

# **RACE NOT SPACE: A REVISIONIST HISTORY OF GANGS IN CHICAGO**

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It is an enduring, progressive insight of the "Chicago School" of sociology that criminal behavior is not a racial characteristic, as nativists, klansmen, and racists of all stripes might claim. Rather, the Chicagoans' doctrine stressed that violence, gangs, crime, and other "social dislocations" are primarily consequences of the intersection of urban ecology and social stratification. For example, "gangs," said the Chicago School's founder Robert E. Park, sprouted in the "city wilderness" without regard to race, creed, or color.<sup>1</sup>

But a closer look at a century of gangs in Chicago casts some doubt over this deeply ingrained assumption. This essay argues that the oft-told, race-neutral story of gangs and space is a sociological shibboleth. Rather, an alternative narrative is proposed that emphasizes how Chicago's gangs have been influenced by deep-seated racism, racial politics, real estate speculation, segregation, police brutality, and white supremacist terrorism. After reviewing the literature on race and gang formation, the story of gangs in Chicago will be retold guided by interviews and documents from the Chicago Gang History Project as well as from secondary sources. This revisionist narrative will place more emphasis on W. E. B. Du Bois than Robert Park. In Chicago at least, it has been race, not class or space, that has most shaped gang behavior and the responses to it.

## **RACE AND SPACE**

Gang research from its beginnings, like urban sociology generally, has minimized the role of race.<sup>2</sup> Frederic Thrasher, the "father of gang research," followed Robert Park, a noted liberal and leader of the Chicago Urban League, in arguing that gangs were the product of "natural areas" of the city. Racial segregation of African Americans, the Chicagoans believed, was a temporary characteristic of a universal and assimilationist "race relations cycle." The industrial city attracted immigrants and migrants, and distributed them non-randomly in "areas of transition" that became ethnic launching pads toward more prosperous, middle class zones. "Ethnic succession," as Jesse Bernard put it, represented the "hidden hand" of the market as it sorted out those who could best survive the competition among ethnic groups. Robert Park defines

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this crypto-social Darwinist perspective: "Human ecology . . . assumes that the origin of social change . . . would be found in the struggle for existence and in the growth, the migration, the mobility, and the territorial and occupational distribution of peoples, which this struggle has brought about."<sup>3</sup> For Park and the Chicagoans, African Americans were following European nationalities on a long, tough road to assimilation. All ethnic groups, including African Americans, the Irish, Italians, and Poles, were subject to the same natural, ecological processes. Immigrant and migrant groups stayed together after arrival in Chicago, gradually integrated into the broader economy, and moved into more prosperous zones of the city, shedding their traditions as they assimilated.<sup>4</sup>

The Chicago social scientists were also familiar with the concept of a "ghetto," but they applied it mainly to Jewish immigrants. Louis Wirth's classic text, which examines "the ghetto as an institution" is filled with insights for African Americans, but Wirth never considers the ghetto in Chicago to be anything but Jewish.<sup>5</sup> Wirth and others believed that Chicago was filled with "ethnic enclaves" where each group chose to segregate itself before it departed for its suburban Valhalla. The ghetto, for Wirth, was a resonant name for a temporary *Jewish* enclave.

Historian Thomas Philpott, in a controversial study of early 20th century census tracts, demolished the cherished Chicago School belief in a rough equivalence of ethnic experiences. Whether neighborhoods were labeled Jewish, Italian, Polish, or Irish, none concentrated a majority of that ethnic group's population, nor was any single census tract overwhelmingly composed of one nationality. What was purported to be an ethnic enclave, Philpott concluded, "was in fact an ethnic hodgepodge."<sup>6</sup>

Not so with Chicago's black population, which according to Philpott lived in "Chicago's only real ghetto." In 1930 nine out of every ten African Americans lived in areas that were at least 80 percent black. No other group experienced levels of segregation anywhere near this. Both Philpott, and the even more devastating critique of the racial blindspot of the Chicago School, Arnold Hirsch's *Making of the Second Ghetto*, demonstrated the intentional violence and discriminatory practices that went into shaping and maintaining a ghetto for African Americans alone. While other ethnic groups followed a path of invasion, succession, dominance, and assimilation, black Chicagoans were forcibly segregated.<sup>7</sup>

Park and his colleagues might have avoided the more egregious weaknesses of their theory, but they curiously ignored the one voice in sociology at the time who was speaking clearly and loudly on race—that of W. E. B. Du Bois. Du Bois, whose *Souls of Black Folk* was at the time well-known in academic circles, plumbed the depth of the social and economic forces that separated the black and white worlds.<sup>8</sup> Park worked closely with Booker T. Washington and, in opposition to Du Bois and other black voices, Park declared that the race relations' cycle was "progressive and irreversible."<sup>9</sup> Park's "fatalistic" notions about African Americans and the "naturalness" of

oppression were roundly criticized by Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal in his monumental study, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and American Democracy*.<sup>10</sup>

But this is a familiar recapitulation of how the Chicago School treated African Americans as just one more ethnic group that, sooner or later, would assimilate into the American melting pot. Race for Park was just another variable, *declining in significance* with modernization; and racial inequalities could best be "explained" by class, family and employment patterns, and other economically-based factors.<sup>11</sup> The Chicagoans, early and late, have been hampered by a nonracial ecological theory and have therefore had difficulties analyzing the consequences of the creation and maintenance of the black ghetto. This racial blindspot becomes apparent with a closer look at the history of Chicago's gangs. Indeed, the history of Chicago's gangs can be divided into six periods that reflect the traditional factors of immigration, poverty, or social disorganization; and at the same time, reveal the centrality of race to the Chicago gang experience.

