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The Double-Bind of 90s Black Youth:
Systemic Divestment in Chicago and Popular Perceptions of Black Youth

By

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In honor of all of those who have jumped headfirst into the River of No Return, thank you for paving the way for my generation.

Until we're all free

Abstract

The *Moynihan Report* (1965), *A Nation at Risk* (1983), and *The Bell Curve* (1994) are three nationally acclaimed texts – two federal reports and one academic book – that speak to the achievement gap between Black and white students between the 1970s and the 1990s. Placed in conversation together, these three texts demonstrate how, at least at the national level, Black family life was coded as being dysfunctional and at odds with mainstream American life.

This thesis seeks to recast the 70s-90s not from a top-down approach, but from an inside out approach, one that places the voices, concerns, and agency of Black communities at the center of this study. How did Black Americans resist, confront, and/or conform to the dominant narratives being portrayed about their culture? The existing literature tends to focus on how communities organize in a moment of crisis - school closures, immigration raids - but less focus is given to the gradual and ongoing process of organizing that happens over the course of decades on the part of local activists and everyday people who are fighting for better futures for themselves and their children.

This thesis seeks to accomplish three main goals: first, to demonstrate the systemic nature through which Chicago has been divested from, and its subsequent effects on the quality of education afforded its youth; secondly, to highlight the role of the media in sensationalizing stereotypical depictions of Black youth as criminal within the popular narratives/discourse - with particular focus on Black boys being delinquent or violent and Black girls being hypersexualized; and, thirdly, to emphasize the ongoing, gradual, and painstaking efforts that the Black community in Chicago took to organize - over decades - to confront the deteriorating city and worsening school conditions for their youth.

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Introduction

In 1987, then Secretary of Education William Bennett proclaimed Chicago's public schools to be the "worst in the nation."[1] With majority-minority (mostly low-income Black and Latine) students in Chicago Public Schools (CPS), a decreasing budget, increasing demands by the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), and widespread systemic divestment from Chicago, most notably affecting housing and schools, it is no wonder that Bennett proclaimed that Chicago's schools were "the worst." Yet less than a decade later, American political scientist John J. Dilulio would coin the term "superpredator" to denote what he believed would be increasing numbers of "hardened, remorseless juveniles" who, due to the "moral poverty" of "Black inner-city neighborhoods" were a "demographic crime bomb" that would wreak havoc nationwide.[2] How does the reality of deteriorating school conditions and the media's portrayal of increasing adolescent violence intersect at the K-12 educational experience for the 90s low-income Black youth of Chicago? What were the consequences behind these discursive ties between schooling, low-income adolescents, and racial politics?

Scholars of Chicago and of school inequality in the 90s placed more emphasis on the so-called dysfunctionality of Black family life, culture, individual behavior, and welfare policies rather than developing a structural understanding as to why and how many of these conditions exist in the first place.[3] The academic performance and day-to-day experiences of Black, low-income inner city kids in Chicago are juxtaposed against their white suburban counterparts, placing an unequal emphasis on individual student or school performance rather than

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[1] Chicago Tribune, "Chicago`s Schools Hit as Worst," Chicago Tribune, August 9, 2021, https://www.chicagotribune.com/1987/11/07/chicagos-schools-hit-as-worst/.
[2] John Dilulio, "The Coming of the Super - Predators," Washington Examiner - Political News and Conservative Analysis About Congress, the President, and the Federal Government, November 27, 1995.
[3] Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu, *To Be Popular or Smart - The Black Peer Group* (African American Images, 1997).

understanding how structural problems culminate in this critical decade.[4] Many mainstream analyses of educational inequality are rooted in dominant narratives of inherent dysfunctionality of the marginalized cultures they assess. Take, for instance, the 1965 *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (commonly known as the Moynihan Report), *A Nation At Risk* (1983), and *The Bell Curve* (1994). Each of these texts influence their decade's public discourse surrounding inequalities in education and the capacities of Black children to learn. These three texts are representative of dominant narratives that create a very distinct imagery of Black Americans as inherently dysfunctional - educational capacities of Black Americans - in general, that they are incapable of self-determination, require ongoing federal assistance, and are difficulty prone to learning (that is, that they are naturally *not* inclined for learning)

In discussing the crucial role that American family life and family values plays on the development of youth, the Moynihan Report concludes:

> But there is one truly great discontinuity in family structure in the United States at the present time: that between the white world in general and that of the Negro American.
>
> The white family has achieved a high degree of stability and is maintaining that stability.
>
> By contrast, the family structure of lower class Negroes is highly unstable, and in many urban centers is approaching complete breakdown.[5]

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[4] Gloria Ladson-Billings, "From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt: Understanding Achievement in U.S. Schools," *Educational Researcher* 35, no. 7 (October 2006): 3–12. Ladson-Billings explains that the "achievement gap" has become one of the most prevalent issues within U.S. education, but that those who use this framing fail to acknowledge the agency of marginalized students in the classroom because the "achievement gap" upholds notions of white supremacy and middle-class values to the detriment of the cultural capital that students already come to the classroom with. Instead, Ladson-Billings argues that a more accurate approach would be in the framing of "educational debt." Much like a national debt that continues to grow year after year if it is unable to stabilize its expenditures before the end of a fiscal year, Ladson-Billings argues that the educational-debt framework highlights structural inequalities that create difficult learning situations for students of color, and that these debts must be acknowledged in order to engage with root causes of the "achievement gap."

[5] U.S. Department of Labor, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, 1965).

The Moynihan Report argued that problems such as female-headed households, absent fathers, and single-parent households were increasing a "breakdown of the Negro Family" which "has led to a startling increase in Welfare Dependency," with the "situation…worsening."[6] This report sets the tone for the remainder of the 60s and arguably the 70s with regards to discourse on inequalities in education.

A Nation At Risk created a sense of urgency and emergency with regards to the performance of Americans in K-12 education, and in relation to their college readiness. Along the lines of upholding family values, the report chastised parents, explaining that they must "be a *living* example of what you expert your children to honor and emulate."[7]

Perhaps one of the most pervasive texts in terms of theories of the cultural deficiency model as a rationale for different academic outcomes between white and Black students is *The Bell Curve*. The reigning logic of this text explains that lower Black academic achievement is a result of cultural deficiencies that create negative behavior patterns and subpar learning conditions for Black youth

> Suppose that the nature of cultural bias does not lie in predictive validity or in the content of the items but in what might be called "test willingness." A typical black youngster, it is hypothesized, comes to such tests with a mindset different from the white subject's. He is less attuned to testing situations (from one point of view), or less inclined to put up with such nonsense (from another). Perhaps he just doesn't give a damn, since he has no hopes of going to college or otherwise benefitting from a good test score. Perhaps he figures that the test score is biased against him anyway, so what's the point. Perhaps he consciously refuses to put out his best effort because of peer pressure against "acting white" in some inner-city schools.[8]

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[6] U.S. Department of Labor, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, 1965).
[7] David P. Gardner and And Others, "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform. an Open Letter to the American People. A Report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education.," ERIC, March 31, 1983.
[8] Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 283.

The Bell Curve also cites a questionnaire cited in the book explains that some 45 percent scholars believe that IQ differences among Black and white students "is a product of both genetic and environmental variation," implying still a strong influence by those who believe in the heritability of intelligence as being a factor for unequal academic performance between white and Black students.[9]

Placed in conversation together, these three texts demonstrate how, at least at the national level, Black family life was coded as being dysfunctional and at odds with mainstream American life. More than anything, an attack on so-called "family values" became the scapegoat for the academic underperformance of Black youth, without any critical structural analysis as to how or why Black Americans were in lower socioeconomic statuses to begin with, as compared to white median household income. Instead, a closer reading of these three texts in conversation with one another demonstrates a critical anti-Black, anti-poverty approach that the government began to take on as it leaned into neoliberal policies that set market logics, personal accountability, and individual achievement as the foundation for analyzing individual behavior, rather than a systemic approach that takes into account the process of how current socioeconomic trends have grown out of.

This thesis seeks to recast the 70s-90s not from a top-down approach, but from an inside out approach, one that places the voices, concerns, and agency of Black communities at the center of this study. How did Black Americans resist, confront, and/or conform to the dominant narratives being portrayed about their culture? The existing literature tends to focus on how communities organize in a moment of crisis - school closures, immigration raids - but less focus

[9] Herrnstein Murray, *The Bell Curve*, 295.

is given to the gradual and ongoing process of organizing that happens over the course of decades on the part of local activists and everyday people who are fighting for better futures for themselves and their children.[10]

This thesis seeks to accomplish three main goals: first, to demonstrate the systemic nature through which Chicago has been divested from, and its subsequent effects on the quality of education afforded its youth, secondly, to highlight the role of the media in sensationalizing stereotypical depictions of Black youth as criminal within the popular narratives/discourse - with particular focus on Black boys being delinquent or violent and Black girls being hypersexualized, and thirdly, to emphasize the ongoing, gradual, and painstaking efforts that the Black community in Chicago took to organize - over decades - to confront the deteriorating city and worsening school conditions for their youth.

Definition of the Double-Bind

The double-bind explored in this thesis serves to highlight the impossibility of the situation in which Black youth of the 90s found themselves: there were systemic divestments across all sectors of the city landscape, creating deteriorating living conditions and under-

[10] The most recent and most robust academic work published on the topic of education reform in Chicago is the work of Elizabeth Todd-Breland, *A Political Education: Black Politics and Education Reform in Chicago since the 1960s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018). She painstakingly details community-based efforts to improve school conditions from the 60s into the present time but does not address the question of the city in deterioration, nor the effects of popular perceptions/dominant narratives (through media or the popular imagining) of Black youth as criminals or victims to their environment in detail. I seek to differentiate my work my highlighting this kind of triangulation between the city in deterioration, the criminalization of Black youth in media, and the deteriorating schools (and student outcomes). Todd-Breland instead highlights the community organizing that takes place during this time, and the many community partnerships that were formed as a result. I seek to combine an assessment of the deteriorating city, critiques of media depictions of Black youth, *and* the role of community organizing to achieve autonomy and agency within their own fights for reform as a sort of triangulation of resources to try and recreate the ambience of this time period, and to develop a more appreciative understanding of the decade's worth efforts of the organizing tradition in Chicago. Similarly, Eve Ewing's book *Ghosts in the Schoolyard* (2018) focuses primarily on the mobilization of the Black community with respect to the 2010s school closings but does not go into detail on the rich history of community organizing and activism that I argue sets the foundation for much of the activism seen in the 2010s.

resourced neighborhoods that ultimately translated to dilapidated school buildings and chronic underperformance.[11] However, this structural analysis of the problems facing youth in the urban centers was not the dominant narrative being promoted at a national level, as evidenced with reports like the *Moynihan Report* and *A Nation At Risk*. Rather, the implementation of carceral logics was employed both in and out of schools, functioning to place blame on the supposed inherent delinquency and criminality of Black youth, and the alleged dysfunctionality of Black culture.[12] By evoking scripts heavily based on the bastardized notions of the culture of poverty and cultural deficiency models, Black youth were either blamed and criminalized for the systemic failures facing them in the 90s or rendered as static victims of their circumstances.

