east on Madison, he would enter Oak Park when he reached Harlem Avenue. The air in Oak Park felt a bit different, with hints of arrogance and pride from their citizens who loved boasting that their town was home to renowned writer Ernest Hemingway and gifted architect Frank Lloyd Wright. As Hampton drove through Oak Park, a town who hosted a march in 1968 which was "against

³⁷ Ibid, 25.

white racism” because they felt victimized by claims that their community was racist, he would have noticed expensive mansions, upper-class shopping districts, and a congruency of white faces.³⁸ Oak Park during this era represented white elitism and as a city effectively remained segregated. Hampton soon crossed Cicero Avenue and reached Garfield Park, a neighborhood that by the late 1960s was predominately African American. As Hampton cruised through the Chicago neighborhood, he would notice the dilapidated buildings which were systemically neglected by the city once the population became predominately black. Halfway through Garfield Park, Hampton could look to the left and take in the sprawling park--which gave the neighborhood its name--filled with luscious plant life and two ponds, and included the Garfield Park Conservatory. As Hampton neared his destination of 2350 W. Madison St., he could see only the tallest buildings in the Chicago skyline because 16 high-rise apartments stood between downtown and the Panthers’ headquarters. These high-rise apartments were the Henry Horner Homes, a product of urban renewal and an embodiment of how the city wished to deal with its growing population, specifically the African American population. Seeing these symbols of urban renewal as Hampton arrived at ILBPP headquarters surely fueled his fire and reminded him exactly what his goals were, creating a more suitable living environment for his neighbors and community.

Hampton was famously known for proclaiming himself a revolutionary, but in many ways he was a reformist. Historian Donna Jean Murch described in her book *Living for the City* that there was a general shift in the BPP from revolution to reform beginning in 1968.³⁹ Hampton’s political activism reflected this shift because while he preached the revolutionary

³⁸ “Photo Gallery: A History of Oak Park and River Forest”, *Chicago Tribune*, 9 February 2016. http://galleries.apps.chicagotribune.com/chi-photo-gallery-a-history-of-oak-park-20121017/#chi-hist-oakpark_whitech20121017083934.

³⁹ Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 169.

ideology, he was also devoted to making an actual change within his community with the survival programs the ILBPP enacted such as the Free Breakfast for Children Program. Therefore, Hampton should not be considered just a revolutionary. Instead, he should be considered a hybrid of a revolutionary and a reformist, idealistically promoting revolution while simultaneously providing practical alleviation for his community.

History of the Black Belt and Connecting it to Environmental Injustice

To fully understand the environment that Fred Hampton and the ILBPP emerged from, an analysis of how Chicago's neighborhoods were physically transformed during the twentieth century must be addressed. Chicago was a city that experienced tremendous growth in the late 19th century, reaching a population of over 1,698,575 people by 1890, less than sixty years after its foundation.⁴⁰ At this point in the city's history the racial demographic was almost entirely white with the majority of the ethnic makeup being Irish, German, and Eastern European. To put into perspective exactly how white Chicago was at the turn of the century, in 1900 there were only 30,150 African Americans which made up 1.3% of the population while residents of European descent were 98.7% of the city's population.⁴¹ Although these percentages did not drastically change over the next two decades, the African American population skyrocketed beginning around 1920. In that year, there were 109,458 African Americans in Chicago which nearly quadrupled the population from 1900.⁴² The Great Migration had a good deal to do with this but there was also a need for workers in Chicago's industries which were prominent at the onset of World War I due to European immigration coming to a near standstill. It therefore made sense for African Americans to settle in on the South Side of Chicago because during the early

⁴⁰ St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Clayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945), 8.

⁴¹ Ibid, 8-9.

⁴² Ibid, 8.

1900s this was where the majority of industry was in the city: from the infamous meat packing district of the Union Stockyards to the Central Manufacturing District (CMD) the South Side was home to most of Chicago's industry. At the CMD's height in the early twentieth century, it was home to factories for the Ford Motor Company, the Pullman Company, and Westinghouse Electric Corporation. The South Side was heaven for an individual seeking employment especially during the war years when demand was high.⁴³ As African American families quickly found out though, they didn't have the ability to live elsewhere in the city even if they wanted to.

Settling on the South Side near the heart of the city's industry was logical for migrant African Americans, but it was also the most blighted area of the city which is why it was readily available. In Chicago, African Americans "inherit(ed) sections of the city that the older, more well-to-do inhabitants have abandoned and thus 'the undesirable racial factor is so merged with the other unattractive features, such as proximity to factories, poor transportation, old and obsolete buildings, poor street improvements, and the presence of criminal or vice elements.'"⁴⁴ As European immigrants in Chicago such as the Italians and Irish began to improve their status economically, they were able to flee the slums in the city and reside in more suitable living environments, leaving the dilapidated areas of Chicago for the new wave of lower-class migrants. Sociologist Nathan Hare dubbed this process as "ecological succession," when migrant African Americans filled the vacancy within urban slums.⁴⁵ Ecological succession defined in scientific terms "is the process by which the mix of species and habitat in an area changes over

⁴³ "Chicago's Central Manufacturing District: The Past and Future of Urban Manufacturing", The Center for Neighborhood Technology, 2016:

<https://cnt.org/sites/default/files/publications/Chicago'sCentralManufacturingDistrict.pdf>.

⁴⁴ St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Clayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945), 175.

⁴⁵ Nathan Hare, "Black Ecology", *The Black Scholar* Vol. 1, No. 6 (1970): 5. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41163443>.

time” which in the case of Chicago’s slums, it was the “mix of race” rather than species that changed over time.⁴⁶

According to this fusion of scientific and sociological ideology, if African Americans were to better themselves like the Irish and Italians did in the past, they too could escape the slums in pursuit of more desirable living environments. Even Drake and Cayton discuss this possibility when they stated that people living within the slums could elevate their social positions and move into established middle-class neighborhoods if they were “able to change the telltale marks of poverty, name, foreign language, or distinctive customs” but they made the key distinction that “this, Negroes wearing the badge of color, cannot do.”⁴⁷ African Americans were prevented from this elevation because of racial prejudice which had plagued black equality in America since the nation’s inception. Because they were forcibly stagnated in the slums, black neighborhoods were irrationally synonymized with dilapidation, blight, and all other factors that created slums. A Chicago resident named Lea Taylor confirmed this bias when she stated “The buildings into which the negroes are being moved are producing such congestion that it is impossible for them to live decently. The inference in the neighborhoods is that that is the way negroes like to live.”⁴⁸ Assumptions such as this one created the illogical association of black neighborhoods with slums and it became so prominent that “By the mid-twentieth century, ‘slums’ and ‘blight’ were widely understood euphemisms for African American neighborhoods.”⁴⁹ The racial bigotry of white Chicagoans entwined the negative aspects of the

⁴⁶ Max Witynski, “Ecological Succession, Explained,” *UChicago News*, 22 December 2021. <https://news.uchicago.edu/explainer/what-is-ecological-succession>.

⁴⁷ Drake and Clayton, *Black Metropolis*, 175.

⁴⁸ Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 35.

⁴⁹ Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 127.

slums with African Americans despite the clear fact that they were the ones forcing black Chicagoans to remain within the confines of the Black Belt.

So as the African American population flourished through the end of WWI and those who had the economic means began looking for new living opportunities outside the Black Belt, they promptly were reminded that they were geographically restricted. White Chicagoans demonstrated that northerners were no better when it came to racism than their southern counterparts. Esteemed Chicago newspaper columnist Mike Royko said it best when he stated, “Most Chicago whites hated blacks. The only genuine difference between a southern white and a Chicago white was in their accent.”⁵⁰ The growing of Chicago’s black population coincided with the growing animosity they faced from white people in surrounding neighborhoods. White Chicagoans made it abundantly clear that they wanted to keep their city segregated with such organizations as the Hyde Park-Kenwood Association (South Side neighborhoods) proclaiming that the use of bullets and bombs were justifiable in the effort to keep African Americans from moving into their neighborhoods. Between the years of 1917 and 1921, “58 Black residences were bombed, and two Blacks were killed...The police did not make any arrests, even when Blacks phoned in bomb threats and buildings were staked out before the bombings.”⁵¹ The culmination of this white aggression towards African Americans came on a hot summer day in July of 1919. On a South Side beach on Lake Michigan, a young African American boy was swimming in the water to escape the heat when he crossed an imaginary line that separated the black beach from the white one. White beachgoers reacted in an aggressive manner by stoning the young boy until he drowned. The incident enflamed a fight between the white and black

⁵⁰ Mike Royko, *Boss* (New York: Penguin Group, 1971), 137.

⁵¹ Dorceta Taylor, *Toxic Communities* (New York: NYU Press, 2014), 208.

people at the beach which subsequently poured into the streets of Chicago.⁵² For the next six days near-constant violence ensued between whites and African Americans within the Black Belt, destroying homes and businesses while leaving 38 people dead (23 black, 15 white) and 537 injured.⁵³ If it was not official already, the Race Riot of 1919 cemented the fact that white Chicagoans would do anything to keep Chicago a segregated city and ensure African Americans remained contained in the Black Belt which was already one of the most degraded sections of the city.

On top of the physical violence that African Americans faced, they also were plagued with racially restrictive covenants that were forged between the white neighborhoods surrounding the Black Belt. These restrictive covenants were distributed and signed by whites on the South Side in their ongoing effort to keep their neighborhoods segregated. The basic rhetoric of these covenants was an agreement amongst neighbors to ensure that they would not sell their homes to black buyers. By 1930, “between 75% and 85% of all residential property in the city was bound by restrictive covenants barring owners from selling or renting to Blacks.”⁵⁴ In addition to these private citizens manufacturing written documents that enforced segregation, the Chicago Real Estate Board (CREB) was also adamantly on board with segregation and proclaimed that they would expel any realtors who tried to sell property to African Americans.⁵⁵ These efforts and declarations from both the private and public spheres made it essentially impossible for African Americans to leave the Black Belt, unless they had a death wish.

All of these factors working against African Americans in Chicago did not deter the flow of more African American migrants. By 1930 the black population of Chicago had grown to

⁵² Drake and Clayton, *Black Metropolis*, 65-66.

⁵³ Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 1.

⁵⁴ Taylor, *Toxic Communities*, 209.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 209.

233,903 and continued on this trend by the time World War II was winding down in 1944 when it reached 337,000, making up almost 10% of Chicago's total population.⁵⁶ Even with this tremendous population boom, African Americans were still restricted to the Black Belt of Chicago which consisted of the neighborhoods of Bronzeville, Douglas, and Washington Park on the city's Southeast Side. African Americans were so condensed in the Black Belt that it was estimated that there were 90,000 black people living within a square mile which compared to whites in nearby apartment-homes, was only 20,000 people per square mile.⁵⁷ The most popular solution to this overgrowth of the African American population within the Black Belt was kitchenettes. St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton perfectly encapsulated what a kitchenette was and why they came to be in the Black Belt during this era in their famous study of Chicago's black population, *Black Metropolis*. Within their text they stated:

"Building after building in these areas was cut up into 'kitchenettes,' for an enterprising landlord could take a six-room apartment renting for \$50 a month and divide it into six kitchenettes renting at \$8 a week, thus assuring a revenue of \$192 a month! For each one-room household he provided an ice-box, a bed, and a gas hot-plate. A bathroom that once served a single family now served six. A building that formerly held sixty families might now have three hundred."⁵⁸

This then became the trend for apartment buildings in the Black Belt, as the population continued to boom but the restrictions on where African Americans could reside were still firmly intact, landlords saw an opportunity to make significant profits off of their properties by overcrowding them inhumanely like sardines into makeshift apartments within apartments. Landlords typically did this to their properties which were already showing signs of deterioration, so this was essentially a last chance effort to squeeze as much revenue out of them before they became uninhabitable. More importantly though, landlords did this because they knew they could get

⁵⁶ Drake and Clayton, *Black Metropolis*, 7-8.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 204.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 576.

away with it. The following interaction demonstrated how the city of Chicago felt about its black population: "What," asked an official of a Negro civic agency, 'do the Chicago Real Estate

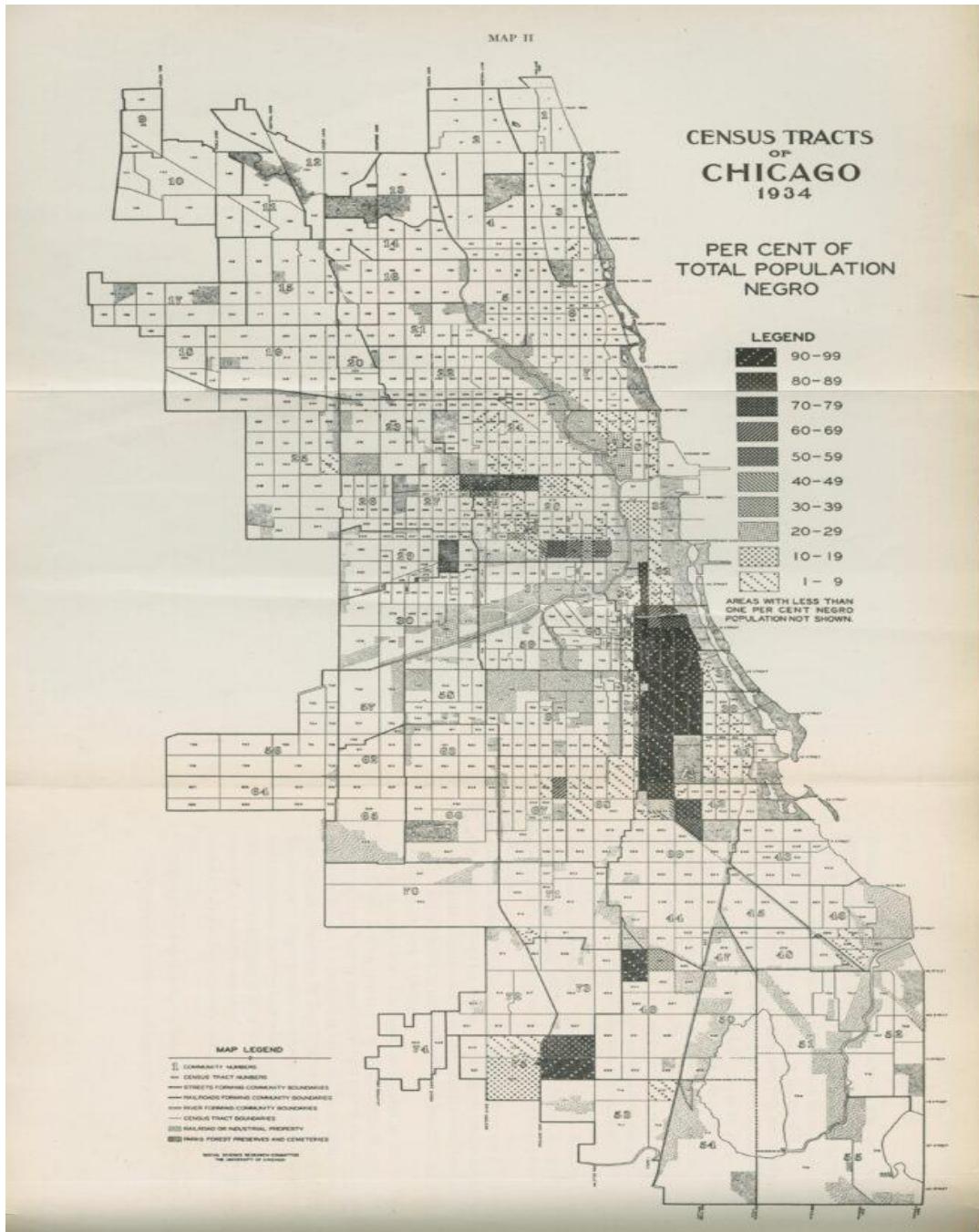


Figure 1. Population distribution of African Americans in Chicago, black area on map was the Black Belt (Bronzeville, Douglas, and Washington Park). Courtesy of wendycitychicago.com

Board, and the city, plan to do with the Negroes who now live in the blighted areas? Will restrictive covenants be relaxed so they, too, can move to the suburbs and near-suburbs?'... the answer of a member of the Real Estate Board was crisp: 'We have no plans for them. Perhaps they can return to the South.'⁵⁹ The harsh reality for African Americans living in Chicago was that the affluent whites in power, most notably realtors and landlords, did not care for their well-being and purposely put them in a moldering environment.