## RACE RIOTS AND "CONVENTIONALIZED" IRISH GANGS

The early stories of Chicago's gangs, told by sociologists and reformers such as Robert Park and Jane Addams, are of second-generation immigrant youth having a tough time making it in school and fighting with police and rival ethnic groups. But there was another, highly significant phenomenon that has generally been minimized by Progressive era reformers and contemporary scholars—the mainly Irish "voting gangs." Sociologist Frederic Thrasher in *The Gang*, published in 1927, spent only a few pages discussing these "conventionalized gangs," which he considered one possible outcome of the universal process of spontaneous adolescent gang development. These white gangs or "social athletic clubs" (SACs) were organizations sponsored by politicians to provide boys and young men of the streets with "recreation." Thrasher estimated that there were about 250 conventionalized gangs in Chicago in the 1920s.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, however, following the example of New York City's Tammany Hall of the 19th century, Chicago's SACs were crucial components of urban political life, with local politicians using whatever means necessary to ensure the election of their candidates. These SACs were a "way out" of the streets for young Irish, Polish, and other ethnic youth by getting jobs as policemen, firemen, or in the parks from their Democratic Party sponsors. As Edward Sutherland put it in 1924:

At the present time a good many gangs are flourishing under the leadership and protection of the politicians. These are frequently called athletic clubs and are fostered even among young boys, evidently with the expectation that political support will be gained in the future. In return for present support and expected future support the politicians extend protection to the boys in their depredations.<sup>13</sup>

But unlike the "Gangs of New York," Chicago's white gangs played another more sinister role. While competition between ethnic groups occurred in every "transitional" neighborhood, the "succession" of African Americans out of their areas of "first settlement" was systematically blocked. The Irish gangs, located in the Bridgeport section just across Wentworth Avenue, used violence and terror as a means to enforce their own Mason-Dixon line and to contain African Americans in their overcrowded, narrow "black belt."<sup>14</sup>

The 1919 Chicago race riot, one of the nation's most violent, was an expression of pent-up racial hostility among whites and their gangs over the increased number of African Americans in areas near Bridgeport, as well as the intense postwar job competition. In their report on the riot, the 1922 Race Relations Commission, headed by sociologist Charles S. Johnson and advised by Robert Park, concluded that white ethnic "gangs and their activities were an important factor throughout the riot. But for them, it is doubtful if the riot would have gone beyond the first clash. Both organized gangs and those which sprang into existence opportunistically seized upon the excuse of the first conflict to engage in lawless acts."<sup>15</sup>

Few commentators have discussed the role of the athletic clubs in racist assaults on the black community. Richard J. Daley, who served as Mayor of Chicago from 1955 to 1976, was a 19-year-old member of the Hamburg gang in 1919 (and later its president for 15 years), and never revealed his actions during the riot, though the Hamburgs were among the riot leaders.<sup>16</sup> Ragen's Colts, the Shielders, the Murderers, and many other mainly Irish gangs allowed their racial antagonism to flow during the week of mayhem in July 1919. "Studs Lonigan," James T. Farrell's fictional Irish youth, was portrayed as taking part in the riots, and Farrell vividly describes a thoroughly racist Irish culture.<sup>17</sup>

White gangs during the 1919 riots, in fact, may have invented the "drive-by shooting," later made famous by Al Capone and his "Outfit."<sup>18</sup> White gang members drove into the black neighborhoods searching for black residents, firing, and then driving swiftly away. African Americans, however, were not passive victims. Many, like Harry Haywood, a World War I veteran, would grab their guns and return fire, defending their community.

It was rumored that Irishmen from the west of the Wentworth Avenue dividing line were planning to invade the ghetto that night, coming in across the tracks by way of Fifty-first Street. We planned a defensive action to meet them.

It was not surprising that defensive preparations were under way. There had been clashes before, often when white youths in "athletic clubs" invaded the Black community. These "clubs" were really racist gangs, organized by the city ward heelers and precinct captains.<sup>19</sup>

Black adolescent gangs, according to all observers, had clashed with white youths over the previous years, defending their community against assault.

Chicago's riot commission concluded, "There are no gang organizations among Negroes to compare with those found among whites."<sup>20</sup> Unlike the Irish gangs, black teenage gang members had no way to become conventionalized by integrating into the political system through patronage.