Methodology

I worked almost exclusively in the Timuel D. Black Archives located in the Vivian G. Harsh Collection at the Carter G. Woodson Library in Chicago. Tim Black (1918-2021) was a

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[11] *Chicago Schools: "Worst in America": An Examination of the Public Schools That Fail Chicago* (Chicago, Ill: Chicago Tribune, 1988), 133-135.

[12] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2008) 2-42. In critiquing right-wing and neoliberal "ghetto scholars" (scholars of the Black urban poor) Kelley writes, "If racism is essentially a thing of the past, as conservatives and many neoliberals now argue, then the failure of the black poor to lift themselves out of poverty has to be found in their behavior or their culture." Kelley provides a counter to this framework, explaining the nuances within even "Black ghetto culture" in which he explains that there are many factors that converge to create the environment in inner-cities that are structural in nature. Black people's culture is neither predicated on nor subject to the environment. According to long-time public school teacher, Barabara A. Sizemore, culture adapts to allow for the best chance of survival within any given circumstance and is relevant to the survival of the group, Barbara Sizemore, "Dr. Barbara Sizemore: 'Black People Still Don't Get It' - A Powerful Talk on Awareness and Identity," YouTube, January 6, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3Gbidz3OcE&t=8s.
Carla Shedd, *Unequal City: Race, Schools, and Perceptions of Injustice* (New York: New York University Press, 2015) for "carceral apparatus/carceral state:" which describes "race, place, education, and the expansion of the carceral state" in such a way that it affect adolescents' "socialization to the justice system and the activation of their various identities" in their relations to the carceral apparatus - of which Shedd argues schools are a part of (p. 4); and Jonathon Simon, "California's New Carceral Logic: Health Care, Confinement, and the Future of Imprisonment." *Boom: A Journal of California* 6, no. 2 (2016): 22–31 for "carceral logic:" it is "an inability to imagine prisoners and prisons beyond the logic of total incapacitation" (p. 29).
(what I am calling carceral logics, implying that there is a logical process through which individuals and institutions make decisions that relate to the criminalization of Black Americans)

Chicago-based historian who documented ongoing shifts in education, civil rights, feminist rights, human rights, city politics, and grassroots organizing. He served on the CPS school board in the late 80s and early 90s; and when he retired, he moved on to collect oral histories of Black Chicago - particularly from the Black Belt at large, and especially of Bronzeville. He was a scholar-activist, and throughout his career he was engaged in many organizations - (most of whom are grassroots based) - as a personal historical example of melding theory and practice. His political activism helped to get Harold Washington, Chicago's first Black mayor, elected, and he also proved to be a key mentor on Barack Obama's first and second presidencies. To say that Black has served in many leadership positions throughout his life is an understatement - his papers reflect his engagement with more than 1,400 different groups and organizations between 1930 and 2009, reflecting a life dedicated to civil rights, grassroots organizing, labor organizing, Black history, and educational reform, which afforded him both personal and professional connections to his activism and his research.[13] In the 90s, Black began to document oral histories of Chicago, entitled *Bridges of Memory*, which is the central piece to my section on the 90s. In this project, Black originally sought to document the stories of Black Chicagoans and the role they've played in the development of Chicago's history. Within this, Black embarked on an additional oral history project: the DuSable Oral History Project, in which he documented the experiences, careers, and lives of current and graduated DuSable High School students he had come in contact with.[14] In the 90s, DuSable High School had faced tremendous challenges, from a nearly 60% dropout rate to the physical deterioration of the school, to increasing violence in the community it served.[15] As a graduate of DuSable High School, Black sought to highlight the

[13] "Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers," Chicago Public Library.
[14] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 10, Folder 32]
[15] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 162, Folder 1]

importance of this high school, not only for the preservation of Black history in Chicago, but also in the capacity of schools to enact positive change on the lives of the community it serves.[16]

In order to develop an analysis of popular perceptions of Black youth, I used media portrayals of Black communities and Black youth, relying heavily on articles published in the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Chicago Reporter*, and the *Chicago Defender*, as well as using some articles from the *New York Times* and other newspapers, as a way of better understanding media depictions and public sentiment towards the socioeconomic and political dynamics of inner-cities. Most of my media analysis is geared around the late 80s and 90s with the advent of the "wolf-pack" and "superpredator" typologies from newspapers; however, I also used these articles to further develop the argument surrounding the systemic divestment of the city and its many afterlives. I also analyze several of the federal and state laws, policies, and reports that have been passed during these three decades, analyzing them for their impact specific to the Black youth experience and for its repercussions in Black communities.

In reading these materials, I primarily looked for key words like "education," "crime," "development," "schools," and "community," which I acknowledge might have created bias in the kinds of materials I employ in this thesis. To highlight the double-bind, I read the Tim Black papers as the "inside" voice of the Black community in direct confrontation with newspaper articles citing violence, crime, or delinquency in Chicago. At times, the archive also has newspaper articles that speak to these debilitating conditions, but it is frequently contextualized by the Black community's resistance to such positioning. Additionally, given the focus of this project, a narrowing of key words was necessary to direct me to the relevant materials, given the scope of the Tim Black papers, as well as the scope of newspaper reporting over the course of

[16] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 25]

three decades. Additionally, I employ a running motif within this thesis: the 70s "sets the stage," the 80s "provides the script," and the 90s is "showtime" influenced by Lewis Mumford's framing of the city as a drama. In this way, Chicago becomes reconceptualized away from the dominant narrative that positions Black communities as either victims to their environments or inherently delinquent.[17] Instead, through Mumford's framework, I argue that Black communities actively co-create their environment in such a way that restores agency to their actions and resistance.

As expansive as the Tim Black papers are, a notable silence in this archive is the absence of youth voices. Although Black taught in high school for many years, and then continued at the collegiate level, the majority of his papers revolve around formal organizations and institutions, with several grassroots efforts on the part of adult community members to improve the conditions of Chicago and its schools. Perhaps it speaks to a wider intergenerational breakdown along lines of communication - although Black fought to eradicate this as much as possible through his research and his activism. Perhaps it is to protect the privacy of youth during this time - Black does have the homework assignments of many of his college-aged students. Perhaps it is because Tim gave so much of his personal time to students directly, that there was no need or no time to document it all. Perhaps, it could be because he was teaching in the colleges and not the high schools at the point in time in which he began his *Bridges of Memory* project.

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[17] Lewis T. Mumford and Frederic Stout, "What Is a City," essay, in *The City Reader Richard T. Legates Edit.; Frederic Stout Edit.* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2007). Questions of city politics, who belongs in the city, who does the city serve/benefit, and why/how a city makes decisions (assuming again from Mumford that the city can operate as its own independent actor, as well as its residents), and racialized concepts of place, belonging, and city politics, I also refer to the works of David Harvey "The Right to the City" (2008), Robert Park, E. Burgess, and R. McKenzie, *The City* (1925), Massey and Denton, *American Apartheid* (1993), Dennis Judd "Symbolic Politics and Urban Politics: Why African Americans Got So Little from the Democrats" in *Without Justice for All* (1999), Adolph Reed, *Without Justice for All* (1999) Ruth Wilson Gilmore "Forgotten places and the seeds of grassroots planning (2008), David Imbroscio "The Color of Law," (2020) and Michael Javen Fortner "Racial Capitalism and City Politics" (2023).

Despite these silences (a comparative silence when juxtaposed against the plethora of materials Black maintained related to formal organizations and adult-lead initiatives) Black's papers *do* manage to highlight *some* efforts on the part of younger students to confront the society in which they lived as noted with his brief mentions of Street Level and some student activism against segregated schools in Chicago from the 70s. In total, the Black papers are a rich repository, representative of an ongoing struggle for Chicago's schools to serve the needs of its surrounding communities.

Outline

The 70s "sets the stage," the 80s "provides the script," and the 90s is "showtime." In studying the city, some schools of thought believe that those who live in abject poverty are there because of individual decisions or cultural deficiencies that prevent them from achieving social mobility. Mumford's framework of the city as a drama helps combat this positioning by giving agency to the city and all of its internal and external actors. My intention in this thesis is to engage critically from the inside-out with materials that speak to the Black experience in Chicago during this time. Through this, I argue that - the deteriorating city conditions in Chicago is not inherent to some kind of dysfunctionality within Black culture that creates communities that are prone to allow their neighborhoods to fall into disarray; rather, the city-as-a-drama metaphor serves to remind my readers that the Chicago has been constructed, through policies, economics, and public narratives, to depict inner-city Black youth in negative light, which reinforces decades of dehumanizing rhetoric surrounding Black subaltern beings.[18] I also seek to

[18] Nuamah, *Closed for Democracy* and Ewing, *Original Sins: How Mass School Closure Undermines the Citizenship of Black Americans* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2023) and Eve L. Ewing, *Original Sins: The (Mis)Education of Black and Native Children and the Construction of American Racism* (New York, NY: One World, 2025) for concepts on the subaltern Black body in relationship to schools, political education surrounding school participation on the part of parents and community members, and for how Black

highlight the agency of the Black community to resist such actors. Each section will explain the systemic divestment characteristic of the decade, as well as showcasing developments in media portrayals and shifting public perceptions of Black youth and inner-city Black communities. I end the thesis by exhuming community efforts to resist the framing that has been imposed upon them by outside voices by highlighting the many ways in which Black Chicagoans engaged in meaning making, political education, and grassroots organizing as a means of asserting their agency onto their lives.