One of the biggest environmental inequalities African Americans faced within the Black Belt was space. For African Americans specifically, the lack of space was a major disadvantage environmentally. As whites fled to the suburbs and traded their apartment flats for Craftsman homes and manicured lawns, there was a clear desirability for space. In fact, "in a survey of reasons for moving to the urban fringe, that of 'less, congested, more room' was twenty times more frequently given than the fact that the environment was 'cleaner'."⁶⁰ The comfort of space is something that may be easily taken for granted or not assimilated with an individual's environment, but for the African Americans living in the Black Belt it was a daily reminder. As we are educated in contemporary society, the best way to prevent disease or avoid getting sick is to distance ourselves or quarantine. For African Americans living in kitchenettes with hundreds of other residents in the same building as them, quarantining or social distancing was a luxury they could not afford. The best demonstration for how a lack of space negatively impacted these black Chicagoans was reflected in the way tuberculosis effected the Black Belt in 1944: "the tuberculosis death rate is five times higher than it is for whites, and that the Negro areas have the highest sickness and death rates from tuberculosis."⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid, 207.

⁶⁰ Hare, "Black Ecology", 5.

⁶¹ Drake and Clayton, *Black Metropolis*, 204.

As Figure 2 illustrates, the Black Belt of Chicago suffered much more from tuberculosis than other regions of the city. This could be attributed to the resident's lower economic status which would have restricted them from receiving proper medical care, but it is also inextricably tied to the vast amount of people in a small area which allows diseases, like tuberculosis, to spread like wildfire. Another facet of disease that the figure below illustrates was occurrences of "insanity," which today we would break down into different forms of mental illnesses. Regardless of the verbiage, there is a clear correlation between the amount of "insanity" and the overcrowded area that was the Black Belt. As sociologist Nathan Hare put it, "At certain levels of optimum density, flies in fruit jars have been known to die in droves and rats in crowded places to attack and eat their young and otherwise behave in strange and aberrant ways. Frantz Fanon and others have patiently charted the way in which oppressed peoples so crowded turn upon themselves when, for whatever reason, they feel too weak to fight their oppressor."⁶² Hare's analysis provides a clear picture for why the levels of mental illnesses are much higher within the Black Belt. The analogy of being stuck in a broken, packed elevator is also useful. Some of the people in there may be your family members but there is also a good deal of strangers, and you are all unwillingly trapped in a confined space, unable to get out unless someone fixes the broken (elevator) system. It then becomes a lot easier to empathize with these African Americans who were involuntarily put in these environments. The overcrowding within the Black Belt was not only bad for physical health, but it was also a detriment to mental health which resulted from the staunch segregation policies of Chicago realtors, neighborhood restrictive covenants, and the general attitude of the Chicagoans in power who disregarding the needs of the African American community and environment. The disregarding of African

⁶² Hare, "Black Ecology", 4.

American needs was best highlighted in an investigation conducted by the Chicago Urban League in 1940 of the Armour Square neighborhood, a South Side community which was

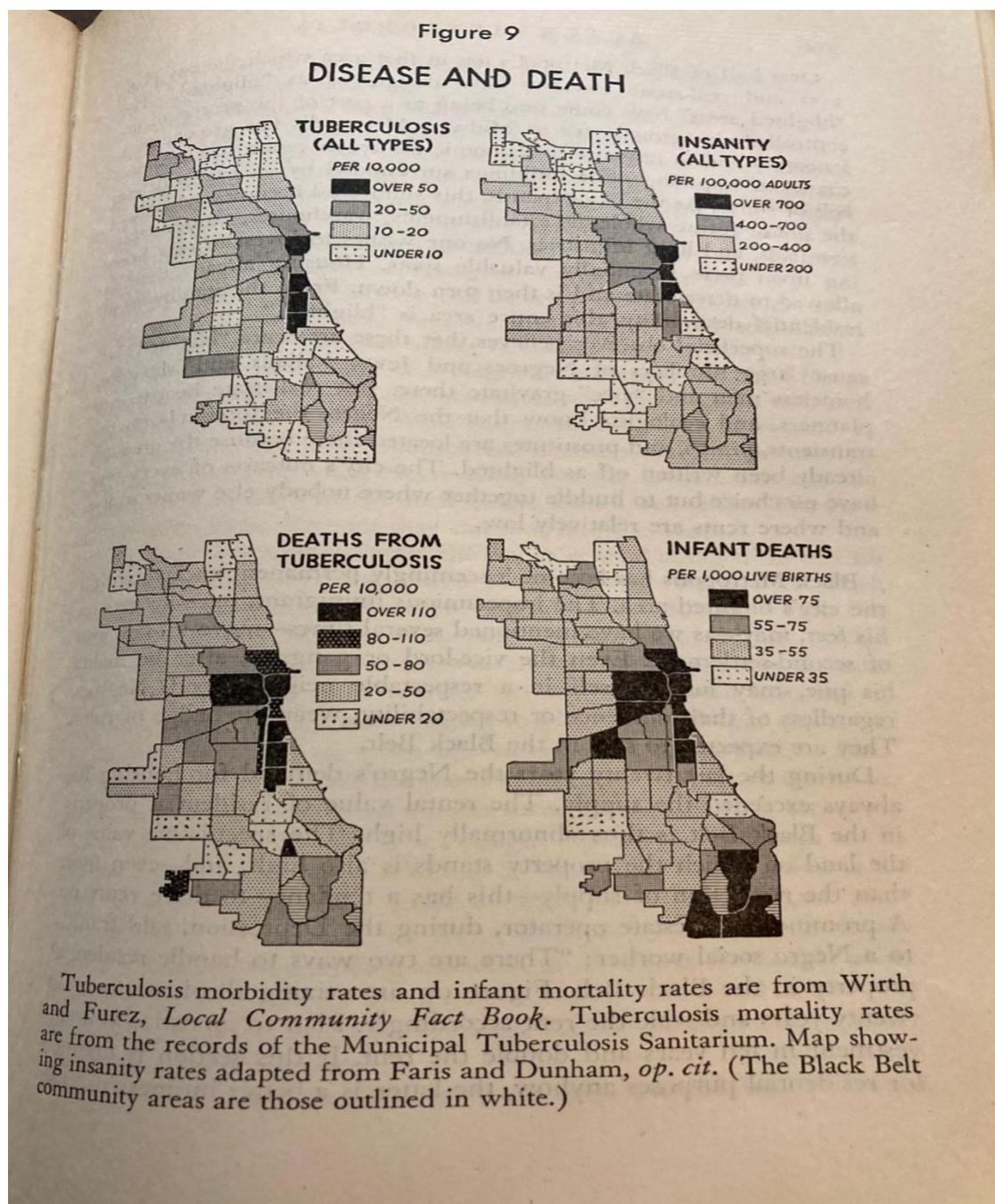


Figure 2. Drake and Cayton, page 209, illustrates how the lack of space negatively impacted the Black Belt.

adjacent to the Union Stock Yards and in the backyard of Comiskey Park. The investigation “found many homes lacking the most ‘ordinary conveniences,’ such as water and toilets, and the widespread use of kerosene lamps.”⁶³ Amenities such as flushing toilets or lightbulbs weren’t available to many African Americans in the Black Belt, demonstrating that a major environmental inequality for black Chicagoans was the absence of services that the vast majority of Chicagoans would have taken for granted.

One of the developments that solidified the inequality of the Black Belt compared to the rest of Chicago was the process of redlining in the 1930s and 40s. As an answer to the economic crisis of the Great Depression, more specifically the housing crisis, the federal government created the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) in 1933. The HOLC sought to alleviate the issue of homeowners facing foreclosure by purchasing their mortgages and refinancing them into extended mortgages of up to 25 years while also amortizing the mortgages so that once the loan was paid off, the mortgagor would own the home.⁶⁴ In theory, this program was a positive initiative which aimed to get working-class and middle-class Americans back on their feet with the support of the federal government. The main issue with HOLC and what made it detrimental to the African American community was how they assessed risk before giving out loans. As Richard Rothstein stated in his integral study on segregation in America, *The Color of Law*:

“The HOLC hired local real estate agents to make the appraisals on which refinancing decisions could be based. With these agents required by their national ethics code to maintain segregation, it’s not surprising in gauging risk HOLC considered the racial composition of neighborhoods. The HOLC created color-coded maps of every metropolitan area in the nation, with the safest neighborhoods colored green and the riskiest colored red. A neighborhood earned a red color if African Americans lived in it, even if it was a solid middle-class neighborhood of single-family homes.”⁶⁵

⁶³ Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 18.

⁶⁴ Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 63

⁶⁵ Ibid, 64.

The same realtors who stated that African Americans should go back to the South were the ones in control of determining which neighborhoods and individuals were fit to receive loans from the federal government. It comes as no surprise then to learn that areas within Chicago where African Americans resided were redlined and deemed unfit to receive loans and overall devaluing the neighborhoods on the local and national level.

The environmental ramifications of redlining are subtle but impacted African American communities greatly. As Bailey Numbers stated in an environmental study of Chicago:

“There are several factors at play that increase temperature, contribute to air and water pollution, and proximity to hazardous waste in these minority communities in Chicago. It all goes back to the redlined history. The decreased land value in redlined districts made it cheaper for city planners to locate new industries, highways, warehouses, and public housing in these neighborhoods. The members of these communities do not have the political power or economic status to fight back.”⁶⁶

Because HOLC determined African American neighborhoods a risk for loans, it decreased the property values which in turn made the region appealing to businesses or infrastructures that could receive a good bang for their buck. This brought large factories into African American’s backyards which had a significant impact on the air and water quality which produced negative health effects. The decreased land value also made it more appealing for city officials to place highways through these neighborhoods, the greatest example in Chicago being the Dan Ryan Expressway (I-90/I-94), an enormous 14 lane highway which carved through the entirety of the South Side’s Black Belt.

This unequal environment for black Chicagoans that was forged in the early 20th century set the precedent for the following decades. African Americans were forced into overcrowded and hazardous regions of the city because of staunch segregation policies which were enforced

⁶⁶ Bailey Numbers, “Environmental Injustice in Chicago, IL”, Story maps ArcGIS, November 27, 2020: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/9d5246e2ecbf4b2babcb33fee01f72>.

by both private and public citizens of Chicago. The conditions that black Chicagoans were subjected to made them more susceptible to diseases, both mental and physical, and provided an overall lower quality of life. The ramifications of redlining furthered these environmental inequalities by placing factories and city infrastructure within their neighborhoods which degraded the air and water quality while also taking away any sort of green space that was left in the community. This was the state of Chicago's African American community on the eve of urban renewal, an era in the city's history that further solidified Chicago as a city determined to remain segregated and subject its black community to environmental inequalities.

Chapter Two: “Inner City Blues” and Chicago in the Age of Urban Renewal⁶⁷

The 1940s marked a new era of American history, and especially in Chicago where urban renewal would define and mold the geography of the city for the next two decades. After World War II, the U.S. came down from their status as avengers on the world stage and had to look in the mirror and face their own domestic issues. Although the U.S. did not suffer utter depletion of their cities like their counterparts in Europe and Asia, they still faced a country-wide housing shortage, specifically in urban regions, that affected its returning soldiers and their rapidly growing baby-boomer families. The federal government under the Truman administration sought to remediate this issue by providing federal funding when necessary for cities who needed to improve their housing conditions. Chicago was among the most prominent cities that needed to improve their housing infrastructure.

The idea of “urban renewal” was not a new phenomenon in America by the time of the infamous federal Housing Act of 1949, especially in Chicago, it just proceeded under different titles and lacked federal support. In 1934, the Metropolitan Housing and Planning Council (MHPC) was formed in Chicago and its members consisted of the elites of the city- bankers, realtors, and industry tycoons with the common broad goal of improving their city.⁶⁸ This elite group sounds like it comes out of a poorly-written Batman comic, the 1% of the city’s wealthy inhabitants plotting together to recreate the city on their own terms, but it’s too ironic to be untrue. The MHPC’s main goal was to clear the city’s slums and specifically targeted the ones directly adjacent to the heart of downtown’s commercial district on the South and West sides

⁶⁷ Marvin Gaye, “Inner City Blues (Makes Me Wanna Holler),” Track 3, *Motown Records*, 1971.

⁶⁸ Beryl Satter, *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America* (Picador: New York, 2009), 47.

because the stigma of dilapidated neighborhoods kept some middle/upper class whites from frequenting these businesses. World War II halted the MHPC's efforts but they quickly got back on track and proposed a solution to the city's slum issue that would set a resounding precedent for how urban renewal would function. The MHPC penned the Illinois Blighted Areas Redevelopment Act in 1947 which became a law and subsequently created the Land Clearance Commission, a public agency that was given the power to obtain land in dilapidated or blighted areas of the city, demolish the existing structures, and then selling the land to private investors who would then build new, more suitable developments.⁶⁹ The most destructive aspect of this new legislation was that it granted this newly created public agency the power of eminent domain. It did not, however, have to abide by the rules that the Chicago Housing Authority had to when it razed slums. In other words, the creation of the Land Clearance Commission was a way for Chicago politicians and wealthy property owners to bypass codes set in place that required fair compensation or relocation for those displaced by slum clearances.

One way the MHPC was able to persuade city and state officials to enact the Blighted Areas Redevelopment Act was an accompanying piece of legislation referred to as the Relocation Act. The Relocation Act was a measure put in place by the MHPC that would provide funding for 15% of those who were uprooted due to urban redevelopment. That 15% was based on a study of the vacancy rate in the entire city.⁷⁰ This measure was a slap in the face for black Chicagoans who fell homeless as a result of these slum clearances. The vacancy rates did not reflect areas in the city where African Americans could afford housing, but more importantly where they would be accepted socially due to still persistent racial tensions and racially restrictive covenants. The Relocation Act made it certain that this new legislation would be

⁶⁹ Ibid, 47.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 48.

inimical for black Chicagoans by giving veto power to the City Council for areas chosen for public housing. This effectively meant that the city of Chicago could continue its enforcement of segregation by barring public housing for African Americans within white neighborhoods, regardless of the vacancy of land. The chairman of the CHA at the time, Robert R. Taylor, saw this legislation and especially the given veto power to the City Council as “the end of public housing sites in good residential areas” because these laws were designed to “prevent the influx of Negroes into white neighborhoods.”⁷¹ More important than this though, the affirmation that public housing for African Americans would only be built in existing black neighborhoods meant that those displaced were forced into a vicious system working against them. Some African Americans were fortunate to find adequate new living quarters in a city where they were already in short supply, but the vast majority were thrust into a state of homelessness or forced into even denser conditions of overcrowding because their homes had been seized from them without compensation. The Blighted Areas Redevelopment Act clearly stated that it wished to eradicate the city’s slums because those regions of Chicago “contribute to the development and cause an increase in the spread of disease, crime, infant mortality and juvenile delinquency, and constitute a menace to the health, safety, morals and welfare of the residents.”⁷² The legislation directly addressed why these blighted regions of Chicago were problematic, but their motive for eradicating the slums had nothing to do with bettering the lives of those living in them. As historian Arnold Hirsch succinctly stated in regard to the creators of this legislation and new public agency, “The promoters wanted to reattract ‘solvent’ population to the central city, not to provide new housing for those who could not afford it... the rebuttal that the plan would not relieve the city’s housing shortage was also true but beside the point. The bill’s architects had

⁷¹ Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 223-224.

⁷² Ibid, 114.

never contemplated such a goal.”⁷³ The goal of urban renewal for organizations like MHPC and individuals who controlled them was to revitalize the inner city and the easiest way to do that was to clear the slums. Whether they employed clever verbiage in their drafts for these bills that would later become state laws is irrelevant, the fact that there was clear legislation implemented that displaced African Americans and disregarded their need for relocation or compensation set a corrupt precedent for how Chicago would “renew” their city.