No riots ever broke out between the Irish and Italians, or Poles and Jews. Mexican gangs would form in South Chicago as their parents took jobs in the mills, but African Americans were prevented from moving into that section.<sup>21</sup> Race riots erupted in various parts of the United States following World War I, but in northern cities the unrestrained racist violence was a response to the expanding black population.<sup>22</sup> In Chicago the Irish gangs were not merely "voting gangs" or "social athletic clubs," but violent racist tools to enforce segregation, and they would continue in that role, in one form or another, for decades. As Irish gang members aged, they were incorporated into the patronage machine controlled by Irish politicians. Black gang members had no such conventionalized opportunities. Former Irish gang members would become cops, firemen, and yes, even the mayor of the city. The Irish gang, in effect, was reinvented as the Chicago Police Department.<sup>23</sup>

### IRISH AND ITALIAN CRIMINALS TAKE CENTER STAGE

It is strange to read Thrasher's *The Gang*, written in 1927, and find almost no mention of the rise of Al Capone's criminal Outfit. Thrasher's laudable point was to differentiate the "boy gangs" from Capone's multi-million dollar bootlegging empire. But the changing of the ethnic guard in various illegal empires during Prohibition would keep the black "Policy Kings" in their place and block African Americans' use of crime as a source of mobility up the "crooked ladder."<sup>24</sup>

In the early years of the 20th century, the criminal "rackets" in Chicago were controlled by the Irish with aldermen like "Hinky-Dink" Kenna and "Bathhouse" John Coughlin offering protection to racketeers, while getting rich themselves.<sup>25</sup> The Italians, like the African Americans, were an important force in Chicago's Republican politics, but the Irish dominated the Democratic political machine and gobbled up most of the patronage, including most of the jobs on the police force. This trend was cemented by the Democratic sweep of 1932.<sup>26</sup>

In many ways the Capone era can be seen as the rise to pre-eminence of Italians in Chicago's rackets.<sup>27</sup> The Italians would prove to be an equal opportunity ally, and the leaders of the Outfit in 1930, unlike the New York mafia, would consist of 31 percent Italians, 29 percent Irish, and 20 percent Jewish.<sup>28</sup> Other organized gangs, like the Chinese tongs, continued to flourish in several sections of the city, but their small size kept them marginalized and not a threat to Irish political dominance.<sup>29</sup> However, the Irish Democrats viewed the black community, a mainstay of Republican "Big Bill" Thompson's political machine, as the enemy. African Americans also represented a growing illicit market, and one that dominated "the Policy," or

numbers racket. In *Black Metropolis*, published in 1945, social scientists St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton described the Policy's vast economic impact on Chicago's black community.<sup>30</sup> Al Capone knew that during Prohibition bootlegging meant huge profits and purportedly struck a deal with the black "Policy Kings": "You keep out of bootlegging and we will stay away from policy."<sup>31</sup> This agreement stuck and African Americans were rarely among the many victims of Chicago's notorious "beer wars" during the Roaring Twenties.

The policy industry, as described by Drake and Cayton and more recently by Nathan Thompson, was a black institution, providing employment for thousands of men and women.<sup>32</sup> But when Prohibition ended in 1933, and the Italian gangs were looking to replace their lost revenue, Capone's deal with the black Policy Kings had to be abandoned. While in jail in the 1930s, small time hoodlum Sam Giancana met "Big Ed" Jones, the king of Policy in Chicago's black belt. Giancana, having been put out of the bootlegging business by the end of Prohibition, immediately realized the potential of policy for the Outfit. When Giancana got out of prison, he unleashed a wave of kidnappings, bombings, and murders, eventually forcing black policy dealers to report to Italian bosses.<sup>33</sup>

Black youth gangs were thus blocked from even the illicit opportunity structure open to and dominated by the Italians and Sicilians. There would be no institutionalized black "Outfit." African American gangs would come and go like other youth gangs, but only within the black ghetto, whose walls, as we shall see, were maintained for decades by white racist violence. As historian Humberto Nelli pointed out, "the last of the large masses of 'white' ethnic groups, Italians, however, remained in power at the top of the crime syndicate because no new ethnic mass came along to force them out of their positions of leadership. Perhaps the logical successors, Negroes, have been prevented from exerting pressure in large part because of segregation and color" . . . and violence.<sup>34</sup>

### INTERREGNUM: WHITE SUPREMACIST TERRORISM IN THE 1940s AND 1950s

Historian Arnold Hirsch calls the period from the 1930s through the 1950s the era of Chicago's "hidden violence." What he describes is the constant enforcement of segregation through the threat and reality of mob violence and terrorism. White politicians, residents, realtors, and gangs attempted to contain growing and overcrowded black neighborhoods through bombing, mob violence, and the enforcement of the "peace" by City Hall and the police. The deep impression that white terrorist violence had on black Chicagoans is captured in Lorraine Hansberry's prize-winning play *Raisin in the Sun*. Early in the drama Walter Younger picks up the *Chicago Tribune* and comments, "Set off another bomb today."<sup>35</sup> The play revolves around the

Younger family's decision to move into a white neighborhood, despite implicit threats of violence by a white neighborhood association.<sup>36</sup>

Hirsch describes an entire era of mob violence by white gangs, encouraged by politicians and realtors and supported by the police, to keep black residents out of white areas. Hansberry makes fun of the deadly virulence when Beneatha Younger asks, "What they think we going to do—eat 'em?" Her daughter Ruth answers, "No, honey, marry 'em."<sup>37</sup> Racist fear ran strong, and white youth gangs assaulted any black person seen near the mostly Italian Cabrini Homes.<sup>38</sup>