Setting the Stage: the 70s and Systemic Divestment

A critical, systemic analysis of the urban crisis that unfolded in the 90s with Chicago schools being proclaimed the "worst in the nation" and with the supposed waves of "superpredators" taking over Black-majority inner cities must begin with a detailed analysis of the policies and social welfare programs of the 70s. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor describes these policies and programs functioned as "predatory inclusion."[19] Instead of functioning to reduce the social disparities that many low-income Black families faced, these policies ultimately set the foundation for public-private partnerships - often at the expense of low-income Black families.[20] While the previous decade had seen the height of civil rights organizing and Black migration into Chicago, the 1970s were characterized by a profound withdrawal of state support, the erosion of

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people are traditionally rationalized and racialized by the predominantly white groups in charge of education in Black communities. For further study of the Black subaltern and its relationship to Indigenous peoples, see also Tiffany Lethabo King *The Black Shoals* (2019), particularly her formulations on "conquistador-settler," "ritual," and "humanism" (p. x-xv).

[19] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 5. "Predatory inclusion describes how African American homebuyers were granted access to conventional real estate practices and mortgage funding, but on more expansive and comparatively unequal terms."

[20] Taylor, *Race for Profit*, 6 and 56 on discussions of the "public-private" partnerships that became characteristic of neoliberal political logic, especially with regards to social welfare policies revolving around the poor and working class.

public institutions, and the increase of racial and economic segregation. Here, I argue that the 70s is the pivotal period where systemic divestment, a rise of neoliberal practices, policies, and rhetoric, and dehumanizing media narratives of inner-city Black communities begin to take full swing. The gains of the Civil Rights were greatly undermined by the institutionalization of neoliberal values and policies that prioritized race-neutral and codified language to address public policy; the 70s demonstrates this neoliberal turn at the national and local levels which undermine the gains of the Civil Rights Era and lay the foundation for the deteriorating city.[21]

While the Civil Rights Era saw many legislative gains with the passage of landmark victories such as *Brown v. Board* (1954) and the Voting Rights Act (1965), white resistance to integration became increasingly insidious.[22] In the North, this maintained its form through restrictive neighborhood covenants, blockbusting, and the strategic use of real estate markets to maintain racial segregation in communities and schools. In Chicago, the city's deeply entrenched discriminatory housing practices confined low-income Black families to increasingly overcrowded and under-resourced neighborhoods.[23] Chicago Public Schools remained segregated despite legislative victories as a result of pre-existing policies, practices, and

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[21] Taylor, *Race for Profit*, 232. Contrary to popular belief that often frames neoliberalism as "only privatization," Taylor argues that it "is a political, social, and economic rejection of the social welfare state and the social contract more generally."

[22] For the rich histories on grassroots organizing during the traditional Civil Rights Era (1954-1968), particularly by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003) on grassroots organizing and political shifts; Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) for organizing traditions; Kwame Ture and Michael Thelwell, *Ready for the Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael* (New York: Scribner, 2006) on Black Power and political resistance; Faith Holsaert, *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Cleveland Sellers, *The River of No Return: The Autobiography of a Black Militant and the Life and Death of SNCC* (New York; HarperCollins, 1973). For documentation on Chicago's persistent segregation and housing discrimination, see also Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) and Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[23] James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 92-101 explains his personal experiences living in Chicago and dealing with Northern racism.

socioeconomic constraints imposed upon an increasingly impoverished Black working class and poor.[24] The illusion of the "post-racial" society espoused by many in the post-Civil Rights Era became increasingly obvious for fallacies: the experiences of Black Americans and systemic constraints on Black social mobility and social cohesion within mainstream American culture and practices had still not been rectified. A *New York Times* article, "Integration Has Failed," covered the growing racial tensions in Chicago:

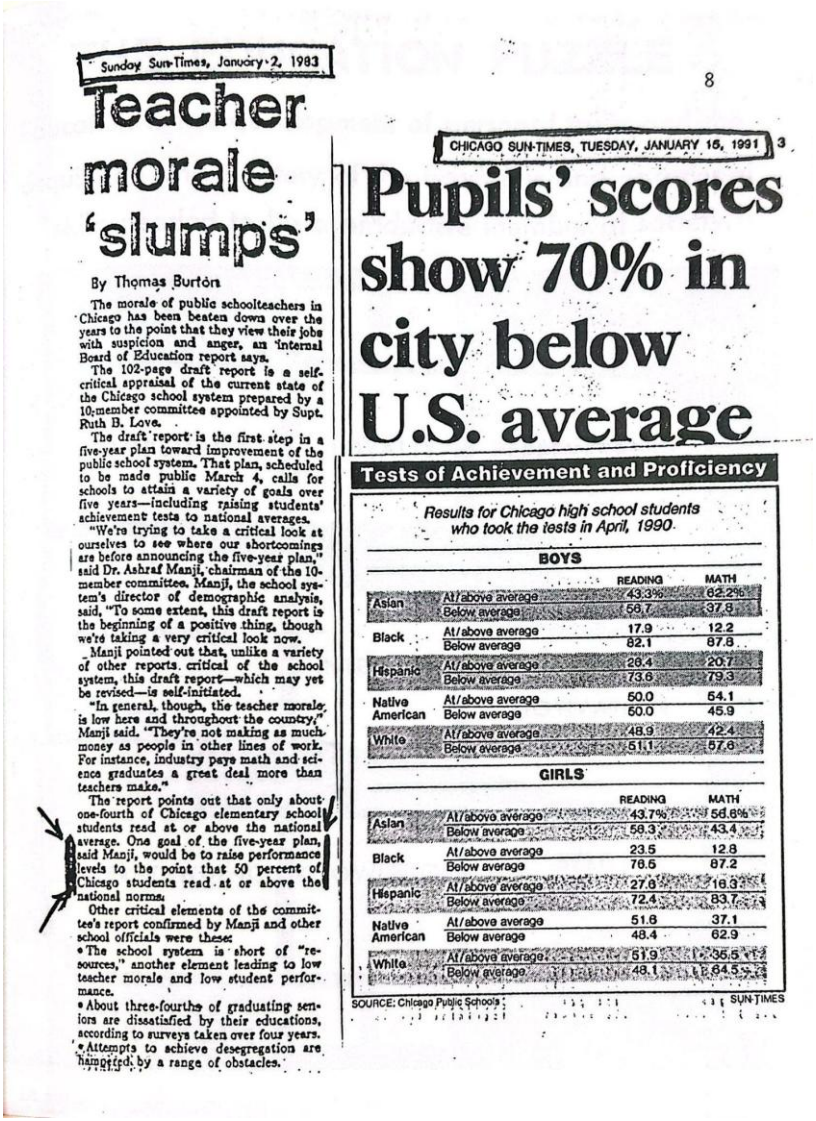
> …according to the city's figures, 42.8 percent of the 151, 290 white students attend schools in which 90 to 100 percent of the students are white, while 86 percent of the 310,880 black students attend schools that are 90 to 100 percent black. There is no court-ordered busing, and that Chicago has thus far avoided the racial clashes that big Northern cities such as Boston have experienced.[25]

Dubbed, "the most racially segregated Northern city in the United States," Chicago's glacial pace towards integration was the most evident in its public schools. By the end of the 70s, "more than 100,000 students left the schools" in mounting efforts of "white students flee[ing] schools in desegregation delay."[26] In a 1979 article, the *Reporter* explained that not only was desegregation becoming an increasingly "impossible" task, but that

> School budget deficits are a phenomenon of the 1970s. The last balanced budget was in 1969. With the exception of 1973, when the operating budget dropped slightly, it has gone up every year, to a whopping $1.3 billion for the current school year, up 132 percent over 1970s's budget.[27]

[24] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 137, Folder 12] A 1975 poster of the Student Coalition Against Racism in which they are hosting a conference against racism, with a focus on bussing and school desegregation, demonstrating that even some 20 years after *Brown v. Board*, the issue of school segregation in Chicago was still very prevalent.
[25] Integration has failed - The New York Times, accessed July 24, 2025.
[26] Sharon Gelder, "White Students Flee Schools in Decade of Desegregation Delay," | the Chicago reporter archives..
[27] Gelder, "White Students Flee Schools."

Although it appears as though Chicago public schools gain more resources over the course of the 70s, by the 80s, many school buildings are in disarray and the conditions in which students are expected to learn and teachers are expected to teach are insurmountable:



Sunday Sun-Times, January 2, 1983

Teacher morale 'slumps'

By Thomas Burton

The morale of public schoolteachers in Chicago has been beaten down over the years to the point that they view their jobs with suspicion and anger, an internal Board of Education report says.

The 102-page draft report is a self-critical appraisal of the current state of the Chicago school system prepared by a 10-member committee appointed by Supt. Ruth B. Love.

The draft report is the first step in a five-year plan toward improvement of the public school system. That plan, scheduled to be made public March 4, calls for schools to attain a variety of goals over five years—including raising students' achievement tests to national averages.

"We're trying to take a critical look at ourselves to see where our shortcomings are before announcing the five-year plan," said Dr. Ashraf Manji, chairman of the 10-member committee. Manji, the school system's director of demographic analysis, said, "To some extent, this draft report is the beginning of a positive thing, though we're taking a very critical look now.

Manji pointed out that, unlike a variety of other reports critical of the school system, this draft report—which may yet be revised—is self-initiated.

"In general, though, the teacher morale is low here and throughout the country," Manji said. "They're not making as much money as people in other lines of work. For instance, industry pays math and science graduates a great deal more than teachers make."

The report points out that only about one-fourth of Chicago elementary school students read at or above the national average. One goal of the five-year plan, said Manji, would be to raise performance levels to the point that 50 percent of Chicago students read at or above the national norms.

Other critical elements of the committee's report confirmed by Manji and other school officials were these:

- The school system is short of "resources," another element leading to low teacher morale and low student performance.
- About three-fourths of graduating seniors are dissatisfied by their educations, according to surveys taken over four years.
- Attempts to achieve desegregation are hampered by a range of obstacles.

8

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES, TUESDAY, JANUARY 15, 1991 3

Pupils' scores show 70% in city below U.S. average

Tests of Achievement and Proficiency

Results for Chicago high school students who took the tests in April, 1990.