Many historians have argued that the legislation passed in Chicago was the template for the federal Housing Act of 1949 and subsequently determined how urban renewal would be imposed across the country. Holman Pettibone, the president of the Chicago Title and Trust Company as well as one of the chief architects of MHPC’s proposal, was certain that “the 1947 Illinois legislation was more significant than the federal Housing Act of 1949. The Illinois-Chicago program was the model for the nation, he claimed, and ‘was in no way dependent on federal legislation.’⁷⁴ Hirsch agreed with Pettibone’s assessment when he gave his analysis on the impact of Illinois’s urban renewal legislation. Hirsch asserted that:

“There is evidence, moreover, that the Illinois Redevelopment Act of 1947 and the Urban Community Conservation Act of 1953 served as virtual models for the federal Housing acts of 1949 and 1954. The sources and nature of Chicago’s policies are thus of more than passing interest as local variants in a broad program- they were of national significance.”⁷⁵

One of the clearest influences that Illinois’s legislation had on the federal acts was the persistence of segregation in the public housing projects. On the national level there were contentious debates on whether it should be allowed for local governments to segregate these newly created housing projects. In 1949 a liberal senator from Illinois, Paul Douglas, attempted

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 112.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 269.

to persuade his colleagues on the Senate floor that implementing any amendment to the Housing act that required integration would not be wise. Douglas stated:

“I should like to point out to my Negro friends what a large amount of housing they will get under this act... I am ready to appeal to history and to time that it is in the best interests of the Negro race that we carry through the housing program as planned rather than put in the bill an amendment which will inevitably defeat it.”⁷⁶

Douglas’s words proved to be persuasive because there was a consensus amongst Congress to reject any integration amendments and the 1949 Housing Act was established, allowing local authorities to lawfully design separate public housing projects for blacks and whites.⁷⁷ This exclusion of an amendment that imposed integration was the perfect loophole local governments like Chicago needed to keep segregation intact. Writing about these urban renewal laws, *The Chicago Defender* eloquently stated that they were “calculated to continue the ghetto and strengthen the spirit of segregation” as well as “determined to confine the Negro population of Chicago within a walled city.”⁷⁸ These laws, both state and federal, set the parameters for what urban renewal would look like in Chicago and how the “second ghetto” was molded in the post-World War II years.⁷⁹

The most prominent example of how the city of Chicago used this legislation to create segregated public housing projects was the Robert Taylor Homes, the largest public housing project in America. When the Robert Taylor Homes opened its doors in 1962, it consisted of 28 high rises which were each 16 stories tall and had 4,400 apartments that housed roughly 27,000 people of which 20,000 were children.⁸⁰ The Robert Taylor Homes were one of the last but also

⁷⁶ Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 31.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 31.

⁷⁸ *Chicago Defender*, 29 April 1950, and 6 May 1950.

⁷⁹ Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, xii.

⁸⁰ D. Bradford Hunt, “What Went Wrong with Public Housing in Chicago? A History of the Robert Taylor Homes”, *Journal of the Illinois Historical Society* Vol. 94, No. 1: 96. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40193536>.

the largest housing project that the city of Chicago constructed in the preexisting Black Belt on the city's South Side. Bearing the name of former African American chairman of the CHA Robert R. Taylor, the public housing project stretched for two miles on Chicago's State Street from 39th Street (Pershing Road) to 55th Street (Garfield Boulevard) but encompassed less than a quarter mile from East to West.⁸¹ The Taylor Homes were the last installment of the five total public housing projects that were built on State Street specifically for African American tenants. Together they were the largest concentration of public housing in America.⁸² The location of the Robert Taylor Homes had been selected as early as 1940 largely due to it being in one of the most dilapidated sections of Chicago's South Side Black Belt, but continuous battles between public officials within the CHA and the City Council delayed the actual construction and logistical framework required to build such an enormous development. By the time they were ready to break ground on the Robert Taylor Homes in the early 60s, it had become blatantly obvious that the high-rise design of public housing projects was unfavorable. Even officials of the CHA, including its Executive Director William B. Kean, realized that the high-rise designs were not suitable living environments for public housing inhabitants. Nonetheless, the CHA greenlit the design and location of the Taylor Homes for two key reasons: the City Council still held their veto power of site location, so the CHA was not able to build anywhere within white neighborhoods, even if there was vacant land which forced their only location to be within the preexisting Black Belt. This subsequently forced them to continue the use of high-rise designs opposed to the more favorable low-rise, park-like design because they still needed to meet the overwhelming demand of housing for black Chicagoans. The second key reason was the need to use the extensive amount of federal money granted to the city for public housing which came

⁸¹ Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 263.

⁸² Hunt, "What Went Wrong with Public Housing in Chicago? A History of the Robert Taylor Homes", 96.

with stipulations. The federal government stayed away from the planning details of the public housing projects, but they were stringent on budgets which ultimately forced the city to continue using high-rise designs because they were cost-efficient, despite their unfavorable environments.⁸³

The designs of these high-rise projects were unfavorable to say the least. The first and most obvious reason was the monotony of these skyscraping housing developments which in the case of the South Side, went on for four miles. Along with this, the continuity and close distance between these high-rises eliminated the community feel of a typical neighborhood which would have had local businesses and shops scattered throughout. One of the earliest and most prominent issues that arose at high-rises like the Robert Taylor Homes was the elevators that transported families to and from their apartments. With only two elevators per building, the design of the housing project became a nightmare for families with little children when the elevators broke down because maintenance was notoriously neglected at the Robert Taylor Homes.⁸⁴ Otis and Westinghouse, the company employed to make repairs, had performed inadequate work, and lied on their reports about the quality and quantity of their work. Having to use the stairs may seem like a small inconvenience, but in 1963, just one year after the project had been built, three children died in a fire on the 14th floor of a Robert Taylor Homes building and fire fighters cited that the broken-down elevators were a hinderance to their ability to put out the fire in time.⁸⁵ The environment that was created by the CHA and the city of Chicago at Robert Taylor Homes and other public housing projects like it quickly turned into dangerous and undesirable living spaces, making “the projects” a new synonym of the ghetto and slums.

⁸³ Ibid, 102-103.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 97.

⁸⁵ CHA Project Manager Robert Murphy, “Report on Fire at 5201 Federal Street on Saturday, September 14, 1963”, September 17, 1963, CHA Development Files, 2-37.

Arguably the most notable geographic feature of the Robert Taylor Homes resided on the project's west side. The housing development was uncoincidentally placed right next to the boisterous railroad tracks which were consistently used by trains heading in and out of the city. Not even a block further to the west of these tracks though, the expansive Dan Ryan Expressway stood which had just been completed in 1961, a year before the Taylor Homes were built. Along with serving as a vast system of transportation for patrons and pedestrians of Chicago, the Dan Ryan served as a physical barrier between Chicago's Black Belt and some of its older, historically white neighborhoods such as Bridgeport (neighborhood where Mayor Richard J. Daley resided) and Canaryville. The placement of the Dan Ryan between these neighborhoods was no mistake, a fact which legendary Chicago newspaper columnist Mike Royko pointed out in his 1971 biography of Mayor Daley. Royko argued, "containing the Negro was unspoken city policy. Even expressways were planned as man-made barriers, the unofficial borders. The Dan Ryan, for instance, was shifted several blocks during the planning stage to make one of the ghetto walls."⁸⁶ Not only were city planners and officials using federal money to build unsuitable high-rise public housing, on top of this they were using federal money to build interstate highways that provided physical barriers between white and black regions of the city, literally cementing segregation in Chicago.

The West Side Black Belt

If you were to hop onto the Dan Ryan Expressway near the Robert Taylor Homes and head northbound, in about 4 miles you would run into the Eisenhower Expressway, Chicago's major highway that runs east to west. Heading westbound on the Eisenhower, in less than a mile

⁸⁶ Royko, Boss, 135.



Figure 3. Aerial View of Robert Taylor Homes looking north which illustrates its proximity to the Dan Ryan Expressway. Courtesy of Lawrence Okrent.

you would arrive in Chicago's newer "Black Belt" on the West Side. The African American population on the West Side skyrocketed in the aftermath of World War II as the black neighborhoods on the South Side were being torn up due to urban renewal and African Americans were in dire need of new housing opportunities. This population boom is best understood when looking at how the specific neighborhoods on the West Side altered over time. In East Garfield Park, there was already an established black population of 2,990 in 1940 but compared to the white population of 62,704, African Americans only made up 4.54% of the total inhabitants. By 1960, the black population encapsulated 61.46% of the total population of East Garfield Park at 41,097. By 1970, the black population made up 97.96% of the neighborhood.⁸⁷ The transformation of West Garfield Park however was much more drastic. In 1940, there were only 24 African Americans opposed to the 48,392 whites which made the black population under 1% of the total. By 1960, the black population grew to 7,204 but only made up 15.79% of the total neighborhood. In 1970, that figure switched to 96.83% of the population and numbered 46,929 African Americans.⁸⁸

The drastic growth of the black population on the West Side of Chicago was by no means a peaceful and streamlined transition. In fact, the process of African Americans moving into neighborhoods such as Lawndale and both Garfield Parks was eerily similar to what had occurred a few decades previous on the South Side. Much like on the South Side, whites on the West Side were fierce in their quest to keep their neighborhoods segregated. For example, "in July 1957, approximately a thousand whites surrounded a building that had been purchased by an African American in an Italian section of Lawndale. They shattered the building's windows until

⁸⁷ Amanda I. Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 34.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 35.

they were dispersed by police. The next night two hundred white teenagers gathered near the home, chanting, ‘We want blood’.”⁸⁹ A similar experience was had by William Glover and his wife in that same year when the couple bought a home in East Garfield Park. As historian Amanda Seligman noted, “When they first moved in, their furnace and boiler were destroyed. They were left alone until September, when renewed attacks frightened them. The Glovers’ garage was burned down. Then their car, parked on the street, was set afire. Finally, large staples were shot through their windows on several successive nights.”⁹⁰ These acts of violence against African Americans were brutal but did not persist nearly as long as they did on the South Side. The main reason for this was because this new wave of blacks moving into white neighborhoods was occurring in the 1950s and 1960s and the geography of Chicago was aging and transforming which caused an ample amount of “white flight.” As early as the Great Depression era, white West Siders were concerned with the physical decay of their environment and became increasingly so in the postwar years when conditions only got worse. These whites campaigned for decades to improve the physical conditions of their neighborhoods but were ultimately neglected and left out of Mayor Daley and his cronies’ plans for urban renewal, demonstrating that the city’s West Side was politically impotent and helpless in regard to environmental rejuvenation.⁹¹ Despite this physical evidence of deterioration already being present on the West Side before there was a significant black population, white West Siders like the majority of all other Americans associated physical decay, blight, and other urban degradation with the incoming African American population. This association was blatantly racist.⁹² In addition to the deterioration of the physical environment on the West Side, whites began to trade in their city

⁸⁹ Satter, *Family Properties*, 93.

⁹⁰ Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago’s West Side*, 167.

⁹¹ Ibid, 6-8.

⁹² Ibid, 41.

homes and head to the suburbs. It is well known that the suburbs exploded during the postwar years and Chicago was no exception. Thousands of white Chicagoans moved to the suburbs in the aftermath of WWII as a reaction to how the city transformed. Many industries moved their businesses out to the suburbs because the land was cheaper which subsequently attracted new residents because there was an established, steady job source. Even if whites who moved into the suburbs still worked in the city, the construction of the massive highway systems in the 1950s and 1960s provided these people with an unprecedentedly speedy commute. For these white West Siders, it made sense to give up the fight against integration and instead flee to the suburbs where newer, more spacious housing was available along with convenient access to jobs and quick commuter routes. In the case of the West Side, it should not be looked at as white flight but instead taking advantage of their privilege as white Chicagoans and choosing to move to a more suitable environment instead of digging their heels in and continuing their fight against environmental decay while also remaining stubborn in their resistance to integration.

As the racial homogeneity of Chicago's West Side quickly shifted from white to black, the physical deterioration did not magically go away, and African Americans were left to deal with it. African Americans did not just roll over and accept defeat, they too like their white predecessors, sought to revitalize their communities and fight blight. It's important to note that the transition of the West Side from a white to a black neighborhood created further deterioration that occurred quickly and in dramatic fashion. Because many whites were willing to sell their houses and head for the suburbs, realtors on the West Side turned significant profits in the process known as "blockbusting." As historian Roger Biles explained the phenomenon, "urging whites to sell their homes and get out quickly, the 'panic-peddlers' purchased dwellings at

bargain-basement prices and then sold them to blacks at outrageous markups.”⁹³ This process ran rampant on the West Side during the 1950s and 1960s and it made realtors egregiously rich. One such realtor named Norris Vitcheck openly boasted about his success in exploiting African Americans through blockbusting in a 1962 magazine article. In the article Vitcheck stated, “I know that I make four times the profit I could for the same amount of effort in all-white real estate. If anybody who is well established in this business in Chicago doesn’t earn \$100,000 a year, he is loafing.”⁹⁴ To put it into perspective in terms of how much Vitcheck claimed realtors were making in today’s economy, \$100,000 in 1962 is equivalent to roughly \$950,000 today. These extortionate prices that realtors charged black West Siders forced many families to double-up to purchase houses. Even landlords followed this trend by raising rent prices which overall caused overcrowding in many African American living quarters. Additionally, landlords stopped performing routine repairs which quickly led to the degradation of whole communities. The city also decreased the frequency of garbage pick-ups on the West Side which greatly increased the rat population and negatively impacted health conditions.⁹⁵

The physical condition of Chicago’s West Side in the 1960s was best described by two visitors in the summer of 1966 who came to Chicago with the goal of improving the lives of African Americans. Ralph Abernathy and Martin Luther King Jr., two esteemed leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, were dumbfounded with the sheer decimation of the urban environment of black Chicagoans on the West Side. As Abernathy described it:

“the apartment houses reminded me of the buildings I had seen in Europe right at the end of World War II- windows broken out and mounds of rubble instead of yards. And the odor was unbearable. It was a little like a city dump, except that along with the garbage you constantly

⁹³ Roger Biles, “Race and Housing in Chicago”, *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* vol. 94, no. 1 (2001): 33-34, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/40193533>.

⁹⁴ Norris Vitcheck to Alfred Balk, “Confessions of a Block-Buster”, *Saturday Evening Post*, July 14-21, 1962, 15-19.

⁹⁵ Jon F. Rice, “Black Radicalism on Chicago’s West Side: A History of the Illinois Black Panther Party” (PhD diss., Northern Illinois University, 1998), 27-28.

smelled human waste. There was no escaping it. The hallways were filled with rotting food and piles of feces, and always you could see the rats patrolling- so large and bold that you wondered if they weren't going to attack you.”⁹⁶

Abernathy’s weariness towards the rats was warranted considering there were several incidents where rats would attack young children in these dilapidated regions and some attacks even resulted in the deaths of children.⁹⁷ This prevalence of aggressive rats prompted Mayor Daley to announce an anti-rat campaign in the mid 1960s which was targeted specifically on the West and South sides, the two regions of the city densely populated by African Americans.⁹⁸

While Abernathy illustrated how the physical environment looked, Dr. King explained how the physical environment effected the inhabitants of the slums psychologically. Early on in his stay within the West Side ghetto, Dr. King realized the emotional toll that the environmental conditions had on him and his family. King stated:

“I realized that the crowded flat in which we lived was about to produce an emotional explosion in my own family. It was just too hot, too crowded, too devoid of creative forms of recreation. There was just not space enough in the neighborhood to run off the energy of childhood without running into busy, traffic-laden streets. And I understood anew the conditions which make of the ghetto an emotional pressure cooker.”⁹⁹

The emotional trauma which King experienced was felt widespread among West Siders, and the psychological stress that the urban environment imposed upon its citizens laid the foundation of social unrest that would explode in the late 1960s. The circumstances that created this hostile environment for black Chicagoans are vividly illustrated in Stevie Wonder’s 1973 song, “Living for the City”, which detailed how for African Americans in urban areas they were “living just

⁹⁶ Ralph David Abernathy, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 370-71.

⁹⁷ Eugene Perkins, “What Can We Do? Rats Are Still Killing Slum Tots,” *Chicago Defender*, March 5, 1966.

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/493147128/ED5B9765010845AAPO/5>.

⁹⁸ “City Opens 3-Way Assault on Rats,” *Chicago Defender*, October 27, 1965.

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/494187913/6D5A779514274E4BPQ/13?accountid=14968>.