Race riots and bombings, provoked by the arrival of roughly 60,000 African Americans during World War II, continued through the war and intensified after the war ended. From May 1944 through July 1946, forty-six homes of black residents were attacked, including twenty-nine arson-bombings. A mob of 2,000–5,000 white Cicero residents greeted a single black family trying to settle there in the summer of 1953. In Englewood, on Chicago's not-yet-black South Side, thousands of whites over several months in 1949 organized to harass black newcomers, as roving gangs of whites assaulted any black person in sight. White segregationist organizations appeared throughout Chicago, fighting the expansion of the ghetto "with fire and bomb."<sup>39</sup> Hostility from the largely Irish and white police force remained high.<sup>40</sup> Hirsch pointed out that, "battles over the use of schools, playgrounds, parks, and beaches became the dominant mode of interracial conflict in the 1950s."<sup>41</sup>

During those years black gangs fought each other, sold drugs, and amused themselves the same as those described by Frederic Thrasher decades earlier. As historian Timuel Black recalled,

We had gangs when I was growing up. There was the 31st Street Gang, the 43rd Street Gang, the 40 . . . 58th Street Gang, the 54th Street Gang. And I hung out with the 54th Street Gang. But what did we do? Played basketball, and baseball, and football. And we had a few hoodlums in the gang, the group. And so they began to do things that were unlawful. Snatching pocketbooks. Sticking helpless people up on the streets.<sup>42</sup>

But in another way, they were not just like other ethnic gangs. Chicago's black community existed within a segregated world, and violence from whites was always threatening. Black gangs fought one another, but the prime turf conflicts were on the borderlands next to the white "no-go zone." Racial violence broke out repeatedly between adolescent gangs, especially as the black population grew. "Ethnic succession" was a concept for European minorities only and black gangs faced a decades-long, violent struggle over turf and new generations of gangs spontaneously formed to carry on the fight.<sup>43</sup> Historians and social scientists agreed that the "numbers" and other criminal rackets were dominated by older men.<sup>44</sup> Youth gangs, therefore, had little opportunity to develop into vice networks. The Democratic machine, under the watchful eye of black Congressman William Dawson, worked

closely with the Policy Kings and policed the status quo. However, postwar migration continued and set the stage for the "explosion of black youth gangs" in the 1960s.<sup>45</sup>

## PROJECTS, POLITICS, AND POWER IN THE 1960s

The years of hidden violence exploded into the open in the 1960s. In one short decade the scaffolding would be erected for the persistence and institutionalization of Chicago's African American gangs.<sup>46</sup> A second wave of postwar black migration to Chicago meant that the slim "black belt" on the city's South Side would be inadequate to contain it. Lawndale, a formerly German and Jewish area, began to rent and sell to the new black migrants. As the black population increased, many white residents fled, while others became absentee landlords.<sup>47</sup>

At the same time, Chicago's industrial economy, which was going full blast in the Vietnam War arms build-up, was showing signs of underlying weakness. Chicago's overall marginal status to war industries foretold plant closures. High-priced union steel made in South Chicago and Gary was having trouble competing with lower priced foreign imports. Black unemployment remained high adding to the economic distress.<sup>48</sup>

Black gang members such as the Conservative Vice Lords' (CVL's) Bobby Gore tell of constant conflict between black and white gangs.<sup>49</sup> As an expanding black population literally fought its way into new territories, youth gangs began to form multi-neighborhood branches. The CVL under "Peplo" and "Chief Alfonso" consolidated its grip on the Westside.<sup>50</sup> The Blackstone Rangers united twenty-one South Side gangs under Jeff Fort and Gene Hairston, also known as "Chief Malik" and "Chief Bull."<sup>51</sup> The change from a single neighborhood gang to multi-neighborhood chapters was the first step in black gang institutionalization.

The continued black migration intensified an already acute housing shortage. While racial covenants were outlawed, boycotts of landlords who rented spaces to black residents, violence, and threats of violence limited African Americans' housing options. One solution was public housing, but the problem for political leaders was where to put it. The decision was made to use public housing to contain, concentrate, and continue to segregate Chicago's black population.<sup>52</sup> While Mayor Daley and the city politicians stopped the spread of public housing outside black neighborhoods, Chicago saw an "explosion" of black gangs. In the 1960s gang membership was estimated at more than 50,000 and gang leaders such as Jeff Fort, Bobby Gore, and David Barksdale became local icons.<sup>53</sup> While the gangs engaged in various types of illegal activities, they also were attracted to black nationalist and civil rights campaigns.<sup>54</sup>

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. met with the Vice Lords and other African American gang members when he moved into the Lawndale section in 1966 as he started his northern campaign. He called on the gang members to



practice nonviolence and join his movement. Several of the major gangs hesitantly responded, even forming a guard to protect Dr. King from attack in his march into a hostile white neighborhood in Marquette Park.<sup>55</sup> The Black Panther Party, led by its dynamic leader Fred Hampton, also met regularly with the leaders of the major street gangs, according to the Better Boys Clubs' Euseni Perkins, who sponsored some of the meetings. The specter of a gang-Panther alliance must have frightened law enforcement officials who utilized disruptive and surreptitious tactics in its Counterintelligence Program or COINTELPRO to try and provoke violence between the revolutionaries and gang members.<sup>56</sup> The three major gangs—"Lords, Stones, and Disciples" or "LSD"—formed a coalition to "take Chicago on a trip" and fight for jobs and civil rights. C. T. Vivian, Jesse Jackson, and other civil rights leaders worked with the gangs in their campaign for jobs in the construction industry, though the alliance was tenuous at best.<sup>57</sup>

Something indeed was happening on the streets of Chicago. The Vice Lords even made inroads into the police department, winning the support of Lawndale area Police Commander George Simms as well as Alderman George Collins and the local business community. Republican fund-raiser W. Clement Stone as well as the Field, Rockefeller, and Ford Foundations funded CVL businesses, youth groups, and clean-up programs.<sup>58</sup> The Black P. Stone Nation under Jeff Fort garnered widespread support among politicians and community groups on the South Side.<sup>59</sup>

Mayor Daley, former athletic club leader, had previously stressed working with wayward youth. But in 1969, he abruptly changed course, and with his hand-picked State Attorney Edward Hanrahan at his side, declared "war on gangs."<sup>60</sup> Police Commander George Simms was transferred and the police department consolidated behind an approach of "war." The opportunities for advancement into the political structure available to Daley and other Irish gang members of an earlier era would be denied African Americans.