BOYS

		READING	MATH
Asian	At/above average	43.3%	62.2%
	Below average	56.7	37.8
Black	At/above average	17.9	12.2
	Below average	82.1	87.8
Hispanic	At/above average	26.4	20.7
	Below average	73.6	79.3
Native American	At/above average	50.0	54.1
	Below average	50.0	45.9
White	At/above average	48.9	42.4
	Below average	51.1	57.6

GIRLS

		READING	MATH
Asian	At/above average	43.7%	56.6%
	Below average	56.3	43.4
Black	At/above average	23.5	12.8
	Below average	76.5	87.2
Hispanic	At/above average	27.6	16.3
	Below average	72.4	83.7
Native American	At/above average	51.6	37.1
	Below average	48.4	62.9
White	At/above average	51.9	35.5
	Below average	48.1	64.5

SOURCE: Chicago Public Schools SUN-TIMES

[Figure 1, Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers Box 28, Folder 7]

In short, this increased budget does not imply well-spent dollars on improving student experience; rather, it implies fiscal mismanagement and instability within CPS that comes to a head in the 80s and 90s. In the meantime, "top-level deputy or associate superintendents at salaries of $70,000 to $80,000" while budgets like the one at Carter Elementary are "slashed to

$578.71 from $3,000 to help pay for teacher raises."[28] The economic vacuum created by the exodus of the white community, coupled with the intentional distancing of the government from social welfare programs created a CPS system that "live[s] in poverty."[29] Residents and their children are left to deal with a "three-tiered system of wildly inconsistent quality" that is inherently "separate and unequal" but because it is masked behind the race-neutral language of "school choice," there is little accountability community members can impose onto the local or federal government.[30]

The withdrawal of whites from public institutions and shared spaces through increasing calls for individualism, racial neutrality, and local control functioned to reify their pre-existing racial privilege.[31] A larger by-product of this retrenchment is the pivot from the ideologies of the Great Society, in which responsibility for marginalized citizenry and the common good was placed onto the government, towards neoliberal logics, in which increasing variations of public-private partnerships obtained responsibility (and profits) for tackling the various problems facing the society, such as housing and education.[32] These growing sentiments in the public psyche that sought to rebrand the deteriorating conditions of the city as resultants of some kind of tendencies within Black culture that are deemed inherently dysfunctional created a visceral reaction in the public's eye against the demands of low-income Black families. This visceral reaction was an entrenchment of long-standing beliefs in Black inferiority, and a reification of Black dehumanization, such that the conditions of the city were seen as by-products of inherent

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[28] *Chicago Schools: "Worst in America,"* 94-95.
[29] *Chicago Schools: "Worst in America,"*110.
[30]*Chicago Schools: "Worst in America,"* 133.
[31] Elaine Tyler May, *Fortress America: How We Embraced Fear and Abandoned Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 2017) on racial privilege being reified through spatial separation from predominantly Black neighborhoods; also, on public perceptions of crime and safety, especially as it relates to housing.
[32] Taylor, *Race for Profit*, 116-120.

dysfunctionality in Black culture, rather than as a conditioning of systemic divestment from the city.[33]

Fade of the Great Society and the Rise of Market Logics

Many of the programs of The Great Society faced increasing levels of scrutiny and political backlash. Inflation rose and trust in the government eroded. Neoliberalism, with its emphasis on personal responsibility and market-based solutions, emerged as the new dominant ideology. As a result, the deterioration of the city centers in majority Black cities was seen as an inherent result of failures of Black individuals to "work hard" rather than understood through a systemic framing. Poverty was decreasingly viewed as a structural issue, but more so as a personal failure, which only increased with the growing racialized media narratives depicting single-female heads of house as "welfare queens."[34] In a news article compiled by the League of Black Women circa 1970s, it was reported that "Half of Black children [were] born to unmarried woman," explaining that "the number of unmarried Black women" "soared by 38 percent as divorces surged," and that "in addition, fewer single teen-agers who become pregnant now are getting married before the child is born."[35]

[33] For works that contest this framing, see Eloise Dunlap, Andrew Golub, and Bruce D. Johnson, "The Severely-Distressed African American Family, in the Crack Era: Empowerment Is Not Enough," *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 33, no. 1 (2006): 115–139 and William J. Wilson, *When Work Disappears* (1996), and Eve Ewing *Ghosts in the Schoolyard* (2018).
[34] Taylor, *Race for Profit*, 178-180.
[35] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 115, Folder 19]

Half Of Black Children Born To Unmarried Women

By Otto McClarrin

More than half the black children born in the United States during 1976 were born to unmarried women, according te a recent report by the National Center for Health Statistics.

It was the first year, officials said, that Black births out of wedlock exceeded 50 percent of all Black births, although the number has been rising steadily for more than a decade. Just 14 years ago, 26 percent of all Black children were born out of wedlock.

This recent statistic is the latest indicator suggesting significant changes the structure of Black families, and researchers in the field are more certain of the importance of the changes than the reasons for them.

"The real changes that are taking place during the 1970s are just enormous," said Kristin Moore, a researcher at Urban Institute. "The changes are so rapid that they 've caught us all out. No one can say definitely why its happening."

Today, 40 percent of all Black children live in families headed by women compared with about 12 percent of white children. Some six years ago, the figure for Blacks was 30 percent.

Almost one-third of all Black children now receive benefits from Aid to Families with Dependent Children, the $11 billion-a-year federal welfare program for broken families.

The recent report says that 258,000 children were born to unmarried Black women in 1976, about 9,200 more than in 1975, and accounted for 50.3 percent of all Black births.

Out-of-wedlock births among whites have risen, the report said, to 197,100 or 7.7 percent of all white births in 1976. The proportion of white births that were out of wedlock was four percent in 1965.

The birthrate for unmarried Black women age 15-44 (the years of female fertility, according to health statisticians) dropped by 13 percent between 1970-1976. However, the number of unmarried Black women in that age group sorred by 38 percent as divorces surged, the average age at marriage rose, and the children of the 1950s baby boom reached maturity.

According to the recent report, married Black women in the United States now have a slightly lower birthrate than married whites for the first time since such statistics have been compiled.

Among unmarried women, however, differences between the races are still wide. In 1976 there were 83.2 births per 1,000 unmarried Black women, compared with 12.7 births per 1,000 unmarried whites.

Teen-age mothers accounted for about half of all out-of-wedlock children born to both Blacks and whites in 1976, and they are the only age group for whom the rate of out-of-wedlock births has increased.

In addition, fewer single teen-agers who become pregnant now are getting married before the child is born, said Arthur A. Campbell, deputy director of the Center for Population Research at the National Institutes of Health. It is still more prevalent for pregnant white teenagers to marry before the child is born than for Blacks.

From 1970 to 1972 - the first years when legal abortions were widely available - white out-of-wedlock births did fall by about 9 percent. But they have increased every year since then. Among Blacks out-of-wedlock births have risen every year since 1965.

"Love that's wise will not say all it means."

Guayule, a dusty-looking shrub, contains the same latex as rubber trees and can be used to make rubber.

[Figure 2, Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers Box 115, Folder 19]

The implied promiscuity of young Black girls and the supposed dysfunctionality of Black women reflect broader societal perceptions of failure within Black communities, particularly in relation to childbearing and rearing practices. As the overt racist rhetoric of earlier decades became less publicly acceptable, codified language - such as references to “broken homes,” “welfare dependency,” and “cultural pathology” - emerged as a sanitized substitute.[36] This shift allowed policymakers to reframe structural inequities as cultural deficiencies, thereby justifying the dismantling of Great Society programs. In this narrative, persistent poverty and educational underachievement were no longer seen as products of systemic exclusion, but as evidence of an allegedly inherent dysfunctionality within Black families.

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Deindustrialization and the Disappearance of Work

The 1970s also saw the beginnings of widespread deindustrialization in the United States. In cities like Chicago, which had long served as manufacturing hubs, this resulted in the closure of steel plants, auto factories, and union jobs, jobs that had once provided a path to economic stability for working-class families. Black workers - many of whom had migrated from the South during the second wave of the Great Migration in search of industrial work were among the first to be let go. Entire communities lost access to stable employment, and in its place arose an informal economy: low-wage work, day labor, and eventually, the underground economy of selling drugs.[37] For Black Chicagoans, their economic core totally collapsed due to deindustrialization and the disappearance of work.[38] Between 1970 and 1980, the city lost 11% of its jobs, resulting in a catastrophic surplus of labor - predominantly from a Black-majority labor force.[39] Thanks to automation, factories either closed or moved to the Global South. Other jobs and businesses alike transitioned to the suburbs, exacerbating the dismal work conditions for Black people in the city. Public transportation failed to reliably connect inner-city workers to these outsourced suburban jobs, resulting in decreased opportunity for social mobility, as low-wage jobs became the dominant form of work for inner-city laborers.[40] The surplus of labor produced by these structural shifts created new pressures for Black youth to navigate as they dealt with the city in decline, the decrease in jobs, and the deteriorating school conditions.

Perhaps, nowhere was this collapse more visible than in the public school system. CPS schools in Black neighborhoods were routinely overcrowded, underfunded, and deeply

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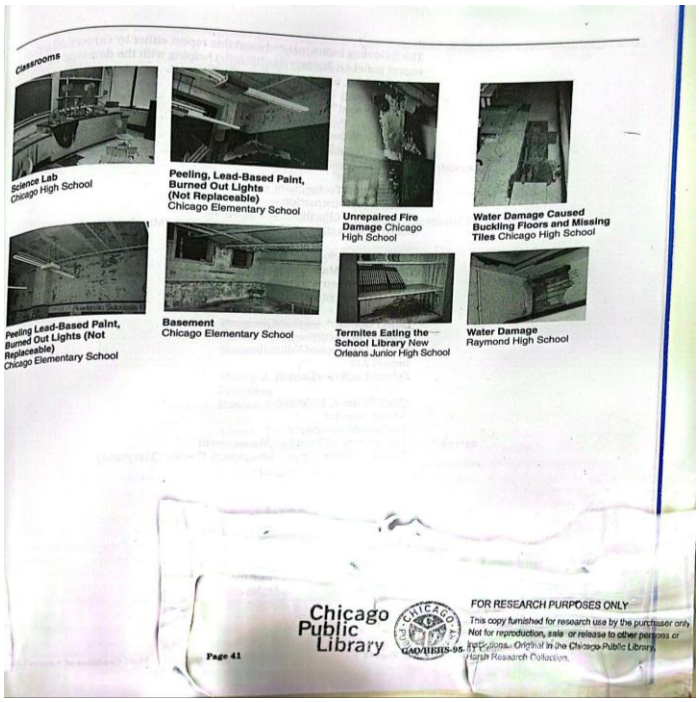
[37] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 185, Folder 29]
[38] William J. Wilson, *When Work Disappear*, 29. Chicago lost 60% of its manufacturing jobs in a twenty-year period.
[39] SOCDS census data output: Chicago City, IL, accessed July 4, 2025.
[40] Wilson, *When Work Disappears,* 56.

segregated. Many school buildings were constructed in the early 20th century, and were left unrepaired, with leaking roofs, crumbling facades, broken windows, rodent infestations, and outdated plumbing as some of the main conditions confronting these schools. By the 90s, long-standing structural problems that first developed decades prior became too egregious to ignore.