⁹⁹ Clayborne Carson, ed., “The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.” (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1998), 302.

enough” to survive. Wonder described how finding a job was like a “haystack needle” while also mentioned police brutality and how black residents were almost “dead from breathing in air pollution” which ultimately leads to the conclusion that “he tried and fought, but to him there’s no solution.” This song articulated the unrest felt among all black Chicagoans subjected to a malignant environment.¹⁰⁰

The African American community of Chicago’s West Side responded fiercely to the inadequacies within their neighborhoods and there seemed to be a building consensus that there was a need for black autonomy because no one was going to provide sufficient help but themselves. One such example of this was the formation of the West Side Organization (WSO) in 1964. The WSO was “an indigenous community organization” which proudly boasted that its leaders and staff were poor people who lived within the community.¹⁰¹ They took great pride in their self-reliance with one of their main goals being “to federate the informal groupings of an urban poverty area into a structure with sufficient power to negotiate equally with representatives of the agencies systems, and formal organizations which have excluded the poor from the decision-making process.”¹⁰² The WSO’s persistent self-determination was best seen through the reaction of Chester Robinson, a leader in the WSO, towards the deal made between Dr. King and Mayor Daley in 1966 which lacked any substance and was more political than substantive. The two leaders drew up a written agreement which was supposed to be an open housing pact, but even King admitted that months later he realized the pact was folly.¹⁰³ Robinson deemed the deal full of “empty promises” and that it did nothing to do to help the people in need because “How

¹⁰⁰ Stevie Wonder, “Living for the City”, Track 3, Motown Records, 1973.

¹⁰¹ West Side Organization for Full Employment “Synopsis of West Side Organization Demonstration Project.” (Chicago, June 18, 1968), 2.

¹⁰² Ibid, 4.

¹⁰³ Carson, ed., “The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.”, 311.

do they know what we need?... They ain't never been into this community. They don't even know what the streets look like.”¹⁰⁴ This community-driven and self-sufficient attitude that the WSO possessed can be seen as the precursor to the ILBPP because their ideologies were similar, and they both sought to improve the community internally.

This growing attitude of self-reliance and courageously calling out the environmental inequalities was best demonstrated in a proclamation made by the citizens of Chicago’s 28th Ward (pictured below) in September 1967. The 28th Ward encompassed almost all of West Garfield Park, half of East Garfield Park, and a good portion of the Near West Side making the racial composition almost entirely African American. The black citizens behind the proclamation were clear in connecting the physical decay of their neighborhoods with racist neglect from city officials. These citizens demonstrated their attentiveness to history when they mentioned how this type of neglect was common “when Black People move to a previously white ward of Chicago.”¹⁰⁵ The most interesting part of this proclamation presented itself in the last paragraph where the citizens “declared war” on the city of Chicago. This word choice reflected that along with forming political autonomy, there was a growing sense from black West Siders in the 1960s that they needed to become more militant and protect themselves because they firmly understood the city of Chicago was by no means an ally. This rising in militant ideology was best shown through the growth of black gangs on the West Side such as the Egyptian Cobras and the Vice Lords who initially organized to protect the black community from white violence.¹⁰⁶ These gangs partially followed in the footsteps of the Deacons for Defense and Justice, an organization

¹⁰⁴ Satter, *Family Properties*, 209.

¹⁰⁵ “Proclamation from Citizens of the Twenty-Eighth Ward,” Chicago, September 21, 1967.

¹⁰⁶ Rice, “Black Radicalism on Chicago’s West Side”, 30.

that formed in 1965 with the intention of protecting the black community against violence from racist police officers.¹⁰⁷ These militant groups did not have the political means to make

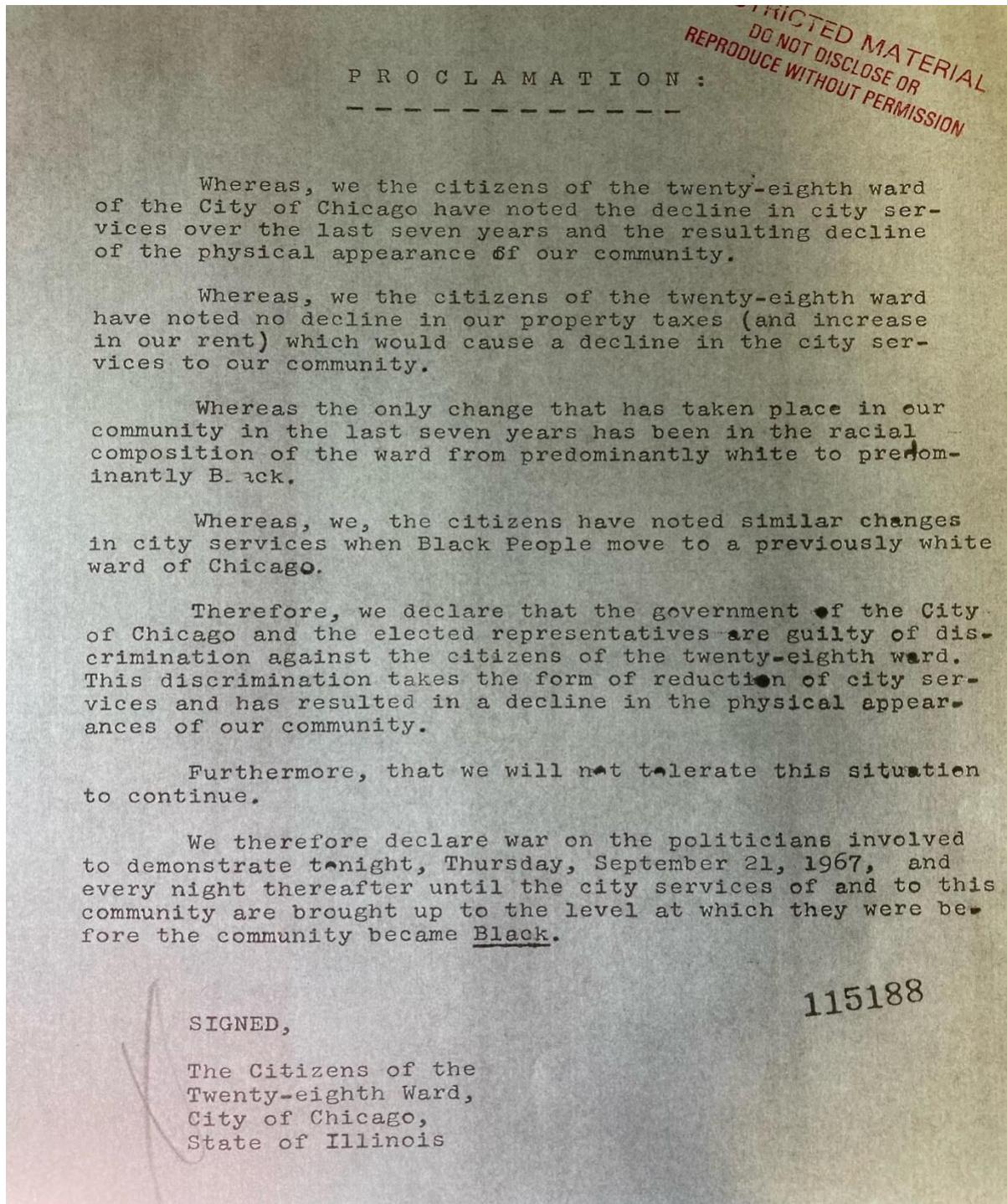


Figure 4. Proclamation from the Citizens of the 28th Ward, September 21, 1967. Courtesy of Chicago History Museum.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 33.

significant change, and the political organization like the WSO did not have the militant means to make significant change in a city where lobbying for change would do nothing for its black citizens. Thus, the arrival of the Black Panther Party in Chicago in 1968 was the perfect amalgamate of militant resistance and political pressure for black West Siders who wished to create impactful change within their community.

The Black Panther Party (BPP) had humble beginnings with an initial objective that was similar to the Deacons of Defense and Justice's policing the police. In 1966, Oakland inhabitants Bobby Seale and Huey Newton formed their Black Panther Party for Self Defense after meeting four years prior at Merritt College. The pair was greatly influenced by famed advocates of Black Power such as Malcolm X and Stolkey Carmichael but their inspiration for armed resistance was in large part from Robert F. Williams, a former Marine from North Carolina who armed himself in self-defense against racial violence that plagued his community.¹⁰⁸ Newton and Seale were discontent with the world they saw around them. The most glaring issue they saw felt needed to be addressed was the racist brutality police officers displayed in Oakland. Newton was an aspiring lawyer and was well read on California gun laws and rights which gave the pair the confidence to begin patrolling local neighborhoods, with the intent of policing the police.¹⁰⁹ From there the BPP continued to grow and spread like wildfire, providing charters in cities like Los Angeles, New York, and Philadelphia. The BPP should be seen as the optimal solution for black Chicagoans on the West Side in the late 1960s because the national party's platform directly addressed the issues that plagued their community. The Panthers national branch published a weekly newspaper that they distributed throughout the country and one such

¹⁰⁸Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin Jr., *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 33-34.

¹⁰⁹Ibid, 45.

installment provided the Party's 10-point program which highlighted their demands and goals.

The fourth point of the program called for "decent housing, fit for shelter for human beings" and also directly addressed the corrupt relationship between white landlords and black tenants.¹¹⁰

Among the other points were calls for fair employment, better education, equitable trials, and the arming of the black community for self-defense.¹¹¹ These demands resonated for many black Chicagoans on the West Side. As former Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal asserted however, "there is no single BPP, there are many, unified in one national organization, to be sure, but separated by the various regional and cultural influences that form and inform consciousness."¹¹² The Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party (ILBPP) certainly fit into this mold that Abu-Jamal described. The overarching ideology of the BPP was alluring to black Chicagoans but it only became impactful when it was applied to local issues that were unique to Chicago. The emergence of the ILBPP was the perfect culmination of political and militant means, providing black Chicagoans with the vehicle necessary to finally obtain legitimate change within their environment.

¹¹⁰ David Hilliard, *The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service 1967-1980* (New York: Atria Books, 2007), 24.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Mumia Abu-Jamal, "A Life in the Party: An Historical and Retrospective Examination of the Projections and Legacies of the Black Panther Party," in *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and Their Legacy*, ed. Kathleen Cleaver and George N. Katsiaficas (New York: Routledge, 2001), 46-47.

Chapter Three: “Damn Right, I’ve Got the Blues” and the Emergence of the ILBPP¹¹³

The attitude and activities of the Black Panther Party (BPP) were already lingering in the streets of Chicago’s West Side before the city received an official charter from the national branch in late 1968. The BPP provided the expectations and framework for Black Chicagoans to make an immediate impact within their community. This was best demonstrated in the national party’s 10-point program and “The Rules of the Black Panther Party,” which were published side-by-side in 1969 in the *Black Panther Intercommunal News Service*. The 10-point program, originally produced in 1966 when the party was created, highlighted the party’s goals as well as their demands from the U.S. government. The first five demands call for black freedom, employment, housing, education, and restitution, all of which the BPP considered long overdue. The authors of the document, co-founders Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, displayed a succinct yet encyclopedic knowledge of history within their demand for restitution. They argued that the debt of 40 acres and 2 mules was 100 years overdue and cleverly included how “the Germans are now aiding the Jews in Israel for the genocide of the Jewish people. The Germans murdered six million Jews. The American racist has taken part in the slaughter of over fifty million black people; therefore, we feel that this is a modest demand that we make.”¹¹⁴ Newton and Seale’s demonstration of historical knowledge was an extremely powerful tool which surely won over many African Americans who were looking for a solution to the strife of living in urban black America in the late 1960s. The demand that the Panthers were most known for, which also displayed historical analysis and personal familiarity with the struggles of black people across America, was their seventh point which called for “an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY

¹¹³ Buddy Guy, “Damn Right, I’ve Got the Blues,” Track 1, *Silvertone Records*, 1991.

¹¹⁴ Hilliard, *The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service*, 24.

and MURDER of black people.”¹¹⁵ Within this demand, Newton and Seale cited the Second Amendment and insisted that “all black people arm themselves for self-defense” which was their solution for ending “racist police oppression and brutality” that had tormented African American communities for decades.¹¹⁶ This solution proposed by Newton and Seale was arguably the most attractive one for its black audience due to its focus on autonomous self-reliance and simply practicing a right all citizens possessed. The 10-point program was an ingenious appeal to American’s sense of fairness and a critique of the trajectory of the American experiment. Newton and Seale included direct quotes from the Declaration of Independence, justifying why their demands were necessary and rational. Using a treasured American document’s rhetoric to justify a revolutionary movement within the U.S. was a beautiful display of irony that only strengthened the BPP’s platform.

Along with the 10-point program, the Panthers published the “Rules of the Black Panther Party” which demonstrated that the organization was regimented and defied the popular narrative that they were only a group of violent African Americans hellbent on destruction. Within the twenty-six rules that are stated, the BPP highlighted how its members were not allowed to be drunk or on drugs while on the job and would be expelled from the party if they were found taking narcotics.¹¹⁷ The rule which specifically defied the stereotype of Panthers being radical warmongers was the fifth rule which stated “No party member will USE, POINT, or FIRE a weapon of any kind unnecessarily or accidentally at anyone.”¹¹⁸ More specific to the business aspect of the Party, the rules stated how each member was to submit a daily report of what work they did and all chapters were required to submit weekly written reports to national headquarters.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 25.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

The most impressive aspect of these rules though were the educational requirements, specifically how taking classes in political education was obligatory for all party members and every person in a leadership position was required to read at least two hours a day “to keep abreast of the changing political situation.”¹¹⁹ Rules such as these distinguished the BPP as a legitimate political organization which was adamant about achieving their goals in a professional manner. For black Chicagoans, all of these guidelines and rules provided a disciplined structure that was necessary for transforming their ideologies about community uplift into reality. In the summer of 1966, Dr. King contested that he and his fellow civil rights activists were the “social physicians of Chicago revealing that there was a terrible cancer... Not only were we the social physicians, in the physical sense, but we were the social psychiatrists, bringing out things that were in the subconscious all along.”¹²⁰ The emergence of the BPP in Chicago should be seen as a break from the efforts of Dr. King and his Chicago Freedom Movement (CFM) with a closer ear to the environment of unrest for black Chicagoans. The CFM attempted to bring the nonviolent and marching protests that King and the SCLC used in the South to the northern metropolis in order to produce positive change. Unfortunately, these strategies did not correspond with the Chicago political structure and more importantly did not adhere to the needs of black Chicagoans.

Historian Beryl Satter contested that:

“Instead of listening to those it claimed to represent, the SCLC had chosen a primary focus- open occupancy legislation- based upon national strategic concerns and upon its superficial similarity to the demand for service in restaurants and public accommodations that had mobilized young people in the South...when SCLC organizers chose their central issue based on the advice of liberal housing experts rather than on the wishes of West Siders, they doomed their movement.”¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Carson, ed., “The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.”, 306.

¹²¹ Satter, *Family Properties*, 213-214.

The failure of the CFM was in part because they tried using strategies that weren't applicable to the specific setting of Chicago. On the other hand, the BPP ideology possessed the platform that best represented and materialized the psychological frustrations that African Americans experienced as a result of being exposed to their decayed urban environment.

The BPP ideology began to materialize in Chicago a few months after Dr. King had been assassinated on April 4, 1968. Chicago erupted into riots the day after King's assassination which resulted in destruction across the city, but most prominently on the West Side within black neighborhoods. The 1960s were a time where riots were widespread across America's urban areas and Chicago was no exception. Riots almost explicitly occurred in the warmer months of the year when the environmental conditions of blighted urban areas only intensified with the heat becoming yet another peril for African Americans to deal with. Jeff Wiltse succinctly demonstrated this issue with his analysis of the riot that broke out in 1966 on the West Side of Chicago as a result of police officers restricting the use of a fire hydrant as a way for local African American children to cool off in the mid-July heat.¹²² This environmentally provoked riot caused mayor Daley and the city to respond the next summer with an initiative which columnist Mike Royko dubbed "wet-the-black program". The program boasted that it provided 133 pools throughout the city along with over 200 "spray pools," which were operated by the Chicago Fire Department, all in an effort to make sure the residents remained cooled off.¹²³ Uncoincidentally, the city of Chicago had no major riots or acts of social unrest in 1967 which can be attributed to this environmental measure that the city provided. There was no program however that could have prevented the riot which broke out in 1968 that can be viewed as the culmination of social unrest for black Chicagoans in the 1960s.

¹²² Wiltse, *Contested Waters*, 185-86.

¹²³ Royko, Boss, 164.