John Fry, pastor of Chicago's First Presbyterian Church and an advisor to the Blackstone Rangers, argued that Daley's "war" was a retaliation against the Rangers' effective 1968 election boycott. In Lawndale, the 24th Ward Democratic organization had long been the single largest source of machine votes, but the 1968 elections saw a drastic fall-off in the Democratic margin of victory. The Rangers' boycott and black antipathy toward Daley, may have cost Hubert Humphrey Illinois' electoral votes and thus threw the national election to Nixon.<sup>61</sup> Daley must have been furious that he could not deliver Illinois, and with the election of Republican Richard Nixon, Daley lost patronage, federal aid, and power. Mike Royko, in his influential biography of Richard J. Daley, *Boss*, summed up the situation:

It wasn't surprising, then, that Hanrahan, after the 1968 elections, declared war on the young black street gangs and on the Black Panther Party. The black gangs frightened Daley, and it wasn't because they shot at each other, or because some of them committed murders in their membership drives and wars over territories. One of the gangs, the Black

P. Stone Nation, had grown to a loose-knit membership of several thousand and was beginning to show signs of political and economic awareness and the use of such power. Black politicians were currying its favor, and private social agencies were making efforts to channel it into legitimate business activities. Daley had seen the same thing happen before. He recalled Ragen's Colts, the Irish thieves who became the most potent political force in neighboring Canaryville, and his own Hamburgs, who got their start the same brawling way before turning to politics and eventually launching his career. There lay the danger of the black gangs.<sup>62</sup>

Black gangs in the 1960s, like the SACs of an earlier time, were involved with both rackets and politics, serving the community and running illegal enterprises, simultaneously helping youth and killing one another. Daley's 1969 war moved the gang leadership, as well as the revolutionary organizations, from the streets to the prisons. The left-wing groups such as the Panthers and Young Lords would be infiltrated by the police, and their members were imprisoned. In prison, however, Chicago's black gangs did not wither away—they grew stronger.

### PRISONS, DEINDUSTRIALIZATION, AND THE "NEW CONCEPT"

The large-scale incarceration of Chicago's black gang members in the 1970s was perhaps the most important factor in their institutionalization. As with institutionalized gangs in Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, and elsewhere, Chicago's gang leaders learned organization in prison from revolutionaries.<sup>63</sup> They were also strongly influenced by the Nation of Islam. James Jacobs's *Stateville* describes the impact of "mass society" or outside forces on the inmate organizations in prison. The gangs took over the old inmate organizations by guile and violence and became the strongest force within the prison. But significantly, and unlike past inmate groups, the gangs maintained their ties to the streets.<sup>64</sup>

In Chicago the slowdown in the economy that was hinted at in the 1960s was no longer a secret to anyone in the 1970s. Deindustrialization, which hit the Midwest full fury during that decade, began to erode the fabric of Chicago's black neighborhoods. Chicago's residents did not lack "collective efficacy" as much as they were overwhelmed by the irresistible tide of joblessness. The 1960s movements brought success to some black workers, moving them into the middle class, but conditions for those in the "underclass" continued to deteriorate and demoralization set in.<sup>65</sup> Between 1967 and 1982 a quarter of a million, or 46 percent of Chicago's manufacturing jobs, were lost.<sup>66</sup> Sociologist William Julius Wilson called the newly devastated neighborhoods the abode of the "truly disadvantaged."<sup>67</sup> The conditions in Chicago's poorest neighborhoods came to resemble impoverished Third World countries, and police harassment was ever-present.<sup>68</sup>

It was primarily the black working class that was most affected by the loss of manufacturing jobs. Pockets of white poverty and teenage gangs continued,

but these groups often formed as a reaction to black and Latino encroachment on their "turf" and some were openly racist.<sup>69</sup> Black gangs in the post-1960s "apocalypse" would be focused more on survival, a euphemism for the underground economy, than on teenage gang-banging.<sup>70</sup>

High-rise public housing, built in the 1960s, turned into towers of concentrated poverty and quickly became dominated by gangs.<sup>71</sup> With the exodus of black middle- and working-class residents and a declining economic base, African American neighborhoods such as Englewood and Lawndale became a base for economically inclined gangs.<sup>72</sup> The advent of cocaine as a moneymaker, replacing less lucrative and harder-to-hide marijuana, gave the gangs a stronger economic base. The gang became the new hiring hall for young men.