[Figure 3, Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 175, Folder 4]

Heating and ventilation systems often failed in the winter, forcing students to wear coats indoors or miss school entirely. Libraries, laboratories, and gymnasiums were missing or grossly inadequate. Some schools lacked basic science equipment or functioning art/music programs altogether.[41] Despite federal mandates to desegregate, city officials and white parents fought

[41] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 135, Folder 27]

busing and blocked integration efforts but also failed to improve the economic conditions necessary to support upgrading facilities or improving school offerings for Black youth.[42] With decreasing economic opportunities and increasingly underfunded and overcrowded schools, young Black people faced the nearly impossible task of surviving in systems that increasingly eradicated any chance for success.

Writing the Script: the 80s and Carceral Logics

The 70s "sets the scene" by creating an urban environment in decay through systemic divestment of city infrastructure and its economy, homes, and schools. Suburban expansion increasingly attracted businesses while deindustrialization wreaks havoc on the city economy, leading to a surplus of Black labor and a higher need for engagement in the informal economy.[43] The 80s marks a shift towards neoliberal policies, Reaganomics, and the increasing application of surveillance and carceral logics in Black communities' writ large, and on Black youth in particular. Here, I argue that the 80s is a crucial shift towards market-based logics that function to replace the Great Society with neoliberal policies and the rise of respectability politics amidst the shrinking city.[44]

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[42] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 175, Folder 4]

[43] Amistad Digital Resource: Social and Economic Issues of the 1980s and 1990s. Accessed July 3, 2025.

[44] Taylor, *Race for Profit*, 248 and Jill Desimini, "From Planned Shrinkage to Formerly Urban: Staking Landscape Architecture's Claim in the Shrinking City Debate." *Landscape Journal* 33, no. 1 (2014): 17–36. "The term shrinking city points to a specific phenomenon defined by loss of overall population, tax, political representation, and federal dollars that are occurring within the defined jurisdictional boundary of a city." (p. 17)

Suburbanization and the Shrinking City

As a by-product of white retrenchment, many white people moved to the suburbs in what is commonly referred to as "White Flight."[45] The acceleration of suburbanization, funded by the post WWII economic boom and many government subsidies, allowed for middle and upper class white (and increasingly Black) residents to move to the suburbs. Businesses, jobs, and the resulting tax revenues followed in their wake, creating an economic desert in many areas of Chicago, especially those in which Black residents were concentrated. Public services - especially schools - began to decline.[46] Public-private partnerships, which were considered to be the solution to urban decline, often served as vehicles for privatization, which ultimately further disempowered Black communities, eroded public accountability, and stole much-needed resources as profits for the benefit of private companies.[47] These shifts hit Chicago particularly hard. While the city boasted a strong Black middle class, it was a class structurally limited by redlining, employment discrimination, and underfunded schools.[48] Many Black residents remained confined to neighborhoods on the South and West sides, places where public housing developments began to decline, and where neighborhood schools lacked basic resources. White suburban voters resisted public housing in the suburbs, school desegregation efforts in the city, and relied heavily on regional governance that favored fragmented school and zoning policies that preserved the racial and economic isolation of the urban center.[49]

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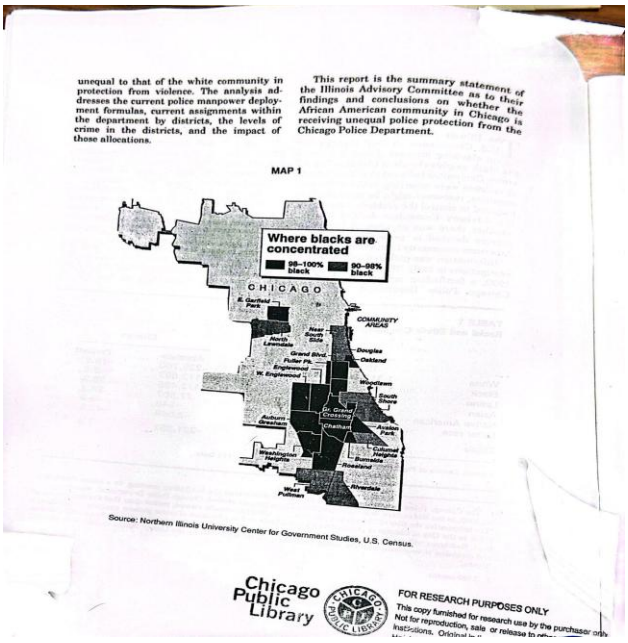
[45] Not seeking to collapse the diverging experiences of many white suburbanites, I cautiously use this term to understand it within a larger context of Cedric Robinson's framing of racial capitalism (*Black Marxism,* 1983) such that the extent to which Black communities had been divested from can be better understood. For more details, see p. 118 in Taylor's *Race for Profit*.

[46] Jessica Trounstine, *Segregation by Design: Local Politics and Inequality in American Cities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 167-173.

[47] Taylor, *Race for Profit*, 232.

[48] Harris, *The Cosby Cohort*, 73-75.

[49] Taylor, *Race for Profit*, 242 on "dual school systems" under the Nixon administration and the advent of "school choice."



unequal to that of the white community in protection from violence. The analysis addresses the current police manpower deployment formulas, current assignments within the department by districts, the levels of crime in the districts, and the impact of those allocations.

This report is the summary statement of the Illinois Advisory Committee as to their findings and conclusions on whether the African American community in Chicago is receiving unequal police protection from the Chicago Police Department.

MAP 1

Where blacks are concentrated

98–100% black

90–98% black

CHICAGO

COMMUNITY AREAS

Source: Northern Illinois University Center for Government Studies, U.S. Census.

[Figure 4, Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers Box 185, Folder 29]

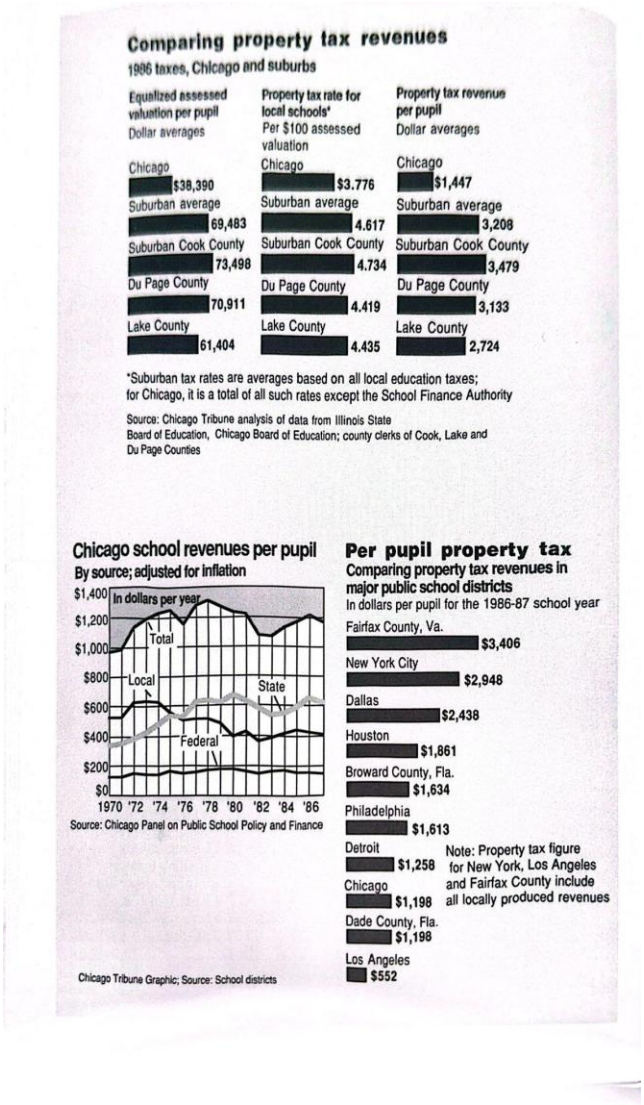
As a result, low-income Black families were geographically isolated due to racist housing policies and practices, and the transition of public-facing supports to public-private partnerships made low-income Black communities particularly vulnerable. In describing life at the Cabrini-Green Homes, Chicago's free weekly *Reader* gave insight into the conditions of the homes:

> The galleries - those chainlink-fenced open-air "hallways" that connect the living units to a central elevator shaft - get heaped with garbage. The elevators often malfunction, forcing many tenants to walk up fourteen flights of stairs. Corridor lights hardly ever work - the bulbs either smashed by delinquents or simply burned out and have never been replaced…Complaints to the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) go largely unheeded.[50]

The Chicago Housing Authority continued to concentrate impoverished Black families in segregated, under-maintained high-rises like Cabrini-Green and Robert Taylor Homes.[51] City services in predominantly Black neighborhoods withered under increasing budget cuts, neglect, predatory practices, and outright abandonment. Black neighborhoods were routinely

[50] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 185, Folder 29]
[51] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 161, Folder 1]

deemed as "blighted," but instead of receiving restorative investment, they were subjected to land grabs, forced relocation, and rising surveillance as a result of the increase of public-private partnerships for everything from health insurance to home ownership.[52] Public spaces like recreational centers, libraries, and health clinics also closed or fell into disrepair. Black neighborhoods experienced declining property values, deteriorating schools, and increasingly underfunded services.



[Figure 5, *Chicago Schools: "Worst in America,"* 108.]

[52] Beryl Satter, *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009).