The experience was best described by a writer for the *Chicago Defender*, John L. Taylor, who was on a bus in the West Side when the riots started. As Taylor described, “a number of persons stood on the sidewalks, fingering bottles, bricks, and rocks. They made menacing motions. Then suddenly, they attacked. Women threw their children on the floor and covered them with their own bodies. The bus resounded with whang of brick against metal. The windows were shattered; glass flew everywhere.”¹²⁴ Amidst all the chaos, buildings were set on fire, homes and buildings were destroyed, and the West Side of Chicago resembled a warzone with looters and arsonists causing havoc as many black Chicagoans expressed their anguish and exasperation through destruction. In a declaration of their disdain, most of this arson and looting was initially aimed at white-owned businesses in the commercial areas of the West Side on Madison Street, Kedzie Avenue, and Homan Avenue but it quickly spread across the West Side ultimately devastating the black community the most.¹²⁵ During the riot, Mayor Daley ordered his infamous “shoot to kill” order in which he told his superintendent of police, James Conlisk, to have his men lethally shoot arsonists or anyone with a Molotov cocktail as well as instructing him to shoot to maim any looters.¹²⁶

Before Daley made this order and after the initial few days of rioting, he took a helicopter ride over the West Side with the Chicago Fire Chief, Robert Quinn, to assess the damage. After 48 hours of rioting on the West Side, there were over 2,000 arrests, 90 policemen injured, 48 citizens wounded by gunshots, and 11 left dead.¹²⁷ This helicopter ride flew over the 24th, 25th,

¹²⁴ John L. Taylor, “7 Minutes of Hell in Westside Riot,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, 8 April 1968, 14. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/494340938/E469C6D8A70B4C52PQ/1?accountid=14968>.

¹²⁵ James Coates, “April 5, 1968 King Assassination Sparks City Riots”, *Chicago Tribune*, 28 September 1997, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/418455924/175374298A8042D3PQ/1?accountid=14968>.

¹²⁶ Mike Royko, Boss: *Richard J. Daley of Chicago* (New York: Penguin Group, 1971), 168.

¹²⁷ *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, “West Madison Street, 1968”, last modified 2005, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/6354.html>.

26th, 27th, 28th, and 29th wards, all predominately black neighborhoods, where the two powerful Chicagoans witnessed looters and arsonists who were still active while scores of buildings were smoldering. Quinn pushed for Daley to become firmer with police action and pressed him to use lethal force against these looters and arsonists. Daley became infuriated with Conlisk when he found out the police superintendent had not ordered his men to shoot arsonists and looters already.¹²⁸ At a press conference on April 15, 10 days after the riots had initiated, Mayor Daley clearly stated his “shoot to kill” order for forthcoming rioters while also expressing how he was “disappointed to know that every policeman, out on the beat was supposed to use his own decision, and this decision was ultimately his [Conlisk]. In my opinion, he should of have instructions, to shoot arsonists and to shoot looters.”¹²⁹ This would go down as one of the most infamous moments of Daley’s tenure as Chicago’s mayor, but more importantly it confirmed to many black Chicagoans that he had no regard for their lives. As historian Jakobi Williams has asserted, “Daley’s order suggested that the protection of property was more important to him than black lives. Several black Chicagoans stated their vilification of Daley dated from this order to shoot to kill, maim, or cripple all looters during protests and riots.”¹³⁰ The events that transpired during the King Riots in Chicago drastically changed the physical landscape of the West Side by destroying 162 buildings which would remain vacant lots for decades to come.¹³¹ Perhaps most notably though, it changed the psychological environment of the West Side. African American residents now knew beyond doubt that the city valued property over black lives. The sense of dread and the feeling that African American residents were being hunted

¹²⁸ Royko, Boss, 166-68.

¹²⁹ “News Item”, Filmed on April 15, 1968, AP Archive, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oI>NN2iT41S4>.

¹³⁰ Jakobi Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot: The Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and Racial Coalition Politics in Chicago* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 49-50.

¹³¹ James Coates, “April 5, 1968 King Assassination Sparks City Riots”, *Chicago Tribune*, 28 September 1997, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/418455924/175374298A8042D3PQ/1?accountid=14968>.



Figure 5. Aerial view of the smoke rising from burning buildings on Chicago's West Side near Madison Street, April 5, 1968. Courtesy of Cy Wolf, *Chicago Tribune*.

reached its crisis point for black West Siders in mid-1968 which made the Black Panther ideology of self-defense all the more appealing. As psychologist Peter J. Rentfrow has argued, “social and physical characteristics of the environment significantly affect health, well-being, attitudes, and identity- constructs at the core of psychology.”¹³² The physical destruction of their neighborhoods paired with the social confirmation that the leader of Chicago viewed African Americans as subordinate citizens created a shared psychology among black West Siders that welcomed and embraced the BPP ideology.

¹³² Peter J. Rentfrow, *Geographical Psychology* (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2014), 4.

As early as June 1968, the BPP began to take root in the city of Chicago. During this time former SNCC members and South Siders Bobby Rush and Bob Brown were seen touring local Chicago colleges actively recruiting for a branch of the BPP they were attempting to establish.¹³³ Simultaneously on the West Side, young black activists such as Jewel Cook and Drew Ferguson were also trying to form a branch of the BPP which demonstrated that the fervor surrounding the BPP was present in both of Chicago's black belts. There was an atmosphere of revolution that had swept through Chicago after King's death. This aura was best illustrated by the many rallies and events held within black neighborhoods where discussions of how change was going to be achieved. At one such event held at the Afro-Arts Theater located at 39th Street and Drexel Avenue on the South Side, a young NAACP activist named Fred Hampton gave a fiery speech that electrified the audience while also catching the eye of Bobby Rush.¹³⁴ It was at this event that the two activists met and realized they fulfilled each other's needs. Hampton had recently been attracted to the BPP through an interaction with a Los Angeles member of the Panthers named Lenny Eggleston who was in Chicago for a speaking engagement.¹³⁵ Rush was undoubtedly devoted to the BPP ideology but was not exactly a skilled orator and knew he needed a spokesperson to represent the Chicago branch in a professional and powerful way. It wasn't long after Hampton joined Rush's faction of the BPP that the South and West side branches combined and were granted a national charter from Oakland. On November 1, 1968, the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party (ILBPP) officially opened its headquarters at 2350 West Madison Avenue in the heart of the West Side. The ILBPP unanimously established Hampton as the chairman of their chapter with Rush being appointed as deputy minister of

¹³³ Rice, "Black Radicalism on Chicago's West Side", 67.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 71.

¹³⁵ William Hampton, *The Essence of Fred Hampton* (Chicago: Salsedo Press, 1989), 26.

defense, positions these two would wield to make the ILBPP an immensely impactful organization in a short amount of time.¹³⁶

The Panther's Actualization in Chicago

The ILBPP was able to become so prevalent in Chicago's black community because they made a valiant attempt at transforming a revolutionary ideology into a realistic operation.

Historian Jon Rice explained the ambition of the ILBPP when he stated: "The Illinois Panthers planned to educate the people, simply by boldly behaving as if Chicago were a democracy and they had the rights of middle-class suburbanites planning an independent revolutionary movement, challenging authority so that the political authority would reveal its contempt for the people."¹³⁷ The ILBPP wasn't naïve in regard to their political power compared to the elites of Chicago but they also were adamantly convinced in "the power of the people." The Illinois Panthers enacted survival programs which served the people of the community while also teaching them that by acting bravely and supporting one another, community uplift was attainable. These survival programs were also direct challenges to the "fascist pigs" who the Panthers sought to expose regarding their antipathy for the black community. When the Panthers said "fascist pigs" or just "pigs," they were referring to any individual who utilized the capitalistic nature of society to maintain the subjugation of African Americans. Hampton specifically referred to "demagogue politicians, avaricious businessmen and racist pig police."¹³⁸ The phrase "pigs" within the context of the BPP has notoriously been associated with police officers but it's important to know that it also included local politicians and businessmen who held power over the black community. Police officers get associated with "pigs" the most

¹³⁶ Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot*, 63-65.

¹³⁷ Rice, "Black Radicalism on Chicago's West Side", 81.

¹³⁸ Faith C. Christmas, "Panther Chief Fred Hampton Tells Party's Goals", *Chicago Daily Defender*, 23 August 1969. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/493468487/B01D6EFD3E254CE5PQ/6?accountid=14968>.

because they are the most present figure within the physical environment of African Americans and therefore are the most prominent embodiment of “pigs,” but they are certainly not the only factor that make up this BPP phrase. The connection between “pigs” and the BPP’s view of the environment for urban African Americans was best described by Bobby Seale in a speech he gave in 1968. In his speech Seale described an analogy in which a man was wandering the wilderness in search of a spring because he was extremely thirsty. The man found a spring but it was filthy, so he worked tirelessly to sanitize the water in an effort to get a clean drink of water but to no avail. Eventually another man approached him and explained that he was pointlessly trying to get clean water “because on top of the hill about a mile or two back where you haven’t checked out yet, there’s a hog in the spring. There’s a hog in the spring, and a lot of those pigs are running around too in the spring.” Seale then concluded this analogy by stating, “All we want is a little freedom, all we want is a clear drink of water, but there’s a hog in the spring!” This analogy illustrated that the BPP viewed pigs as a physical element of their environment that diminished their quality of life and contaminated the landscape.¹³⁹

One of the survival programs that the ILBPP enacted which was certainly their most successful one was the Free Breakfast for Children Program. The Free Breakfast for Children Program was initiated in Oakland by the national branch in September of 1968 with its aim being self-explanatory, to feed malnourished children within the community.¹⁴⁰ The program instantly became popular and spread to other branches including Chicago. The ILBPP implemented the free breakfast program in early 1969 and by May of that year there were five separate free breakfast sites on the West Side alone, along with one each on the North and South Sides. At its

¹³⁹ Bobby Seale, “Speech Delivered at the Kaleidoscope Theater” (Speech, Los Angeles, April 16, 1968), American RadioWorks, <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/blackspeech/bseale.html>.

¹⁴⁰ Bloom and Martin Jr., *Black Against Empire*, 182.

height, the Chicago branch was feeding breakfast to over 400 children every morning.¹⁴¹ The ILBPP was able to carry out this program through the hard work of its rank-and-file members, mostly women party members, who would go out into the neighborhood daily, soliciting for food and money. ILBPP members such as Wanda Ross were tasked with organizing the breakfast program which was daunting at first, but the black community of Chicago showed their respect and support for what the Panthers were doing in the form of donating up to \$600 a week at its peak.¹⁴² As much as the Free Breakfast for Children Program was about meeting the physical needs of the community's youth, it was a political statement to the people of the community which was supposed to be empowering. As Hampton himself stated, "we have the Breakfast for Children because we teach people, through practice, through observation and participation, that people can be there, free."¹⁴³ The breakfast program served as an example for black Chicagoans that the power really did reside in the people, especially when they worked together for the betterment of their community. The mass migration of white Chicagoans towards the suburbs during the mid-twentieth century was followed by businesses such as grocery stores and supermarkets relocating to the suburbs.¹⁴⁴ This left many inner-city neighborhoods to become food deserts, areas where access to healthy, affordable food was in short supply, and the ILBPP's Free Breakfast for Children Program was an immediate answer to this environmental inadequacy.

Along with the breakfast program, the ILBPP enacted other programs such as free daycare, free clothing, as well as an emergency heat program which pressed landlords to fix and

¹⁴¹ Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot*, 93.

¹⁴² Ibid, 94-95.

¹⁴³ "Fred Hampton on Revolution and Racism", Filmed in 1969, *AfroMarxist*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wVzbSvWaMkc&t=92s>, 1:46-1:58.

¹⁴⁴ E. James West, "Highways, High-Rises and Food Deserts," *Black Perspectives*, January 19, 2022. <https://www.aaihs.org/highways-high-rises-and-food-deserts/>.

maintain broken boilers and furnaces so that African American families could enjoy a more suitable living environment in the cold winter months.¹⁴⁵ If the Free Breakfast for Children



Figure 6. Fred Hampton engaging with children on the West Side in 1969 who received free breakfast from the Panther's program. Courtesy of Chicago History Museum.

¹⁴⁵ Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot*, 93.

Program was Chicago's most popular program, the Surgeon "Jake" Winters People's Free Medical Care Center was its most impactful. The free medical clinic was located in the North Lawndale neighborhood on the West Side and opened its doors in January 1970.¹⁴⁶ The clinic's main goal was to serve the black community. Deputy minister of defense Bobby Rush expounded on the environmental impacts of health in Chicago's poor neighborhoods.

"In that area, where you have a high infant mortality rate, where you have lead poisoning, where you have inadequate medical service, we saw the basic needs for free medical service and we worked hard and worked over a long period of time to make that a reality. Now up till this day in the black community, you have doctors there who are more concerned with private wealth rather than public health. The concept behind the medical center is that we would take the profit out of the medical profession. Our medical center is a direct result of the basic need in the black community for free medical service."¹⁴⁷

Within its first two months the clinic served over 2,000 black Chicagoans which demonstrated the dire need for medical services on the West Side. The clinic also held blood drives which were then donated to Cook County Hospital, the only free hospital in Chicago (also located on the West Side) which served many black Chicagoans.¹⁴⁸ All of these programs enacted by the ILBPP were intended to improve the environment of black Chicagoans by bettering its people, the living organisms that inhabited the space. The soiled environment black Chicagoans had to endure directly produced health issues which the ILBPP addressed with the establishment of their health clinic in the heart of the West Side. The programs also played a pivotal role politically for the Chicago Panthers because as former ILBPP Yvonne King asserted:

"our survival programs heightened the contradiction that existed between the black people and the government. When we were able to feed thousands, literally thousands of children every morning in various cities in the country, parents began to ask, why wasn't the government doing that? The government had all the resources at its disposal."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 95-96.

¹⁴⁷ "The Murder of Fred Hampton", 1971 The Film Group, *Chicago Film Archives*, <https://chicagofilmarchives.org/pres-projects/the-murder-of-fred-hampton-1971>, 17:50-18:29.

¹⁴⁸ Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot*, 96.

¹⁴⁹ Yvonne King quoted in Ibid, 95.

This sentiment shared by King further illustrated how the ILBPP was aware of their lack of wealth and political power, but they also had an outright belief in the power of community and rallying individuals together to meet the ailments of the collective. This belief in self-determination was demonstrated in the programs that the Panthers implemented within Chicago's black community which provided a boost in living conditions. More importantly, however it reminded people that they were not helpless, and they could improve their lives with bold action and a refusal to accept their environment as beyond repair.

Behind most of the positive impacts that the ILBPP had upon the African American community of Chicago was its leader, Fred Hampton. It is impossible to discuss the ILBPP without referencing Hampton and the intellectual backing and influential leadership he provided for the Panthers. Those who knew Fred Hampton couldn't sing his praises enough. Hampton was celebrated by his peers as a warm and genuine soul who had a sincere passion for his fellow people while dually being fiercely committed as a leader for civil rights. Dolores J. Smith, a friend of Hampton's, described her recollection of the young revolutionary when she stated, "at such an early age, he understood and had the capacity to articulate the insidious root causes of oppression; had a vision which encompassed the beauty and usefulness of oppressed people that would allow them to make decisions about their own lives; and had the desire and determination to contribute to the equality of opportunity for all people, by any means necessary."¹⁵⁰ Friends and relatives of Hampton were all harmonious in compliments like this one commending him as an intellectual young man who essentially was destined to become a leader of the people.

There also was a congruency among friends and relatives in regard to how from a young age it was apparent that Hampton clearly understood the struggle of his fellow African

¹⁵⁰ Hampton, *The Essence of Fred Hampton*, 14.

Americans and was determined to join the fight towards equality. Hampton's father recalled that at very young age, his son told him, "Daddy, I've got to help the people uplift themselves."¹⁵¹

Hampton was also a dedicated scholar who was constantly reading and studying the works of other civil rights figures like Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey. Joan Elbert, a fellow community activist from Maywood recalled that "I never saw him when he didn't have a book in his hand.

He would come to our house for a meeting and read while still following what was going on."¹⁵²

Hampton's combination of being a savant and having a deep devotion to community uplift was best illustrated in the speeches he would go on to give during his days as chairman of the ILBPP.