Larry Hoover, head of the Black Gangster Disciples (BGD), introduced his gangs to what he called the "new concept." Calling it "Black Growth and Development," he reorganized the BGD into a corporate-style business and social organization.<sup>73</sup> Chicago's African American gangs that had been founded in the 1950s, grew in the 1960s, were jailed in the 1970s, grew through drug trafficking in the 1980s, and fought deadly "crack wars" going into the 1990s. These gangs would become institutionalized on the streets since they had few channels to legitimate jobs and a lack of political power. They filled a void left by the decimation of Chicago's black social institutions and used the crack economy to strengthen and expand their operations.

## CONCLUSION

What is most notable in this revisionist narrative are the different trajectories of strikingly similar Irish, Italian, and African American gangs of various periods. While early 20th century Irish gang members would be integrated into the political structure and their organizations incorporated into the political machine, the black gangs of mid-century were met with repression and incarceration. While Irish and other white ethnic gang members moved from poor neighborhoods to outlying areas in the suburbs, black gang members were compelled to stay on their home turf. When that turf was high-rise public housing, the gang had even more reason to persist and prosper, rather than dissolve.

Like the Italians in the 1920s, who were also kept out of Democratic patronage, African Americans formed their own illicit opportunity system, finally replacing bootlegging and the numbers with drug trafficking. But unlike the Italians and Irish before them, who were both eventually co-opted into conventional politics and business, African American gangs in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s were never more than bands of juvenile delinquents that came and went as the members aged.<sup>74</sup>

After fighting racial battle after battle on their frontiers for more than forty years, the new black gangs of the 1950s set out on a different course. Segregation, poverty, increasing numbers, the politicization of the 1960s and

demoralization of the 1970s, prison, high-rise projects, de-industrialization, a hostile Irish Democratic machine, and the "crack economy" all were conditions that eventually led to the institutionalization of African American gangs as semi-permanent organizations of the street.

The Chicago School was surely right in rejecting the racist linkage of criminality to "essential" ethnic characteristics. But their "space trumps race" outlook blinded them to the importance of color in the shaping of Chicago's social and institutional history.<sup>75</sup> The history of gangs in Chicago is fundamentally a history of race, or more precisely racism, though also inextricably tied to class and space. As one young Gangster Disciple boldly put it, "It's the gang versus the racism."<sup>76</sup> For many young gang members, the contemporary gangs are not only an economic benefit, but a way to avoid being "dependent" on the social welfare system. Chicago's gangs are still struggling to make the underground economy work for them, but also, like Irish and Italian youth in the past, to maintain their racial and ethnic dignity.

The prime theoretical error of the Chicago School was that they did not consider race to be a true independent variable, but merely something "to be explained" away when researching social inequality or urban violence. Afraid of contributing to nativist and racist feelings, they denied, masked, and ignored the self-evident truths of W. E. B. Du Bois as well as the enduring power of racism.

Race continues to color all aspects of life in Chicago. As developers salivate over spaces near the Loop occupied by all-black public housing projects, Chicago's black population is being displaced and moved to the south and west.<sup>77</sup> The gangs are being uprooted as well, and they are clashing with gangs in their new neighborhoods.<sup>78</sup> Unlike New York and other U.S. cities in the 1990s, Chicago's homicide rate was slow to decline and its African American gangs showed no signs of going away. It's race, not space, that best explains the reality of institutionalized gangs in Chicago.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Park, introduction to Frederic Thrasher, *The Gang: A Study of 1313 Gangs in Chicago* (Chicago, 1927), xi.

<sup>2</sup>See for example Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London, 1989); and Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *New York, Chicago, Los Angeles: America's Global Cities* (Minneapolis, MN 1999).

<sup>3</sup>Jesse Bernard, *The Sociology of Community* (Glenview, IL, 1970); Robert E. Park, "Human Ecology" in *Robert E. Park on Social Control and Collective Behavior*, ed. Ralph H. Turner (Chicago, 1967), 69–84.

<sup>4</sup>Surprisingly, one of the prime examples that Park used to compare the invasion, competition, succession, and domination of groups was South Africa. In a classic essay on succession, Park describes in detail the replacement of Bushmen by Hottentots, then by Boers, and then the English. He concludes by arguing that "the land eventually goes to the race or people that can get the most out of it." What occurred in South Africa, Park claims, is "an inexorable historical process." Elsewhere, Park always the careful social scientist, argues that "it is not safe to predict the outcome of the Black social movement." Robert E. Park, "Human Ecology" in *ibid.*, 132.