However, local news outlets reported on these deteriorations not as a result of systemic divestment, but as evidence of Black cultural inferiority and discord from mainstream American values. The 70s saw the advent of the "welfare queen" trope, in which single-headed households, often of low-income Black women, were portrayed as preying on welfare supports, taking advantage of an already strained welfare system.[53] The results of a 20-year study published in the *Chicago Tribune* concluded that "since 1960, the number of out-of-wedlock births in Chicago has more than tripled and the number of babies born to teen-age mothers nearly has doubled."[54] The demonization of single, female-headed households was bolstered with statistics that only addressed the moment of crisis, rather than structural forces that have created the conditions:

> In Chicago, 80 per cent of unmarried teen-age mothers end up on welfare, compared with a national average of 60 per cent, [Pierre de Vise, Circle Campus School of Urban Sciences] said. This has created the role of the "welfare mother" in which welfare female-headed households are increasingly becoming an accepted way of life for teen-age black women.[55]

Concerns about unwed young mothers having children, being single-parents, and then dependent on welfare also created a national narrative that depicted Black women as sexually deviant and unfit to raise their children. In another *Chicago Tribune* article published in 1985, "Lost Society Infects Cities":

> A new class of people has taken root in America's cities, a lost society dwelling in enclaves of despair and chaos that infect and threaten the communities at large.

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[53] "The Rochester Sentinel," Google News Archive Search, accessed July 3, 2025 and Franklin D. Gilliam, "The 'Welfare Queen' Experiment: How Viewers React to Images of African-American Mothers on Welfare," eScholarship, University of California, June 25, 2003.

[54] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 115, Folder 19]

[55] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 115, Folder 19]

> It is most often described in the United States as black, but there are similar groups in other countries without significant black populations, reflecting the fact that at the core the problem is economic.[56]

The article proceeds to extrapolate on the role of the underclass in American society:

> The existence of an underclass in itself is not new in this country. What appears to be different today from past decades and centuries is what gives every indication of being the *permanent* entrapment of significant numbers of Americans, especially urban blacks, in a world apart at the bottom of society *[emphasis added]*.[57]

This kind of language takes at its core the notions of traditional family life, which is at total odds with the portrayal of the single, female-headed households that became increasingly descriptive of Black American The article continues, stating that this new-age underclass is locked into a permanent position within American society because of the "random and predatory [violence]," unsafe public schools that "the best…leave for safer schools," public housing which has "deteriorated into islands of terror populated in large part by brutal gang members, single mothers, pimps, prostitutes, drug dealers and children," and "racism and poverty" which are the "basic ingredients" to "most of the inner-city underclass."[58] Such rhetoric clearly denotes codified language - single mothers, drug dealers, and gangsters becoming the stereotypical characters of Chicago scenery in the public's psyche.

Reaganomics and the Collapse of Urban Opportunity

Codified language became the norm when discussing racialized matters. Lee Atwater served in Reagan's cabinet in the Office of Political Affairs as the southern strategy coordinator. In explaining the Southern Strategy Atwater explained how Republicans were able to win votes

[56] Chicago Tribune, "Lost Society Infects Cities," Chicago Tribune, August 9, 2021.
[57] Chicago Tribune, "Lost Society Infects Cities," Chicago Tribune, August 9, 2021.
[58] Chicago Tribune, "Lost Society Infects Cities," Chicago Tribune, August 9, 2021.

of Southerners without losing political correctness that became prominent after the passage of the Civil Rights Act:

> You start out in 1954 by saying, "Nigger, nigger, nigger." By 1968 you can't say "nigger"—that hurts you, backfires. So you say stuff like, uh, forced busing, states' rights, and all that stuff, and you're getting so abstract. Now, you're talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is, blacks get hurt worse than whites.… "We want to cut this," is much more abstract than even the busing thing, uh, and a hell of a lot more abstract than "Nigger, nigger."[59]

The election of Ronald Reagan marked a pivotal moment in the transformation of American economic and social policy. Reagan's administration ushered in a radical departure from the federal investment ethos of the Great Society and replaced it with a market-oriented ideology that prioritized tax cuts, deregulation, and privatization. While these ideas were packaged to the American public as a response to the stagflation, deindustrialization, and perceived failures of liberal social programs, in reality they served to facilitate the privatization of public goods and dismantle the civil rights gains of Black communities. For example, the administration slashed the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) budget by nearly 80%, eliminating most federal support for the construction of new or maintenance of existing public housing.[60] In an excerpt taken from "Consideration on a Revolutionary Situation in the United State: Likely Trigger Factors, Potential Politics" by Clyde Young, member of the Revolutionary Community Party, USA explained that:

> The urban landscape of "late imperial America" can best be understood in terms of the "dual city": glittering and overbuilt downtown districts, complete with glass-encased office towers, luxury hotels, and new residential high-rises or condominiums side by side with hundreds of thousands of families locked into deteriorating neighborhoods and ghettos, often displaced by urban renewal projects (or fire zones created by developers and landlords), and unaccounted-for tens of thousands living in abandoned

[59] Rick Perlstein, "Exclusive: Lee Atwater's Infamous 1981 Interview on the Southern Strategy," The Nation, December 7, 2018.
[60] Reagan budget to Slash Housing Aid - The Washington Post, accessed July 4, 2025.

> tenements…The deterioration of one portion of the city is the condition for the lavish and often speculative expansion of the other.[61]

The deteriorating city was a created event, one that was created through neoliberal policies towards the role of the state in welfare programs, as well as a staunch commitment to the ideals of individualism and personal accountability. However, what Young's comments demonstrate is that the creation of the ghetto is not something that occurs due to the deficiencies of the community members who live there. Instead, Young argues that the ghetto is created because of a mismatched placement of funds in the hands of elites who have the power to move assets to continue to improve their communities at the expense of other groups of lower socioeconomic status. As such, aging high-rise public housing complexes like Cabrini-Green and the Robert Taylor homes were left to deteriorate without consistent repairs, maintenance, or federal investment.[62] Elevators frequently were out of service and lights in common areas didn't work. In a field observation conducted on the standards of CHA homes it was discovered that

> In most of the projects visited, the machine rooms were found to be in terrible condition - in a few instances, disastrous. Loose electrical wiring, poor contacts on the controller, burnt-out connections, dirt and oil covered electrical switches, were normal. Litter was found to be lying around within the machine rooms; other rooms had roof leaks which introduced water in dangerously close proximity to the electrical circuitry; and still other machine rooms had no ventilation as required by the machinery.[63]

Public schools faced a similar trend of divestment from the public and the increase of privatization. Under Reagan, federal education spending declined, even as schools were

[61] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 125, Folder 17]
[62] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 185, Folder 29]
[63] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 185, Folder 29]

experiencing increasing needs due to rising poverty levels, aging infrastructure, and population shifts.[64] The 1988 study by the *Chicago Tribune* of Chicago public schools found that

> More than half of the toilets in the first floor girls' washroms at Manley High…are unusable - stopped up, boarded over. Graffiti everywhere. There are no doors on most of the stalls. There is no toilet paper or paper towels.[65]

The 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*, commissioned by the Department of Education, declared that American public education was so poor it represented a threat to national security. The administration perceived education to be a site of bureaucratic inefficiency and moral decline, arguing that the teacher's unions, lax standards, and permissive curricula were to blame for falling achievement rates.[66] Rather than addressing school segregation, unequal funding, or the systemic divestment that created many subpar learning conditions for low-income families, the Reagan administration sought to implement an educational agenda focused on discipline, accountability, and back to basics instruction - which theoretically worked well for schools that were well resourced but failed to address the lived realities of students in underfunded schools. The crisis framing implemented with the *Report* re-centered national discourse on education around standards, competition, and testing - all of which were very aligned with the rise of market-based logics to address social concerns. Public education became redefined through market logic, where Black students were increasingly cast not as learned to be supported but rather as liabilities to be managed and disciplined.

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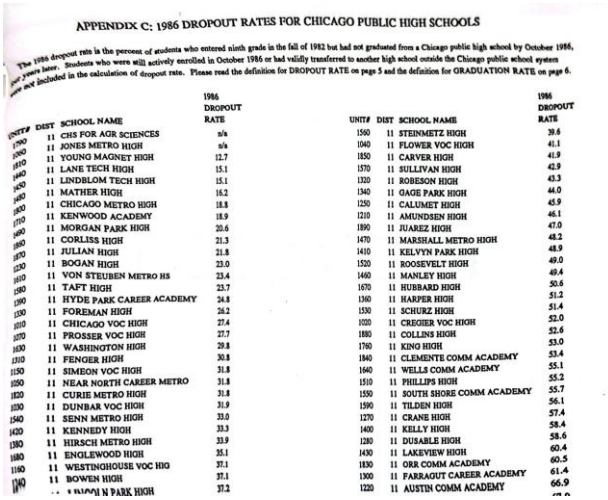
[64] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 185, Folder 29] there is a piece entitled "State of Black America" in which it explains the population shifts, rising poverty levels, and deteriorating city infrastructure in relation to the socioeconomic status of Black Americans nationally.
[65] *Chicago Schools: "Worst in America,"* 140.
[66] Gardner and And Others, "A Nation at Risk"

In the 80s, high school graduation rates significantly dropped among Black-majority schools like DuSable and Wendell Phillips Academy, where roughly 50-60% of Chicago students dropped out.[67]



APPENDIX C: 1986 DROPOUT RATES FOR CHICAGO PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

The 1986 dropout rate is the percent of students who entered ninth grade in the fall of 1982 but had not graduated from a Chicago public high school by October 1986, four years later. Students who were still actively enrolled in October 1986 or had validly transferred to another high school outside the Chicago public school system were not included in the calculation of dropout rate. Please read the definition for DROPOUT RATE on page 5 and the definition for GRADUATION RATE on page 6.