During an informal meeting at ILBPP Headquarters sometime in 1969, Hampton was heard giving the following statement: "I was born in a bourgeois community and had some of the better things in life, but I found that there were more people starving than there were people eating, more people that didn't have clothes than did have clothes, and I just happened to be one of the few. So, I decided that I wouldn't stop doing what I'm doing until all those people are free."¹⁵³

This brief remark from Hampton exemplified his political evolution and maturation from the time when he told his father he needed to help uplift the people. Hampton understood he came from a privileged position as an African American boy growing up in Maywood. Instead of becoming comfortable in that position, he used it as a rationale to fuel his determination on the path towards bettering his community and the people that comprised it. The determination and dedication that Hampton displayed was igneous, and much like a wildfire it consumed and affected those who came in contact with it. When attorney Jeffrey Haas first met Hampton in

¹⁵¹ Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot*, 54.

¹⁵² Joseph Boyce, "Friends, Relatives Tell Story of Fred Hampton," *Chicago Tribune*, 28 December 1969, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy195.nclive.org/docview/169815441/C00848039BC44FCAPQ/1?accountid=14968>.

¹⁵³ "The Murder of Fred Hampton", 1971 The Film Group, *Chicago Film Archives*, <https://chicagofilmarchives.org/pres-projects/the-murder-of-fred-hampton-1971>, 36:15-36:43.

1969, he described him in the following words: “He seemed to be driven by some inner force that created a continuous flow of orders and encouragement. Even though he appeared relaxed and jovial, there was a sense of urgency to his directions. The Panthers appeared to run on Fred’s energy.”¹⁵⁴ Hampton was the heartbeat that made the ILBPP tick. He provided the inspiration and devotion that was necessary to turn a revolutionary ideology into a pragmatic organization. When Hampton frequently stated, “I am a revolutionary,” it was sincere because he was the embodiment of the movement for those invested in Chicago’s chapter of the BPP.

A key aspect of the leadership that Hampton provided was how he emphasized the importance of placing the revolutionary struggle in a specific environment. For the ILBPP, that environment was the deprived black neighborhoods of Chicago where revitalization was most dire. Hampton stressed this point in one of his speeches when he was explaining where the ILBPP’s free health clinic was being placed. Hampton declared, “now does everybody know where 16th and Springfield is at? It’s not in Winnetka, you understand. That’s not in Dekalb. That’s in Babylon. That’s in the heart of Babylon, Brothers and Sisters. And that free health clinic was put there because we know where the problem is at.”¹⁵⁵ The BPP as a whole was fond of using the comparison of urban black communities and Babylon because they saw themselves as a walled-in community fighting for survival against oppressors who surrounded them. For Hampton and Chicago specifically, the heart of Babylon rested on the West Side in the destitute black neighborhoods which is why their programs like the free medical clinic were placed in these areas to aid the environmental deficiencies. Another important aspect of Hampton’s leadership was his ability to engage with non-blacks to make them understand the true purpose

¹⁵⁴ Jeffrey Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton: How the FBI and the Chicago Police Murdered a Black Panther* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2010), 70.

¹⁵⁵ “Vita Wa Watu: A New Afrikan Theoretical Journal Book Eleven”, *Spear and Shield Publication*, 1987, <http://brothermalcolm.net/TRANSFORMED/PDF/book11.pdf>, 11.

of the BPP because there were many false narratives created about the organization during its prominence. Arguably the most important conversation of this nature that Hampton conducted occurred during one of the stints in prison he served under the trumped-up charge for allegedly stealing \$71 worth of ice cream from an ice cream truck. It was in prison in 1968 where Hampton had a long discussion with a young Puerto Rican man named Jose “Cha Cha” Jimenez who was the leader of the Young Lords Organization (YLO), a group of Puerto Ricans living in Chicago’s Lincoln Park (North Side neighborhood).¹⁵⁶ During their conversation, Hampton persuaded Jimenez to implement BPP ideology and programs into the YLO such as the free breakfast programs and free medical clinics. More importantly though, it was because of Hampton’s influence that the YLO became allied with the ILBPP in what became known as the Rainbow Coalition.

The Rainbow Coalition was a political alliance created and lead by the ILBPP in 1968 which sought to unite the various impoverished ethnic groups of the city under one umbrella to fight their common oppressor.¹⁵⁷ The Panthers were able to unite different races of Chicagoans because they found common ground with environmental inequalities that plagued all races of poor Chicagoans. The initiation of the Rainbow Coalition began with ILBPP member Bobby Lee who engaged in discussions with a group of white migrants from Appalachia called the Young Patriots Organization (YPO). The YPO was based out of a North Side neighborhood called Uptown and faced similar issues as the black communities on the West Side such as dilapidated living spaces, the negative effects of urban renewal, and police brutality. In one of the initial meetings with the YPO, Lee called upon these environmental inequalities to make these poor whites realize that they were not alone and that the same things were happening to the poor black

¹⁵⁶ Bloom and Martin Jr., *Black Against Empire*, 291.

¹⁵⁷ Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot*, 126.

communities of Chicago which was what the ILBPP was attempting to rectify. In this meeting Lee stated, “once you realize man, that your house is funky with rats and roaches, the same way a black dude’s house is, once you realize that your brothers have been brutalized by the cops the same way the West Side and the South Side is... a revolution can begin.”¹⁵⁸ The connection that won over these white Appalachian migrants to align with a black revolutionary group was environment. It quickly became apparent that many of the problems which were afflicting their urban space were the exact same problems black neighborhoods were facing, thus making these two groups unified over environmental inequalities. By June of 1969 when the ILBPP officially announced the formation of the Rainbow Coalition which initially consisted of the YPO, the YLO, and Rising Up Angry (another poor, young white organization), the leader of the YPO could be seen sporting Black Panther buttons alongside the organizations symbol which was the Confederate flag.¹⁵⁹ This was a quizzical combination but nonetheless a promising sign that different cultures and ethnicities were united to work together for a common goal of bettering the lives of Chicago’s poor and oppressed populations.

Hampton epitomized this sentiment that began to run through the streets of Chicago during a speech he gave that same year in which he used a call and response style of communication with the crowd. Hampton declared, “All power to all people. We say white power to white people. Brown power to brown people. Yellow power to yellow people. Black power to black people. X power to those we left out. We say Panther power to the vanguard party.”¹⁶⁰ This fervor of unity that Hampton and the ILBPP were creating struck genuine fear for

¹⁵⁸ “American Revolution II” 1969 The Film Group, *Chicago Film Archives*, <https://chicagofilarchives.org/projects/american-revolution-2>, 54:00-54:56.

¹⁵⁹ Bloom and Martin Jr., *Black Against Empire*, 292.

¹⁶⁰ “Fred Hampton on Revolution and Racism”, Filmed in 1969, *AfroMarxist*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wVzbSvWaMkc&t=92s>, 4:10-4:34.

Daley and his Democratic machine because their success relied on dividing the masses of the poor. Most alarming for Daley though was how the ILBPP was attempting to unify the black gangs of Chicago and make them more peaceful and most importantly more political. Hampton himself targeted the largest black gangs in Chicago such as the Black Stone Rangers, the Vice Lords, and the Black Disciples and encouraged them to adopt the BPP ideology and discontinue their criminal activities in order to take political control over their neighborhoods.¹⁶¹ No one was more alarmed by this development than Mayor Daley, who personally had experience in gangs becoming political entities. As Chicago columnist Mike Royko asserted, “Daley had seen the same thing happen before. He recalled Regan’s Colts, the Irish thieves and street fighters who became the most potent political force in neighboring Canaryville, and his own neighborhood’s Hamburgs, who got their start the same brawling way before turning to politics and eventually launching his career.”¹⁶² Daley, an Irish product from the South Side neighborhood of Bridgeport, was involved with the Hamburg Social and Athletic Club from the time he was a young teen. The Hamburgs in Chicago were a mainstay in Bridgeport and had notoriously been associated with the 1919 race riot in which they were in the heat of the brutality and violence between black and white South Siders. As they become more political, Daley capitalized on their evolution by become the club’s president in 1924 and eventually using that political platform to vault himself into the mayor’s office in 1955.¹⁶³ Daley may not have been a skilled orator, but he was certainly an astute politician who knew a political threat when he saw it. If the black gangs were able to uplift themselves and evolve politically like his own Hamburg Club had, the sky was the limit for what they could achieve in the political realm of Chicago. Daley firmly

¹⁶¹ Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot*, 160.

¹⁶² Royko, *Boss*, 212.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, 30-31.

understood this which is why he viewed the ILBPP, the organization that was pushing for the politicization of black gangs, as an imminent threat.

CPD: Molding the Physical and Psychological Environment of Black Chicago

All of these endeavors advanced by the ILBPP did not go undetected or unaddressed by the Chicago Police Department, which acted as an arm of Daley's Democratic machine during his tenure as mayor. As historian Simon Balto asserted in his aptly titled book *Occupied Territory* which referred to Chicago's black neighborhoods, "the Panthers represented the most assertive threat to police power that Chicago had seen since at least the 1930s, and quite possibly ever."¹⁶⁴ This threat was not taken lightly by Mayor Daley who was well known for his policy of law-and-order which he utilized to maintain his dominance of Chicago's political arena. The stranglehold that the Democratic Party had on the city of Chicago during the mid-20th century was almost autocratic, with Anton Cermak being elected to the mayor's office in 1931 and that position was held by successive Democrat machine mayors until 1979. Daley represented the pinnacle of machine politics because he had the fortuity of being at the helm of Chicago's Democratic Party at a time when historian Jon Rice claimed that Chicago was as much of a one-party system at the time as communist Moscow.¹⁶⁵ Daley did his best to ensure that most of his cronies, many of whom came from his neighborhood of Bridgeport, were put into positions of power throughout the city which most notably were alderman and ward bosses (usually both positions held by one individual). This certainly would have been an ample amount of power alone for Daley to wield but he also was the chairman of the Cook County Democratic Party during his reign as mayor. This position gave Daley supreme power because it made all city

¹⁶⁴ Simon Balto, *Occupied Territory: Policing Black Chicago from Red Summer to Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 224.

¹⁶⁵ Rice, "Black Radicalism on Chicago's West Side", 127.

politicians, especially those in City Hall, answer to Daley if they wished to remain in their positions due to the Democratic Party's supremacy in this era. City Hall was the entity that the CPD answered to so in a long line of command, Daley was the person behind the curtain who controlled the police department.¹⁶⁶ Further on down the chain of command, police officers usually needed approval from their local ward bosses (who were usually put in place by Daley) for hiring which often bound them to please these ward bosses and subsequently the Democratic machine.¹⁶⁷ This is not to suggest there were no morally sound cops at this time because there surely were, but there was a clear incentive to please the higher-ups because it offered job security as well as career-boosting incentives if they carried out the wishes and favors of the machine. Knowing the intricate jurisdiction that Daley retained as Chicago's mayor, it made nicknames that he received over the years such as "The Man on Five" (referring to City Hall's 5th floor) and "Boss" seem like understatements for the true power he possessed.

Chicago police officers were without a doubt employees of the city government and as Balto argued, "police are, for citizens, the most visible agents of the American criminal justice system, if not the state itself. They are, first and foremost and by occupational definition, the front line of whatever criminal justice initiatives politicians and policymakers decide to push."¹⁶⁸ Daley's infamous strict law-and-order policies on policing came to fruition just one year after his election in 1956 when his commissioner of police at the time, Timothy O'Connor, implemented the task force. The task force was a special unit of the CPD which consisted of twenty squads each with eleven officers, with a captain and four lieutenants overseeing the entire operation making the total unit 225 officers. The task force was distributed to different neighborhoods each

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 31.

¹⁶⁸ Balto, *Occupied Territory*, 4.

night and were supposedly deployed to enhance the normal forces within these regions to eliminate the threat of crime.¹⁶⁹ In a 1958 report though, the task force was cited as visiting black neighborhoods such as West Side's Lawndale twenty times more frequently compared to white ones in other poor communities in Chicago.¹⁷⁰ Of the eleven officers assigned to a squad, nine of them were instructed to walk a beat of just three to six blocks while one patrolled the given neighborhood on a motorcycle and a sergeant stood by on command. This concentrated placement of police officers in an African American community created an environment of unrest which made its citizens feel suffocated. An aspect of the task force that made these officer's presence feel like a genuine occupation was the CPD's orders of stop-and-frisk. The squads dispatched to different neighborhoods were ordered to "set up a series of traffic stops to ensnare the greatest number of people passing through. When a vehicle would arrive at the stop, officers could direct the driver and any passengers to get out of the car, after which occupants would be frisked for weapons or drugs, and the car would be searched. Passerby on the sidewalk were subject to receive the same treatment-stopped, frisked, and ultimately arrested if officers found anything illicit on their person."¹⁷¹ This blatant violation of these citizen's 4th amendment rights was openly supported by Daley as well as O'Connor's successor, Orlando Wilson, which was demonstrated when the two successfully lobbied for stop-and-frisk to become legislation in 1968.¹⁷² To make matters worse, as Chicago's black communities on the West and South Sides continued to deteriorate from 1965 to 1970 and its people suffered from a lack of employment opportunities and sound education systems, Daley increased the CPD's size by twenty percent

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 146-47.

¹⁷⁰ "Task Force Preys on Racial Districts: Report Shows Main Targets", *Chicago Defender*, 26 April 1958, 9. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/493030787/pageviewPDF/3FB23D91FC414565PQ/5?accountid=14968>.

¹⁷¹ Simon Balto, *Occupied Territory: Policing Black Chicago from Red Summer to Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 147.

¹⁷² Ibid, 162.

while more than doubling their budget from \$90 million to \$190 million.¹⁷³ Daley's lack of funding for Chicago's black neighborhoods was a much more subtle act of disdain compared to his "shoot to kill" order but it nonetheless demonstrated that he wished to keep that demographic of the city's population under his thumb. These policies implemented by Daley and the CPD further cemented to black Chicagoans that their city viewed them as inferior, but it also fueled an environmental trauma which made them feel unsafe in their own neighborhoods because they could be stopped and searched without provocation.

In a report conducted in 1972 by Ralph H. Metcalfe, a Representative from the First Congressional District of Illinois, the implications of this over-patrolling of police in African American neighborhoods were presented to the public. Metcalfe started out the report with an epigraph of one of his own quotes that he directed toward the CPD superintendent: "Mr. Superintendent, you will be hard pressed to go into any home in the black ghetto and not find at least one member of that household who either feels that they have been abused verbally and physically by some member of the police force, or has first-hand information of such an incident."¹⁷⁴ The sentiment expressed by Metcalfe was supported a little later on within the report when it discussed how there was a minute number of African Americans who had the privilege of never been forced "to swallow their pride and take a bullying insult from a police officer."¹⁷⁵ The universal experience of police brutality amongst black Chicagoans was firm evidence that the police inextricably played a part in molding their environment. The sound of a siren blaring or the flashing of the blue and red lights on the streets of Chicago surely made the

¹⁷³ Ibid, 164-65.

¹⁷⁴ The Blue Ribbon Panel, "The Misuse of Police Authority in Chicago", based on various hearing from Summer 1972, *Police Accountability Task Force*, <https://chicagopatf.org/2016/01/04/the-misuse-of-police-authority-in-chicago-a-report-and-recommendations-based-on-hearings-before-the-blue-ribbon-panel-convened-by-the-honorable-ralph-h-metcalfe/>,

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 31.

heart of a young black man come to an abrupt stop even if they weren't doing anything wrong. The heightened presence of police officers in black neighborhoods created a general fear among African Americans who were simply existing in their own communities. Thanks to new implementations like the task force, which was given direct orders to stop-and-frisk guiltless pedestrians, it became an environmental norm for African Americans to see their neighbors and fellow community members being randomly searched or unjustifiably berated and/or assaulted by an officer who had no concern for being disciplined. The extremes of this fear were best expressed by a young African American man who "equated white policemen in black ghettos with slavery-era plantation overseers" which drew upon the most sinister chapter in African American history.¹⁷⁶ Overall though, this excessive presence of police officers in black Chicagoan's communities in the 1960s generated a psychological association of angst and unease with police officers and for some inhabitants, it generated an association of fear merely with the spaces they occupied because Chicago police had rooted themselves as an elemental component of black Chicagoans' environment.

The growth of the CPD and the new policy of stop-and-frisk was accompanied with a much more violent and lethal approach to policing. In 1969 alone, the CPD killed 39 black Chicagoans and unsurprisingly not one officer was indicted or taken to court.¹⁷⁷ This was an unprecedented number for the time and a further demonstration of the city's growing apathy for the lives of its black citizens. In a study conducted by the Chicago Law Enforcement Study Group during 1969 and 1970, they found that the CPD was "four times as lethal in their enforcement of the law than New York City or Los Angeles" and Chicago police officers were

¹⁷⁶ Balto, *Occupied Territory*, 241.