- <sup>5</sup>Louis Wirth, *The Ghetto* (1928; reprinted Chicago, 1956).
- <sup>6</sup>Thomas Lee Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto: Neighborhood Deterioration and Middle-Class Reform: Chicago, 1880-1930* (New York, 1978), 142.
- <sup>7</sup>Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940-1960* (Cambridge, MA 1983).
- <sup>8</sup>W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1902; reprinted New York, 1989); see also David Sibley *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (New York, 1995).
- <sup>9</sup>Robert Park, *Race and Culture* (Chicago, 1940), 150.
- <sup>10</sup>Gunnar Myrdal, et al., *An American Dilemma: the Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York, 1944), 1050.
- <sup>11</sup>See, for example, Robert J. Sampson, "Urban Black Violence: The Effect of Male Joblessness and Family Disruption." *American Journal of Sociology* 93 (Sept. 1987): 348-82; and William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago, 1987).
- <sup>12</sup>Thrasher, *The Gang*, 74.
- <sup>13</sup>Edwin H. Sutherland, *Criminology* (Philadelphia, PA, 1924), 156.
- <sup>14</sup>William M. Tuttle Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (1970; reprinted Urbana, IL, 1996).
- <sup>15</sup>Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago* (Chicago, 1922).
- <sup>16</sup>Adam Cohen and Elizabeth Taylor, *American Pharaoh: Mayor Richard J. Daley. His Battle for Chicago and the Nation* (Boston, MA, 2000).
- <sup>17</sup>James T. Farrell. *Studs Lonigan* (1932; reprinted New York, 1978).
- <sup>18</sup>Tuttle, *Race Riot*.
- <sup>19</sup>Harry Haywood *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Chicago, 1978).
- <sup>20</sup>Chicago Commission on Race Relations, 11-12.
- <sup>21</sup>William Kornblum, *Blue Collar Community* (Chicago, 1974).
- <sup>22</sup>Anthony M. Platt, *The Politics of Riot Commissions, 1917-1970: A Collection of Official Reports and Critical Essays* (New York, 1971).
- <sup>23</sup>The current president of the Hamburg Club, which celebrated its centennial in 2004, is a Chicago Police Department administrator.
- <sup>24</sup>James M. O'Kane. *The Crooked Ladder: Gangsters, Ethnicity, and the American Dream* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1992).
- <sup>25</sup>John Landesco, *Organized Crime in Chicago* (1929; reprinted Chicago, 1968).
- <sup>26</sup>William J. Grimshaw, *Bitter Fruit: Black Politics and the Chicago Machine* (Chicago, 1992).
- <sup>27</sup>Gus Russo, *The Outfit: The Role of Chicago's Underworld in the Shaping of Modern America* (New York, 2001).
- <sup>28</sup>Humberto S. Nelli "Italians and Crime in Chicago: The Formative Years, 1890-1920" *American Journal of Sociology* 74 (January 1969): 373-91.
- <sup>29</sup>Walter Cade Reckless, *Vice in Chicago* (Chicago, 1933).
- <sup>30</sup>Drake, St. Clair and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (1945, reprinted New York, 1970); see also Nathan Thompson, *Kings: The True Story of Chicago's Policy Kings and Numbers Racketeers* (Chicago, 2003); Harold Gosnell, *Machine Politics, Chicago Style* (Chicago, 1937); Russo *The Outfit*, 2001; and Landesco, *Organized Crime in Chicago*, 1929.
- <sup>31</sup>Robert M. Lombardo, "The Black Mafia: African-American Organized Crime in Chicago, 1890-1960," *Crime, Law, and Social Change* 38 (July 2002): 33-65.
- <sup>32</sup>Thompson, *Kings*; see also Drake and Clayton's detailed treatment of the economics and politics of the policy racket in Chapter 17 of *Black Metropolis*.
- <sup>33</sup>Thompson, *Kings*, 251-54; Lombardo "The Black Mafia," 2002.
- <sup>34</sup>Nelli, "Italians and Crime in Chicago," 390.
- <sup>35</sup>Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (New York, NY 1958), 14.
- <sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 78-79.
- <sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>38</sup>Hirsch, *Second Ghetto*; Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890–1945* (New York, 2003).

<sup>39</sup>Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis* (Appendix 1961), liii.

<sup>40</sup>Karl E. Johnson, "Police-Black Community Relations in Postwar Philadelphia: Race and Criminalization in Urban Social Spaces, 1945–1960," *The Journal of African American History* 89 (Spring 2004): 118–133.

<sup>41</sup>Hirsch, *Second Ghetto*, 67; see also Tuggle, *Race Riot*.

<sup>42</sup>Timuel Black, "The History of African American Gangs in Chicago" Chicago Gang Research Project, <http://gangresearch.net/ChicagoGangs/gangs&ghetto/TimuelBlackx.html> (2000).

<sup>43</sup>Mexican gangs, after the deportations of the 1930s, would exemplify a classic pattern of ethnic succession. Puerto Ricans, on the other hand, would be pushed from one inner city neighborhood to another, pursued by developers and their yuppie clients. See Felix Padilla, *Latino Ethnic Consciousness: The Case of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago* (Notre Dame IN, 1985); and Felix Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago* (Notre Dame, IN 1987.) See also the interview with historian Mervin Mendez at: <http://gangresearch.net/ChicagoGangs/latinkings/lkhistory.html>.

<sup>44</sup>Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*; Thompson, *Kings*; Timuel Black, "The History of African American Gangs in Chicago"; and Euseni Perkins, "African American Gangs of the 1940s"; Chicago Gang Research Project <http://gangresearch.net/ChicagoGangs/gangs&ghetto/Perkins.htm> (2002).

<sup>45</sup>Euseni Eugene Perkins, *Explosion of Chicago's Black Street Gangs* (Chicago, 1987).

<sup>46</sup>To say that a gang has institutionalized is to say that it persists despite changes in leadership (e.g., killed, incarcerated, or "matured out"), has organization complex enough to sustain multiple roles of its members (including roles for women and children), can adapt to changing environments (e.g., police repression) without dissolving, fulfills some needs of its community (economics, security, services), and organizes a distinct outlook of its members (rituals and/or a written literature, sometimes called a gang "subculture").

<sup>47</sup>See the compilation of newspaper articles from the *Chicago Tribune*, *The American Millstone: An Examination of the Nation's Permanent Underclass* (Chicago, 1986).