UNIT#	DIST	SCHOOL NAME	1986 DROPOUT RATE
1760	11	CHS FOR AGR SCIENCES	n/a
1060	11	JONES METRO HIGH	n/a
1810	11	YOUNG MAGNET HIGH	12.7
1140	11	LANE TECH HIGH	15.1
1450	11	LINDBLOM TECH HIGH	15.1
1440	11	MATHER HIGH	16.2
1820	11	CHICAGO METRO HIGH	18.8
1710	11	KENWOOD ACADEMY	18.9
1480	11	MORGAN PARK HIGH	20.6
1840	11	CORLISS HIGH	21.3
1870	11	JULIAN HIGH	21.8
1220	11	BOGAN HIGH	23.0
1610	11	VON STEUBEN METRO HS	23.4
1180	11	TAFT HIGH	23.7
1190	11	HYDE PARK CAREER ACADEMY	24.8
1330	11	FOREMAN HIGH	26.2
1010	11	CHICAGO VOC HIGH	27.4
1070	11	PROSSER VOC HIGH	27.7
1630	11	WASHINGTON HIGH	29.8
1510	11	FENGER HIGH	30.8
1150	11	SIMEON VOC HIGH	31.8
1050	11	NEAR NORTH CAREER METRO	31.8
1020	11	CURIE METRO HIGH	31.8
1030	11	DUNBAR VOC HIGH	31.9
1540	11	SENN METRO HIGH	33.0
1420	11	KENNEDY HIGH	33.3
1380	11	HIRSCH METRO HIGH	33.9
1080	11	ENGLEWOOD HIGH	35.1
1160	11	WESTINGHOUSE VOC HIG	37.1
1340	11	BOWEN HIGH	37.1
[illegible]	11	[illegible] N PARK HIGH	37.2
1560	11	STEINMETZ HIGH	39.6
1040	11	FLOWER VOC HIGH	41.1
1850	11	CARVER HIGH	41.9
1570	11	SULLIVAN HIGH	42.9
1320	11	ROBESON HIGH	43.3
1340	11	GAGE PARK HIGH	44.0
1250	11	CALUMET HIGH	45.9
1210	11	AMUNDSEN HIGH	46.1
1890	11	JUAREZ HIGH	47.0
1470	11	MARSHALL METRO HIGH	48.2
1410	11	KELVYN PARK HIGH	48.9
1520	11	ROOSEVELT HIGH	49.0
1460	11	MANLEY HIGH	49.4
1670	11	HUBBARD HIGH	50.6
1360	11	HARPER HIGH	51.2
1530	11	SCHURZ HIGH	51.4
1020	11	CREGIER VOC HIGH	52.0
1880	11	COLLINS HIGH	52.6
1760	11	KING HIGH	53.0
1840	11	CLEMENTE COMM ACADEMY	53.4
1640	11	WELLS COMM ACADEMY	55.1
1510	11	PHILLIPS HIGH	55.2
1550	11	SOUTH SHORE COMM ACADEMY	55.7
1590	11	TILDEN HIGH	56.1
1270	11	CRANE HIGH	57.4
1400	11	KELLY HIGH	58.4
1280	11	DUSABLE HIGH	58.6
1430	11	LAKEVIEW HIGH	60.4
1830	11	ORR COMM ACADEMY	60.5
1300	11	FARRAGUT CAREER ACADEMY	61.4
1220	11	AUSTIN COMM ACADEMY	66.9

[Figure 6, Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers Box 161, Folder 4]

Public schools were in crisis, and the shrinking city provided less and less opportunities for those who didn't achieve academic success. The decline of opportunity in the urban sector was made evident with the policies under the Reagan administration, which advanced an aggressive neoliberal economic agenda that created tax cuts for the wealthy, deregulation of industry, and deep cuts to social programs. Public housing, welfare, and urban education all saw dramatic reductions in federal support, which only exacerbated the economic decline of the urban center. As many youth navigated these structural shifts in their day-to-day experiences, they increasingly turned to the informal economy as a way out of the lack of opportunity in the urban sector.

[67] Alina Tugend, "Half of Chicago Students Drop out, Study Finds," Education Week, February 25, 2019, originally published March, 06, 1985.

The War on Drugs and the Criminalization of Black Youth

With the city in decline, the urban sector increasingly saw the incorporation of the informal economy into its daily operations. Drugs - both the use and selling - became a staple characteristic of urban centers. While the crack cocaine epidemic did not hit Chicago nearly as it had other cities, the media sensationalization of Black criminality and the increase in police funding certainly did.[68] Codified language began to describe the urban centers as well and Reagan's tough on crime policies such as the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act and 1988 Omnibus Anti-Drug Abuse Act institutionalized the War on Drugs through increased funding for policing.[69] Reagan increased federal drug enforcement spending from $8 million in 1980 to $95 million by 1984, while simultaneously slashing social welfare programs.[70] In a 1981 public hearing organized by the 1st Congressional District Educational Task Force of Chicago, Reagan's budget cuts and their potential impacts were discussed by its members:

> Schools in Northeastern and Midwestern states are now suffering the acute symptoms of the domino effects of industrial decay. New York City, which has already undergone the massive butchery of BIG MAC closing nearly twenty schools, is now slated to shut 15 more. Philadelphia will close 13. Chicago will close 36, 34 of which are in the Black community. As Blacks have moved in, whites have moved out, not only moving out but systematically demolishing the remaining school system. The administration is now proposing a system of Black grants that will excise 25% of the past year's educational expenditures automatically. Elementary and secondary education programs consolidated will suffer a 26% cut, while elementary, secondary and vocational education programs in Fiscal year 1982 will be reduced by 30%.[71]

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[68] "Chicago Has Been Spared Full Force of Crack Epidemic : Drugs: Local Gangs and the Luck of Geography Have Lessened the Substance's Impact, Experts Say. but the City's Suburbs, like the Rest of the Nation, Have Been Ravaged.," Los Angeles Times, December 3, 1989.

[69] US Congress, Washington, "NCJRS Virtual Library," Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 | Office of Justice Programs, accessed July 3, 2025, and "68. The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988," Justice Manual | 68. The Anti-Drug Abuse Act Of 1988 | United States Department of Justice, January 18, 2020.

[70] Katherine Beckett, *Making Crime Pay: Law and Order in Contemporary American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 52.

[71] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 102, Folder 23]

Despite the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the national narrative became one of control, policing, and surveillance, as millions of dollars were funneled out of social welfare and educational programs and into higher police budgets and the construction of more prisons.[72] The systematic nature in which divestment from Chicago occurred on both local and national is highlighted here. Although CPS was receiving less and less money due to its declining economy and taxes being based on in-district property values, the Reagan administration engaged. Additionally, it served to further criminalize drug-users by making drug testing a condition for receiving public housing and federal aid, and required schools to adopt zero-tolerance stances on drug use in schools in exchange for federal funds.[73] While social welfare and schooling programs had their budgets cut, funding for police and drug-related surveillance increased. A 1984 *New York Times* article, "Reagan Plans Bigger Budget for U.S. Law Enforcement," details the $200 million increase that the Reagan Administration had enacted:

> Congressional approval of the expected request for the fiscal year 1985, which starts Oct. 1, would bring the Justice Department's budget to approximately $3.57 billion, nearly 6 percent more than this year. Most of that money, officials said, would go toward criminal justice, including the hiring of new agents for the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Drug Enforcement Administration, an expansion of Federal prosecutors' offices around the country and the building of new prison space.[74]

This effectively redirected federal aid away from social welfare programs and funneled it into policing and surveillance of communities. These federal policies fueled local policing practices that blanketed Black neighborhoods in surveillance. The Safe and Drug Free Schools Program tied school funding to the adoption of anti-drug policies and encouraged partnerships between schools and law enforcement. The early seeds of what would become the school-to-prison

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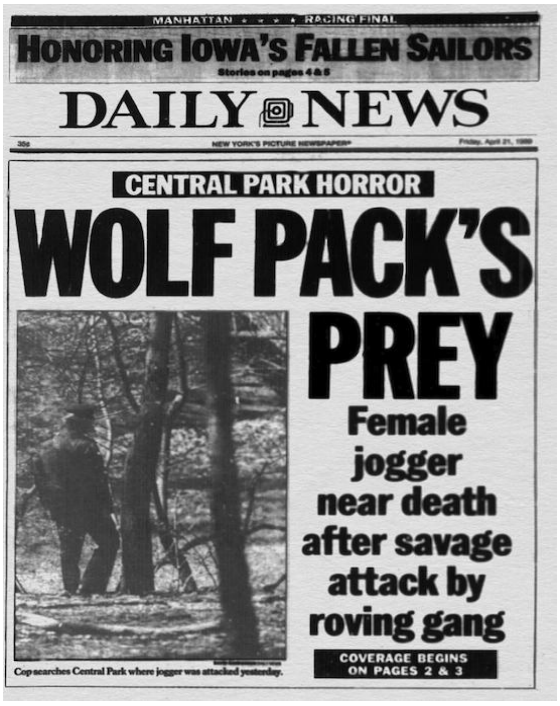
[72] Reagan plans bigger budget for U.S. Law Enforcement, 1984.
[73] "The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988," Justice Manual | 68. The Anti-Drug Abuse Act Of 1988 | United States Department of Justice, January 18, 2020.
[74] Reagan plans bigger budget for U.S. Law Enforcement, 1984.

pipeline were planted during this period. The Department of Education and the Department of Justice also began to offer grants to schools to hire School Resource Officers (SROs) , normalizing the presence of police in hallways and classrooms. With the advent of the "wolf-pack," the precursor to the "superpredator" trope, these punitive logics extended into the classroom. Schools began to mirror prisons: students were searched for weapons or drugs and constantly monitored and controlled.


MANHATTAN RACING FINAL

HONORING IOWA'S FALLEN SAILORS

Stories on pages 4 & 5

DAILY NEWS

NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER

CENTRAL PARK HORROR

WOLF PACK'S PREY

Female jogger near death after savage attack by roving gang

COVERAGE BEGINS ON PAGES 2 & 3

Cop searches Central Park where jogger was attacked yesterday.

[Figure 7 (Photo by NY Daily News Archive via Getty Images)]

The media played a key role in legitimizing this logic. News coverage of gangs, drugs, and crime in urban centers often relied on racialized images of young Black men. The *Daily News* published this "wolf-pack" article in 1989, describing "a pack of teen-agers" that "rampages through Central Park, harassing and assaulting people" that ends with their "brutalization" and "raping an innocent young woman."[75] Although this crime happened in New

[75] Lynnell Hancock, "Wolf Pack: The Press and the Central Park Jogger.," Gale Academic Onefile, accessed July 24, 2025.