¹⁷⁷ Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot*, 168.

six times more likely to kill a black person compared to a white one.¹⁷⁸ This racial persecution was often justified behind the common Cold War veil of communist prevention. In an informal meeting in 1969 between citizens and a police officer who was referred to as “Commander Connolly”, the officer was asked by a participant why the police were so aggressive within poor neighborhoods. Connolly’s response was “In the past, the poor neighborhoods have been exploited by person or persons who have been less than American. There are so many of these Anti-American, pink, even red organizations.”¹⁷⁹ Although Connolly referred directly to red organizations, his statement of “less than American” can easily be read as a reference to African Americans who were undoubtably treated as second-class citizens in Chicago. Connolly disguised the racist persecution of the ILBPP by implying that they possessed the same negative intentions associated with Soviet Union communism that Americans were taught to have a fear of during the Cold War. The apex of racism within the CPD though was the presence of the Ku Klux Klan on the force, most notably an admitted card-carrying member who was stationed in West Side’s North Lawndale neighborhood. The Klan claimed to have 50 members within the CPD, but they were notorious for embellishing stats like this to promote more fear. This particular officer, however, drove to work openly displaying “KKK” in spray-paint on his trunk which sent a clear message to black West Siders. The officer was quickly fired but the statement his presence made as well as the realistic possibility that there were more Klan members within the CPD provided yet another reason for black Chicagoans to fear police officers.¹⁸⁰

Accompanying all of these statistics however was the highest rate of Chicago police deaths from citizens up until this point in history which totaled at 9 and illustrated the increasing indignation

¹⁷⁸ Rice, “Black Radicalism on Chicago’s West Side”, 132.

¹⁷⁹ “American Revolution II” 1969 The Film Group, *Chicago Film Archives*, <https://chicagofilmarchives.org/projects/american-revolution-2>, 1:09:33-:49.

¹⁸⁰ Rice, “Black Radicalism on Chicago’s West Side”, 128.

that was brewing amongst Chicagoans.¹⁸¹ This violent nature of the police/citizen relationship was another serious contributor that formed the environment of black Chicagoans in the late 1960s.

For the ILBPP, this violence was visible in their own backyard and in 1969 it ramped up tension between black West Siders and the police. Just a few blocks away from the ILBPP Headquarters stood the West Side's largest public housing project, the Henry Horner Homes. The Henry Horner Homes housed thousands of Chicagoans who were predominately black and was yet another symbol of urban renewal with its protruding high-rises being visible from almost all vantage points on the West Side. Beginning in 1968, teenagers within the Horner Homes were voicing concerns and requesting for a stoplight at an intersection where kids from the projects crossed for school. This concern came to a climax in September 1969 when two young children were killed crossing the streets and the city still had no plans for putting in a light. A seventeen-year-old named John Soto organized protests over this issue and on October 5th, he was “accidentally” shot in the back of the head when he was stopped by a police officer. Five days later John’s older brother Michael, who was home on leave from Vietnam and attended his brother’s protests, was chased through the second floor of the Henry Horner Homes before he was gunned down.¹⁸² These acts of police violence were even following African Americans into their actual living spaces further exploiting their sense of intrusion and insecurity in their environment. Another event that happened in the same year illuminated that African American men were not alone in this maltreatment. In an apartment on the West Side, a rookie police officer had been summoned on a disturbance call. When denied entry by Linda Anderson, a 19-year-old African American woman, he returned to his car for his shotgun and proceeded to shoot

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 138.

¹⁸² Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton*, 64.

down the door despite the fact it was a plywood and easily could have been kicked in. The police officer precariously missed the lock which he claimed to be aiming for and instead hit the young girl in the face, killing her immediately.¹⁸³ This bloodshed at the hands of police officers within the ILBPP's neighborhood further fueled their justification for vilifying the CPD and the continuation of their rhetoric of policing the "pigs."

The Black Panther Party as a whole clearly advocated the condemnation of the police, but Hampton individually was one of the most outspoken denouncers of the police within the party. In nearly all of his speeches given in 1969, Hampton made some reference to the "pigs" or the police officers that oppressed his community. During a speech he gave at Northern Illinois University, Hampton delivered a powerful analogy for his audience. Hampton asserted: "We don't hear nobody running around talking about 'I'm Benedict Arnold III', because Benedict Arnold's children don't want to talk about they his children. You hear people talking they might be Patrick Henry's children—people that stood up and said 'Give me liberty or give me death'. Or Paul Revere's cousin. Paul Revere said, 'Get your guns, the British are coming'. The British were the police."¹⁸⁴

Hampton's historical analogy would have evoked any sense of patriotism that his audience possessed because he positioned himself and the BPP in the same situation as America's founding fathers. It also was a clever insult of police officers who surely did not wish to be compared to British colonists. Hampton sometimes was much blunter with his disrespect of the "pigs." In one speech when referring to them he stated, "If you a kill a few, you get a little satisfaction. But when you kill them ALL you get complete satisfaction."¹⁸⁵ This statement was much more radical and whether Hampton meant it figuratively or not, there were certainly many

¹⁸³ Rice, "Black Radicalism on Chicago's West Side", 130.

¹⁸⁴ Watu, "A New Afrikan Theoretical Journal Book Eleven", 14.

¹⁸⁵ Philip Foner, *The Black Panthers Speak* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 1970), 142.

politicians and politicians who perceived this as a direct threat and justification for persecution of the ILBPP.

The thing about Hampton though that was important for the context of his public slander on “pigs” was that he was keenly aware of the political, social, and environmental system that surrounded him. As he once stated, “The only way to deal with the system is to deal with the enforcers of the system. The pigs are the enforcers. They come into the black community and brutalize and victimize black people. We intend to put a stop to that kind of violence.”¹⁸⁶ Just as Daley understood that the evolution of street gangs was a serious political threat, Hampton understood that his war against the “capitalist pigs” had to begin on the ground level against the physical representation of the machine. Hampton frequently made the comparison between Vietnam and Chicago’s West Side which he asserted was more of a brutal warzone than Vietnam.¹⁸⁷ If Hampton would have still been alive in the fall of 1970, he would have resonated with the lyrics of the Black Sabbath song, “War Pigs,” which was a raucous decry of the Vietnam War. In particular, Hampton would have connected with the references to the “war machine keeps turning” and the “politicians hide themselves away” while they are “treating people just like pawns in chess.”¹⁸⁸ Hampton understood the path towards ridding his community of oppression started with the “pawns” which were controlled by the Man on Five who called the shots and played king in Hampton’s version of a warzone. In a speech he gave at Olivet Baptist Church in the heart of Chicago’s South Side Black Belt, Hampton codified this exact notion when he stated:

“we understand that there’s work to be done in the valley, and when we get through with this work in the valley, then we got to go to the mountain top. We’re not going to the mountain top because there’s capitalism on the mountain top. We’re going to the mountain top because there’s

¹⁸⁶ Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot*, 93.

¹⁸⁷ Watu “A New Afrikan Theoretical Journal Book Eleven”, 18.

¹⁸⁸ Black Sabbath, “War Pigs”, Track 1, *Warner Bros. Records*, 1970.

a motherfucker on the mountain top that's playing King, and he's been bullshitting us. And we've got to go up on the mountain top not for the purpose of living his lifestyle and living like he lives. We've got to go up on the mountain top to make this motherfucker understand, goddamnit, that we are coming from the valley!"¹⁸⁹

This statement from Hampton was foreshadowing what he saw needed to be done in his community, to better the lives of his people and to free them from subjugation. As much as this was a forewarning for what was ahead for those invested in the revolution, Hampton's rhetoric also served as bait that agitated the "pigs." Hampton was very aware that his words baited the police, but he understood that he needed to lead by example by speaking fearlessly regardless of the repercussions.

The high approval within the city and the quick ascendance of Fred Hampton and his ILBPP led to the FBI quickly becoming involved with the CPD's efforts to suppress the Chicago Panthers. The FBI's COINTELPRO paired with the CPD's Red Squad had the same objectives; both served as a force that suppressed anyone who attempted to disrupt the status quo and was deemed a threat by their leaders. COINTELPRO was established in 1956 as a facet of the FBI out of frustration with governmental limits on the FBI's ability to persecute alleged domestic dissident groups. A select committee of the Senate was employed to investigate COINTELPRO in 1976 and they defined COINTELPRO's principal philosophy as "a law enforcement agency has the duty to do whatever is necessary to combat perceived threats to the existing social and political order."¹⁹⁰ These perceived threats were up to the discretion of their infamous director at the time, J. Edgar Hoover, and in 1969 he deemed the BPP "the greatest threat to internal security of the country".¹⁹¹ The Red Squad served an eerily similar purpose but on the local

¹⁸⁹ Watu, "A New Afrikan Theoretical Journal Book Eleven", 7.

¹⁹⁰ U.S. Senate, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans*, Book 3, April 23, 1976, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_III.pdf, 3.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 187.

level, working for the Daley administration to combat his dissenters in the city while maintaining the status quo in regard to his power. The Red Squad, a subversive intelligent unit of the CPD, had been present in Chicago for over seventy years and existed under different names before it reached its greatest power under the Daley administration which used the Red Squad as a political asset and suppressor of adversaries. The power of Chicago's Red Squad was what led to civil liberties lawyer Frank Donner to dub Chicago "the National Capital of Police Repression."¹⁹² These forces combined to wreak absolute havoc on the ILBPP and because of the impressive exertion of power that Daley's administration displayed, the FBI worked closely with the CPD on their operation to dismantle the ILBPP, which Donner argued was unparalleled compared to their work in any other city.¹⁹³ The first real exhibition of power that the FBI/CPD presented came on June 4th, 1969 when a raid was conducted on the ILBPP Headquarters under a phony search warrant for George Sams who was in fact an informant for the FBI. During the raid the FBI arrested the eight Panthers who were at HQ, seized \$3,000 worth of donations along with six legally owned guns, destroyed all of the food for the free breakfast program, stole records of volunteers and members, and more good measure tore out all of the wiring in the building.¹⁹⁴ This was a systematic assault from a federal agency who wished to dismantle and discredit the Panthers in Chicago. A month later a very similar raid occurred but from the CPD, this time it was preceded by a gun fight between the police and ILBPP members inside the Headquarters. After all of the Panthers were arrested, the police officers did the same kind of damage that occurred previously with property being seized and destroyed.¹⁹⁵ An almost identical altercation

¹⁹² Frank Donner, *Protectors of Privilege: Red Squads and Police Repression in Urban America* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1990), 90.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 143.

¹⁹⁴ Rice, "Black Radicalism on Chicago's West Side", 144; Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton*, 51.

¹⁹⁵ John Kifner, "Five Policemen Shot in Chicago During Battle at Panther Offices", *New York Times*, 1 August 1969, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/118510668/735D3EFE85F14655PQ/8?accountid=14968>.

occurred on October 4th, 1969 with arrests, property damage, and property seizure at the ILBPP Headquarters. This made it clear if it wasn't already that the ILBPP was deliberately being stripped of their funds and property by the CPD and the FBI in efforts to decimate the organization. The last major raid that the joint operation of the FBI and CPD conducted would occur exactly two months from then, but would incur a lethal cost.

Amidst all of this persecution and destruction, Hampton and the Panthers remained focused and undeterred on their mission. It was in fact during all of these raids when Hampton gave a majority of his community-rallying speeches, when the Chicago Panthers built their Rainbow Coalition, kept an unbroken drive to sustain their Free Breakfast for Children Program, and unceasingly tried to establish their medical clinic despite their funds being consistently hijacked from them. Along with keeping their programs alive, the Panthers kept their confidence and unrelenting fearlessness alive, especially chairman Hampton. In a speech given in November after three detrimental raids on the ILBPP headquarters, Hampton still asserted that "It takes two to tango, motherfucker. As soon as you kick that door down, I have to kick it back on you. We don't lock our doors. We just get us some good guns and leave them motherfuckers open."¹⁹⁶ The utter confidence displayed by Hampton instilled hope in his audience that the Panthers would prevail against their daunting adversary, but even Hampton's words in this speech were breathtakingly prophetic as he ended his speech with "Time is short, let's seize the time".¹⁹⁷ In the hours before dawn on December 4th, 1969, a special unit of police officers prepared for a raid that would alter the fate of the ILBPP permanently.

Sometime in early October, Hampton and his seven months pregnant fiancé, Deborah Johnson, moved into a five room flat at 2337 West Monroe Street, just two blocks away from

¹⁹⁶ Watu, "A New Afrikan Theoretical Journal Book Eleven", 15.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 21.

Panther Headquarters. Hampton was strongly advised against this but like always, he did not submit to fear and chose to welcome the threat at hand.¹⁹⁸ The essence of this fearlessness Hampton possessed was best described by Mike Gray, one of the filmmakers of *The Murder of Fred Hampton*. Gray professed:

“as we listened to the speeches again and again, it became apparent he had accommodated death. He knew he was going to die. It was OK and so he had set aside the ultimate fear, the one that stopped all of us in our tracks, no matter how courageous, the net fear upon which we base all our other fears, the one that keeps us all in line. Hampton had simply set that fear to rest. He was free. Thus he was able to speak clean simple truths that hit you like a thunderbolt.”¹⁹⁹

Hampton’s foreknowledge of his death was best illustrated in the fact that he had all the pockets of his clothing sewed, that way he couldn’t be pinned for reaching for a weapon which was the common justification of law enforcement homicides. Hampton wanted it to be clear his death was nothing short of an assassination. The actualization of his prescience came on December 4th, thanks in large part to an informant for the FBI named William O’Neal. O’Neal had infiltrated the ILBPP under the direction of FBI agent Roy Mitchell, who was the special agent in charge (SAC) of the FBI’s Chicago effort to suppress the Panthers. O’Neal continuously worked from within to disrupt the ILBPP such as encouraging members to participate in illegal activities while also frequently providing intel to Mitchell which greatly aided the macro-level disruption from the FBI/CPD joint operation.²⁰⁰ The predominant contribution that O’Neal made though was the information he gave to agent Mitchell as well as his participation in the December 4th raid. O’Neal drew out a detailed floor plan of Hampton’s 2337 W. Monroe apartment which even illustrated the exact placement of the bed in which Hampton slept in.²⁰¹ Scholar Ward Churchill

¹⁹⁸ Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton*, 63.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 53-54.

²⁰⁰ “Hampton v. Hanrahan”, United States Courts of Appeals, Seventh Circuit, Decided April 23, 1979, <file:///Users/tylermcculloch/Downloads/Hampton%20v.%20Hanrahan.pdf>, 6-7.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 7.

argued that there was also significant evidence suggesting O’Neal drugged Hampton with secobarbital, a drug used to treat insomnia, to ensure that the raid’s target was fully exposed and subdued.²⁰² The intelligence provided to agent Martin was then relayed to the office of Cook County State Attorney, Edward V. Hanrahan, who used this information to enact the raid using his own fourteen person unit of the Red Squad which only answered to the State Attorney’s Office.²⁰³

The raid commenced at 4:30am on Hampton’s apartment. According to a group of legal scholars, the actions of Hanrahan’s Red Squad officers “were more suited to a wartime military commando raid than the service of a search warrant.”²⁰⁴ Equipped with “a machine gun, a sawed-off shotgun, a semi-automatic 30-caliber carbine, and other weapons,” the officers fired over 91 shots.²⁰⁵ The one bullet accounted for that came from a BPP member’s gun was from Mark Clark, a visiting Panther leader from the newly formed Peoria chapter, who most likely fired the shot after being struck in the heart by oncoming gunfire, making Clark the other casualty as a result of this raid.²⁰⁶ Amidst all of this, Hampton remained asleep in his bed where he would be shot several times in the body as well as the head.²⁰⁷ There is no other way to explain this act of police violence besides a political assassination. If there was any doubt left after this police raid that assassination was not the objective of the FBI and the CPD, the very next day an almost identical raid was conducted on Bobby Rush’s apartment, but luckily for

²⁰² Ward Churchill, “To Disrupt, Discredit and Destroy”, https://propagandhi.com/wp-content/empires/Ward_Churchill.pdf, 71.

²⁰³ “Hampton v. Hanrahan”, United States Courts of Appeals, Seventh Circuit, Decided April 23, 1979, <file:///Users/tylermcculloch/Downloads/Hampton%20v.%20Hanrahan.pdf>, 7.