<sup>48</sup>Lughod *New York, Chicago, Los Angeles*.

<sup>49</sup>Bobby Gore; "How the Vice Lords Started," Chicago Gang History Project. <http://gangresearch.net/ChicagoGangs/lawndale/gorexx.html> (2000). See also David Dawley, *A Nation of Lords: The Autobiography of the Vice Lords* (Prospect Heights, IL, 1992).

<sup>50</sup>David Dawley, *A Nation of Lords*.

<sup>51</sup>Lance Williams, "The History of the Blackstone Rangers," Chicago Gang History Project. <http://gangresearch.net/ChicagoGangs/blackstonerangers/lance.htm> (2001).

<sup>52</sup>Hirsch *Second Ghetto*; Cohen and Taylor, *American Pharaoh*.

<sup>53</sup>Williams, "The History of the Blackstone Rangers."

<sup>54</sup>Bobby Gore; "The Conservative Vice Lords of the 1960s," Chicago Gang History Project. <http://gangresearch.net/ChicagoGangs/lawndale/gorexx.html> (2000).

<sup>55</sup>Dawley, *A Nation of Lords*. Also see the detailed treatment of Dr. King and West Side gangs in Stephen B. Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York, 1982); and a more damning account of Mayor Daley's role in Cohen and Taylor, *American Pharaoh*.

<sup>56</sup>John R. Fry, *Locked-Out Americans: A Memoir* (New York, 1973); Perkins "African American Gangs in the 1940s"; See also Errol A. Henderson, "The Lumpenproletariat as Vanguard?: The Black Panther Party, Social Transformation, and Pearson's Analysis of Huey Newton" *Journal of Black Studies* 28 (November 1997): 171–99.

<sup>57</sup>Quote from Bobby Gore in <http://gangresearch.net/cv/historyvfinal/lsd.html>.

<sup>58</sup><http://gangresearch.net/cv/historyvfinal/VLTitlenew2.html>.

<sup>59</sup>Irving A. Spergel, et al., *Youth Manpower: What Happened in Woodlawn* (Chicago, 1969); Fry, *Locked-Out Americans*.

<sup>60</sup>Hanrahan's involvement in the war was important since the gangs had won over allies within the Chicago Police. Hanrahan had his own "gang squad" which he used in the infamous raid on the Black Panthers and killing of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark. See also undated document in the Chicago Historical Society: "War on Gangs."

<sup>61</sup>Interestingly, Fry reports that Fort was invited to Nixon's Inauguration.

<sup>62</sup>Mike Royko. *Boss. Richard J Daley of Chicago* (New York, 1971), 210.

<sup>63</sup>Luke Dowdney, *Children of the Drug Trade: A Case Study of Children in Organized Armed Violence in Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2003).

<sup>64</sup>James Jacobs, *Stateville: The Penitentiary in Mass Society* (Chicago, 1977).

<sup>65</sup>Wallerstein, has long argued that the failure of the social movements of the 1960s to transform the living conditions of those on the margins of society has led to demoralization and the withdrawal of legitimacy of the state. Immanuel Wallerstein, *After Liberalism* (New York, 1995). For "collective efficacy," see Robert J. Sampson, et al., "Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy," *Science* 277 (August 1997): 918-24.

<sup>66</sup>Abu Lughod *New York, Chicago, Los Angeles*.

<sup>67</sup>Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged*.

<sup>68</sup>Rates of poverty, violence, and other indicators of social exclusion resemble Third world cities like Rio de Janeiro, Cape Town, and Lagos more than they resemble lower-class European urban areas of poverty. John M. Hagedorn, "Youth in Organized Armed Violence in Chicago" in *Neither War Nor Peace: International Comparisons of Children and Youth in Organized Armed Violence*, ed. Luke Dowdney (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2005), 312-30.

<sup>69</sup>Michael Scott, *Lords of Lawndale: My Life in a Chicago White Street Gang* (Bloomington, IN, 2004).

<sup>70</sup>Abu Lughod *New York, Chicago, Los Angeles*.

<sup>71</sup>Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, *American Project: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Ghetto* (Cambridge, MA, 2000).

<sup>72</sup>Dawley, *A Nation of Lords*; Rod Emery, *The Blueprint: From Gangster Disciple to Growth and Development* (Elgin, IL, 1996); Sudhir A. Venkatesh and Steven D. Leavitt, "Are We a Family Or a Business? History and Disjuncture in the Urban American Street Gang," *Theory and Society* 29 (Fall 2000): 427-62.

<sup>73</sup>Rod Emery, *The Blueprint: From Gangster Disciple to Growth & Development* (Elgin, IL, 1996).

<sup>74</sup>Cohen and Taylor, *American Pharaoh*; Russo, *The Outfit*; Carl Taylor, *Dangerous Society* (East Lansing, MI, 1989).

<sup>75</sup>John M. Hagedorn, "Gangs, Institutions, Race, and Space: The Chicago School Reconsidered" in *Gangs in the Global City: Reconsidering Criminology*, ed. John M. Hagedorn (forthcoming).

<sup>76</sup>Interview # 103. Chicago Gang History Project.

<sup>77</sup>Venkatesh *American Project*.

<sup>78</sup>Hagedorn, "Gangs, Institutions, Race, and Space."

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