²⁰⁴ A Report by the Commission of Inquiry into the Black Panthers and the Police, *Search and Destroy* (New York: Metropolitan Applied Research Center, 1973), viii.

²⁰⁵ “Hampton v. Hanrahan”, United States Courts of Appeals, Seventh Circuit, Decided April 23, 1979, <file:///Users/tylermcculloch/Downloads/Hampton%20v.%20Hanrahan.pdf>, 9-12.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 10.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

Rush he was tipped off and was able to flee for his life.²⁰⁸ The forces of the FBI and the CPD were hellbent on destroying the ILBPP and they were willing to murder people in order to attain their goal.

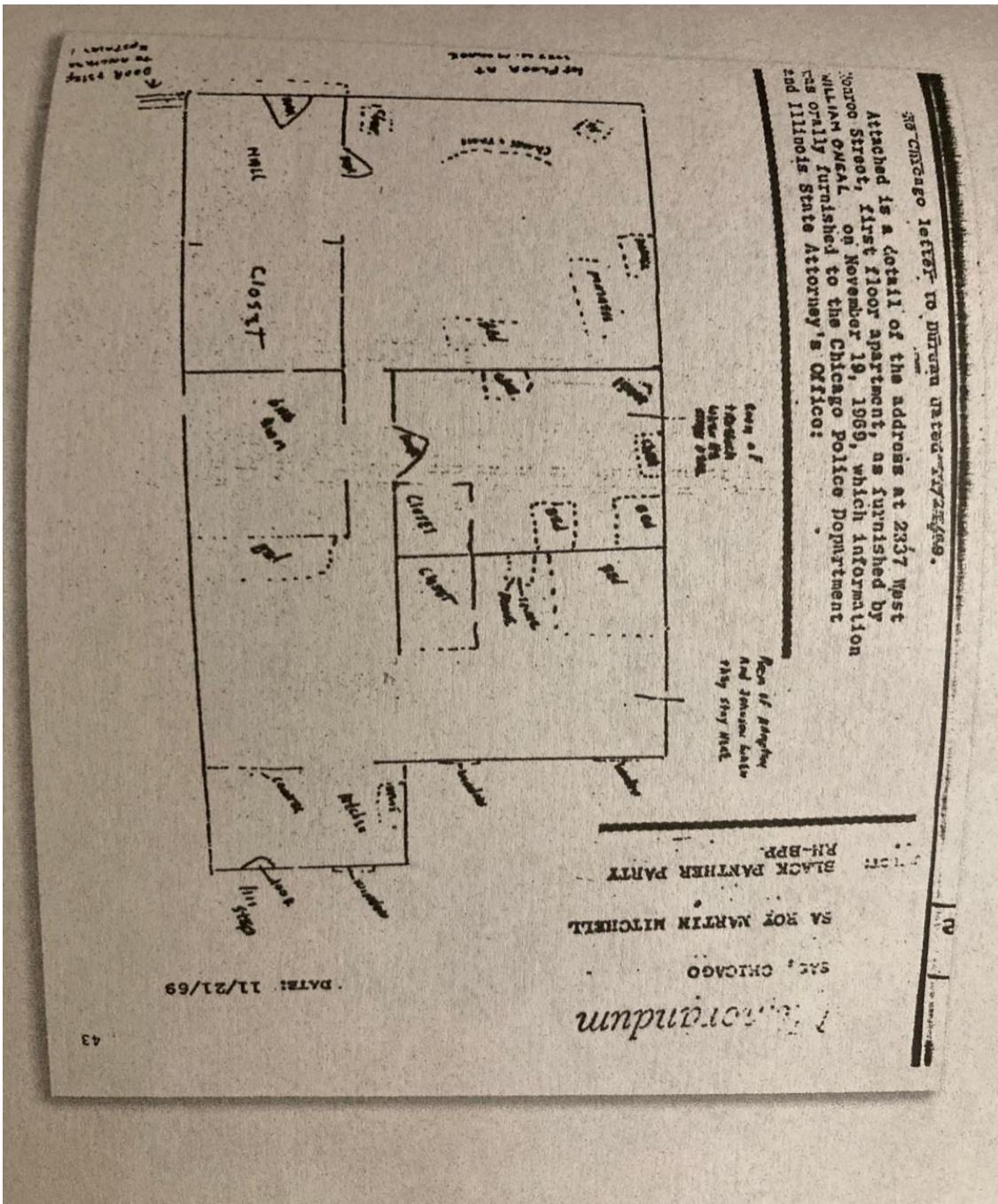


Figure 7. Floor Plan of Hampton's Apartment which O'Neal provided to the FBI. Courtesy of the People's Law Office.

²⁰⁸ Balto, *Occupied Territory*, 224.

Perhaps the most disconcerting fact surrounding Hampton's assassination was that the national chapter of the BPP had provisional plans of moving the national headquarters of the party to Chicago under Hampton, who silently had been given a national rank in the BPP, because all of the other higher-ups including Newton and Seale were either indicted or in exile.²⁰⁹ Hampton's importance within the ILBPP as well as the national BPP was immeasurable. If February 3, 1959 was considered the day the music died, then December 4, 1969 should be considered the day the revolution died for the BPP. Although the ILBPP hung around until 1974 and the BPP as a whole technically didn't dissolve until 1982, the party rapidly lost its charisma, effectiveness, and momentum when the twenty-one-year-old died. Huey P. Newton himself even stated in 1971, a little over a year after Hampton's assassination, that "the Party is over".²¹⁰ The prophetic words of Hampton himself encapsulate the allure that the young man exuded. In his most famous speech, Hampton declared:

"I believe I was born not to die in a car wreck; I don't believe I'm going to die slipping on a piece of ice; I don't believe I'm going to die because I got a bad heart; I don't believe I'm going to die because of lung cancer. I believe that I'm going to be able to die doing the things I was born for. I believe I'm going to be able to die high off the people. I believe that I will be able to die as a revolutionary in the international revolutionary proletarian struggle. And I hope that each one of you will be able to die in the international proletarian revolutionary struggle or you'll be able to live in it. And I think that struggle's going to come. Why don't you live for the people, why don't you struggle for the people, why don't you die for the people?"²¹¹

Hampton ended that very speech with these bone chilling words, "Before you go to bed tonight, say 'I am a revolutionary.' Make that the last words in case you don't wake up and somebody might believe it and you might end up in what they call revolutionary happy hunting grounds."²¹²

²⁰⁹ Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot*, 182.

²¹⁰ Bloom and Martin Jr., *Black Against Empire*, 381.

²¹¹ "The Murder of Fred Hampton", 1971 The Film Group, *Chicago Film Archives*, <https://chicagofilarchives.org/pres-projects/the-murder-of-fred-hampton-1971>, 1:28:16-:55.

²¹² Ibid, 52:12-.21.

If there is such a thing as the “revolutionary happy hunting grounds,” then Fred Hampton is certainly there leading the masses.

Conclusion

Although the ILBPP's existence was short-lived, their impact was immediate and a direct response to the urban environment of black Chicagoans. The decades long process of subjugation that African Americans endured in this Midwest Metropolis created a pent-up yearning for equality along with exasperation that was perfectly embodied within the ILBPP's ideology and platform. Panthers such as Fred Hampton exemplified a fearlessness towards the pursuit of bettering the community that for a brief moment in history, a realistic solution towards improving the neglected environment for Chicago's poor African American neighborhoods looked attainable. The programs introduced by the ILBPP such as their free breakfast program and medical clinic instantaneously served the people of the community some alleviation but more importantly taught them the importance of coming together and embracing the "power of the people." For over a half-century the black population of Chicago had been neglected and purposely oppressed by local politicians and elite businessmen because of racial prejudice but they also profited off keeping them segregated and impoverished. This subsequently made their environments dilapidated and ill-suited which importantly made them dependent on the little amount of governmental aid they were provided. The era of urban renewal produced massive public housing projects which further manipulated the segregation of Chicago's black population. If they didn't get selected to live in high-rises, then they had to pack in tighter to the already limited housing available for African Americans in Chicago which only became more dilapidated as time progressed. Amidst all of this struggle and blight, black Chicagoans continued to resist but it wasn't until the emergence of the ILBPP that a resistance was propitious enough to evoke a response from the city's power structure that was so hostile. Real change was afoot. The lethal persecution of the ILBPP from government agencies revealed that Chicago as

well as the federal government were adamant on keeping its black population in an inferior and controlled state. Nevertheless, the ILBPP with the leadership of Hampton encapsulated the angst, anger and fervor that was created amongst black Chicagoans as a result of being subjected to a disintegrated and dilapidated environment for over fifty years.

An intriguing facet of this history was the dichotomy of the subaltern and top-down viewpoints which equally imposed their will on molding this era. The duality revealed how these historical actors were reacting to the others actions. For example, the racist implementation of urban renewal by the city of Chicago caused its African American population to react in the form of social unrest and rebellion which in turn made the city's leaders like mayor Daley respond with their own reactions such as the mass installment of pools within black neighborhoods. The power presented by both groups of historical actors illuminated an unfeigned depiction of this historical period, but it also demonstrated just how powerful Daley and his political machine was. Daley has been revered as one of the few mayors who truly dominated the political arena of his city. Both Martin Luther King Jr. and Ralph Abernathy were amazed with the power Daley wielded which prompted Abernathy to declare that Daley ran Chicago "like his own private kingdom."²¹³ Much like how this writing traced the drive Fred Hampton would have taken from Maywood to ILBPP Headquarters, Royko traced Daley's drive from his home in Bridgeport to City Hall. Daley's four-mile drive illustrated the physical impact his autocratic rule had on the city. Royko mentioned the Dan Ryan, Eisenhower, Stevenson, and Kennedy expressways, all built by the mayor. He also mentioned the University of Illinois campus which Daley built. It was one of the largest city campuses in the U.S. that was informally referred to as the concrete jungle because of its expansive urban presence.²¹⁴ The colossal amount of construction that

²¹³ Ralph David Abernathy, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 377.

²¹⁴ Royko, *Boss*, 3-4.

Daley enacted during his tenure left a physical legacy on the environment of Chicago but also should serve as a reminder of the true power the “Man on Five” imposed on his city and especially its inhabitants.

One of the important legacies created by this era was the unjust associations formed between African Americans and the environments into which they were forced. Most of these associations were created by those who had never set foot in these neighborhoods and most importantly, had no clue how these environments became decayed. Growing up in the Chicago suburbs in the 2000s, I heard many phrases and words that essentially were synonyms for predominately black neighborhoods and unmistakably had negative connotations when used. Phrases such as “the ghetto,” “the hood,” or “the projects” become common ways to describe a black neighborhood. The word ghetto has its roots in referring to urban Jewish populations who were forced into segregated regions of cities in early modern Europe. The term then followed them over to America. When African Americans began to migrate northward to urban areas, the term was applied to them because they were racially segregated as well.²¹⁵ African Americans were rarely able to leave the “ghettos” in American cities because of racially restrictive covenants and redlining that forced them to remain in the run-down neighborhoods they inherited. Thus, the term “ghetto” became synonymous with African American neighborhoods by the mid-twentieth century. Likewise, the term hood has harmless roots with being a shortened reference to a neighborhood, but over the course of the twentieth century it became associated with the dangerous and decrepit communities of African Americans which were molded by decades of segregation and government policy. The last phrase, the projects, has the most

²¹⁵ Daniel B Schwartz, “How America’s Ugly History of Segregation Changed the Meaning of the Word Ghetto”, *Time*, 24 September 2019, <https://time.com/5684505/ghetto-word-history/#:~:text=The%20name%20E2%80%9CGhetto%20likely%20derived,become%20the%20all%2DJewish%20district>.

obvious roots of being a shortened version of public housing projects but it quickly picked up a connotation of belonging to a withering set of apartments inhabited by black people. Public housing projects in their conception were positive because they set out to providing homes for the less fortunate but because of an array of factors that led to their neglect and degradation, the projects became yet another phrase that had a negative overtone attached to the living quarters of African Americans in cities like Chicago. The etymological transformation of all these terms sheds light perhaps on the subliminal biases most Americans have towards the black community despite the harsh realities which created the bleak environments to which many black Chicagoans were subjected.

In 1991, journalist Alex Kotlowitz published a disheartening book titled *There Are No Children Here* that focused on two young brothers who grew up in the Henry Horner Homes in the late 1980s and followed the everyday struggles they faced with life in the projects. An important facet of Kotlowitz's book was the critical role the environment played in molding how the boys viewed the world. As Kotlowitz stated, "Sometimes at Henry Horner you can almost smell the arrival of death. It is the odor of foot-deep pools of water that, formed from draining fire hydrants, becoming fetid in the summer sun. It is the stink of urine puddles in the stairwell corners and of soiled diapers dumped in the grass. It is the stench of a maggot-infested cat carcass lying in a vacant apartment and the rotting food in overturned trash bins. It is, in short, the collected scents of summer."²¹⁶ Kotlowitz's vivid illustration demonstrated what summer meant for these young kids who unlike most children growing up in the suburbs or elsewhere, summer was not a time of care-free fun. The fears and anxieties produced as a result of living in Henry Horner were illustrated by the children sitting around dreaming about living in the suburbs

²¹⁶ Alex Kotlowitz, *There Are No Children Here* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 45.

because “you could sit outside all night and nothing would happen” and citing that the suburbs had flowers that reached four feet tall.²¹⁷ The most pertinent example of this environmental trauma was seen with one of the brothers, Pharoah, developing a stutter because the violence of the summer months unnerved him so much.²¹⁸ For those who look at the research conducted in this thesis, Lafayette and Pharoah, the two brothers in the book, could easily have succumbed to the lethal demise that the Soto brothers did just twenty years before in the same exact Horner Homes. Kotlowitz’s analysis of these two boys’ lives was an exemplar for the legacy of public housing in Chicago as well as an illustration of how the West Side evolved twenty years after Hampton and the ILBPP dissipated.

A lasting legacy to come out of this era though is perhaps the environmental consequences. Due to the egregious practice of redlining, cities marked areas where African Americans were living as hazardous or undesirable which made them prime targets for industrial factories because they could buy more land for cheap. As a result of this, studies have shown that these regions today have much higher levels of air pollution and are a threat to overall health.²¹⁹ Applying this idea directly to Chicago, the truth behind it becomes incredibly apparent. A map produced by the Natural Resources Defense Council illustrated that the city’s South and West Sides experienced “the greatest exposure to air, water and land pollution.”²²⁰ Uncoincidentally, the South and West Sides of Chicago are home to the largest concentration of Chicago’s black population to this day. This evidence directly supports the argument that the city of Chicago

²¹⁷ Ibid, 31-32.

²¹⁸ Ibid, 53

²¹⁹ Laurel Wamsley, “Even Many Decades Later, Redlined Areas See Higher Levels of Air Pollution”, *NPR*, March 10, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/10/1085882933/redlining-pollution-racism>.

²²⁰ Brett Chase and Patrick Judge, “Interactive Map: Pollution Hits Chicago’s West, South Sides Hardest”, *BGA*, October 25, 2018, <https://www.bettergov.org/news/interactive-map-pollution-hits-chicagos-west-south-sides-hardest/>.

subjected its African American population to inhospitable environments. That legacy remains today.

In 1970, Fred Hampton was aptly honored with Maywood's aquatic center being named after him, a community improvement for which he adamantly pushed. As of the time of this writing however, a push to get his childhood home historically preserved is still in the works. The home at 804 South 17th Avenue which the Hampton's have owned since 1958 is at the risk of foreclosure, which is currently being battled by Hampton's son, Fred Hampton Jr. Hampton Jr. directs the Black Panther Party Cubs out of the Maywood house, a program that mirrors his father's ILBPP while also teaching the youth of the community about Hampton and the legacy he left.²²¹ The fight to "Save the Hampton House" is much more than just preserving an old building. Making the Maywood two flat home a historic landmark would provide a physical space to commemorate the revolutionary leader in a personal environment where he developed his political roots and impacted so many. In addition to that, it would serve as a physical place for visitors to come to learn about this historic period in Chicago. A period that contains grim, but invaluable lessons about the struggle for equal access in twentieth century America.

²²¹ Gabe Levine-Drizin, "Bigger Than a Building", *South Side Weekly*, January 7, 2020, <https://southsideweekly.com/bigger-than-a-building-hampton-home/>.

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