York, national headlines picked up the article's logos, reproducing the rhetoric denoting Black youth as violent and out of control. Functionally, the media's sensationalization of this story helped to brand the "image of savage kids rampaging through city's streets…into the national consciousness."[76]

Newspapers and television broadcasts in Chicago regularly portrayed Black youth as gang-affiliated, emotionally unstable, and inherently violent. National news outlets and local television stations repeatedly portrayed young Black men as the face of America's so-called drug crisis. The media-fueled myth of the "crack baby" - which falsely claimed that children born to mothers who used crack cocaine were permanently damaged - became a national obsession.[77] A 1990 *New York Times* article entitled "The Instincts of Parenthood Become Part of Crack's Toll" explains that:

> Rise in Cases of Children's advocates blame the crack epidemic for more and more of the 2.2 million cases of child abuse and neglect that are reported to child-protective services each year. A surge in the number of children reported to have died of abuse and neglect is also linked to crack…Addicted mothers are often single parents, and this can add to the stress of the family situation. Nine out of 10 men leave women addicted to drugs, said Ms. Vandegrift, New Image's editor.[78]

While seemingly rooted in facts and statistics, these articles capitalize on the Southern Strategy explained by Atwar in which codified language becomes a way to take about race while still maintaining these stories overwhelmingly functioned to demonize poor Black mothers while simultaneously ignoring similar or higher rates of drug use among white women, or among

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[76] Lynnell Hancock, "Wolf Pack: The Press and the Central Park Jogger.," Gale Academic Onefile, accessed July 24, 2025; Crack hits Chicago, along with a wave of killing (published 1991), accessed July 26, 2025. Both articles create a sensationalization of criminal imagery of Black youth.

[77] Jogger's attackers terrorized at least 9 in 2 hours - The New York Times, accessed July 4, 2025, and 1. Linda Lichter, S. Robert Lichter, and Daniel Amundson, "The New York News Media and the Central Park Rape," Berman Archive, n.d., 10.

[78] Michael Decourcy Hinds, The instincts of parenthood become part of Crack's toll (published 1990), accessed July 24, 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/1990/03/17/us/the-instincts-of-parenthood-become-part-of-crack-s-toll.html.

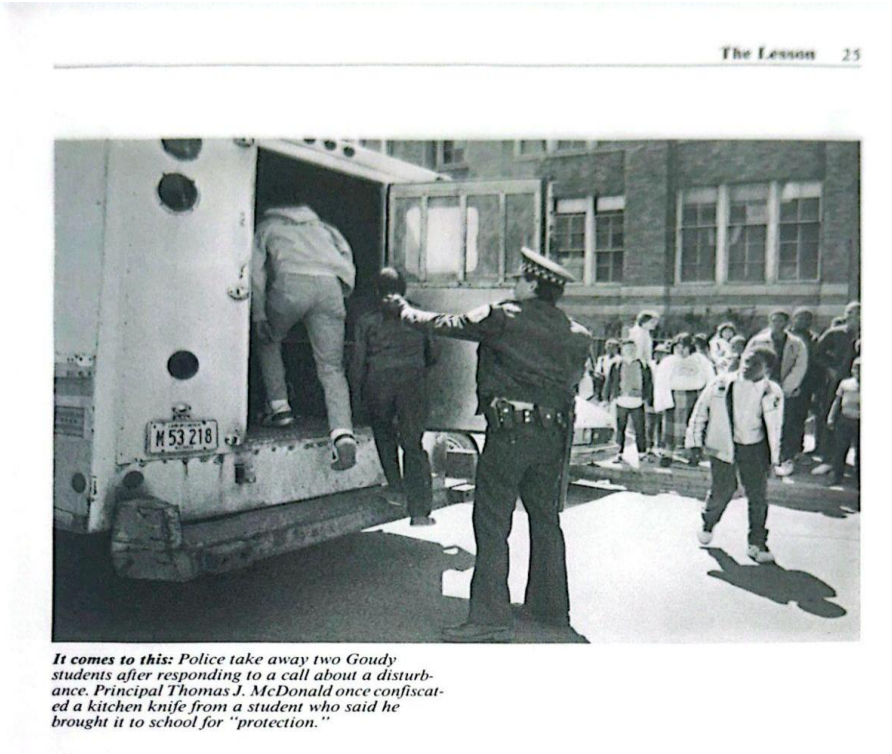
demographics in the suburbs. Meanwhile, Black suspects were overly represented as suspects in crime reporting, creating a distorted image of urban violence and reinforcing the white fears that were at the base of initial sentiments of white retrenchment from the 70s.[79] These portrayals were echoed in public policy, leading to increased funding for security measures in schools rather than counselors, teachers, or social workers - ultimately reifying the carceral logics and punitive treatment of Black youth.

The scene has been created, the caste has been set: Chicago was in full on deterioration, and the blame has been cast onto low-income Black families, branding them as inherently dysfunctional and disjointed from the values of the wider American society.

Lights, Camera, Criminalize: the 90s and Suprepredators on Screen and in Schools

The 90s demonstrate the culmination of several processes that began in the 70s and took hold in the 80s. The invention of the "superpredators" in the 90s created a wave of hysteria that ultimately functioned to inculcate Black youth as inherently deviant and criminal in the public's eye. This, coupled with the declaration of Chicago schools as being the "worst in the nation" solidifies the criminalization of Black youth in schools: it is the children's fault, because of their inadequate cultural values and their inherent disposition towards a life of delinquency.[80]

[79] Derrick Z. Jackson, "Invisible or Thugs: The Stereotyping of Black Males," Chicago Tribune, August 22, 2021, originally published June 6th, 2005.
[80] Kelley, *Disfunktional*, 8-9.



The Lesson 25

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It comes to this: *Police take away two Goudy students after responding to a call about a disturbance. Principal Thomas J. McDonald once confiscated a kitchen knife from a student who said he brought it to school for "protection."*

[Figure 8 *Chicago Schools: "Worst in America,"* 25.

This section explores how this reigning *logos* became another form for placing Black youth into a "double-bind" while being unable to adequately address the structural problems that have created such challenging learning environments for Chicago's Black youth.

From Crisis to Criminalization: Suprepredators

Dilulio predicted that there would be an onslaught of teenagers - mostly Black and brown boys - that would terrorize urban America. These youth, he claimed, were the product of "moral poverty" and a breakdown in the Black family and Black culture. In a 1995 news article printed in the *Washington Examiner*, Dilulio explains that:

> …big-city prosecutors inundated me with stories about the ever-growing numbers of hardened, remorseless juveniles who were showing up in the system. "They kill or maim on impulse, without any intelligible motive," said one. Likewise, a veteran policeman

> confided: "I never used to be scared. Now I say a quick Hail Mary every time I get a call at night involving juveniles. I pray I go home in one piece to my own kids.[81]

Dilulio claimed that "the trouble will be the greatest in black inner-city neighborhoods," which he supported by citing the increasing rates of murder among young men between 14 and 17 which had "increased by 50 percent for whites and over 300 percent for blacks," further sensationalizing black-as-criminal imagery.[82] The idea quickly gained traction in the media and among policymakers. News programs ran nightly segments on gang violence, often using grainy footage of young Black boys in handcuffs. In obtaining a copy of "The Images of Blacks on Chicago's Local TV News Programs," the *Reporter* found that "Chicago's television news programs feed racial anxiety and antagonism by giving dramatically different treatment to African-American and white criminal subjects."[83] Local news in Chicago reinforced this imagery, painting urban youth as delinquent. In a statement to the board of education regarding school reform, the LSC chairperson for Hartigan Elementary School, Patricia Jackson, explained:

> Kids as young as kindergarten are being recruited by gangs. Some of the gang recruiters are students at the school, but most are from outside the school…Students threaten each other with knives, some have actually been stabbed. It makes kids afraid to come to school.[84]

The political utility of this national fear of crime gave way to bipartisan control for increasing surveillance of Black communities - particularly that of Black youth. Juvenile sentencing laws were rewritten to allow more minors to be tried as adults for non-violent drug offenses, and

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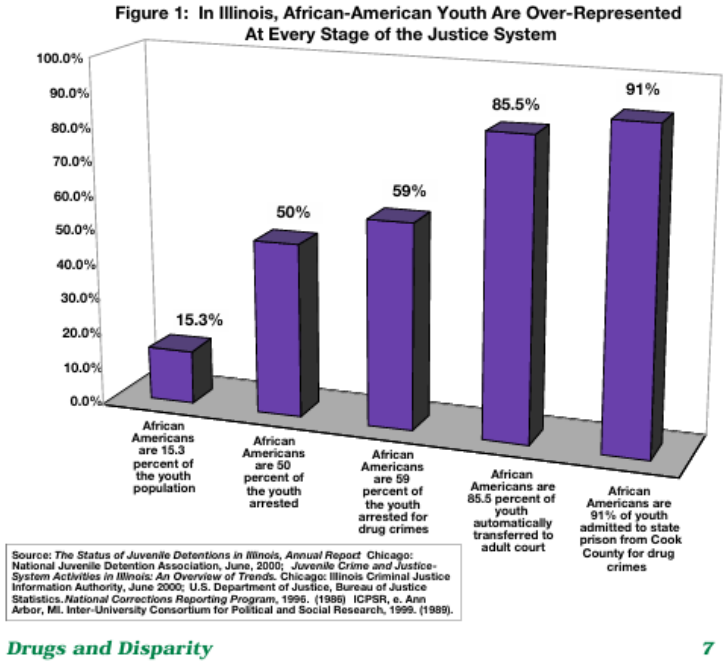
[81] John DiLulio, "The Coming of the Super - Predators," Washington Examiner - Political News and Conservative Analysis About Congress, the President, and the Federal Government, November 27, 1995.
[82] Dulilio, "Super-Predators."
[83] Ted Cox, "TV News in Chicago Fuels Racial Anxiety," | The Chicago Reporter Archives.
[84] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 162, Folder 1]

states lowered the minimum age at which children could be incarcerated.[85] In Illinois, this age was lowered to first 15, and then 13 for young drug-related offences to be charged as adults. Illinois had implemented an experimental juvenile justice policy in which 15- or 16-year-olds who were within 1,000 feet of a school or public housing development would be charged as adults. A 2001 study of juvenile justice policies from the mid-1980s to 2000 found that "as a result of these laws, 99% of the youth in Cook County transferred to adult court for drug crimes [were] African-American or Latino:"[86]



[Figure 9 Drugs and disparity: The racial impact of Illinois' practice of transferring young drug offenders to Adult Court - Justice Policy Institute[87]]

[85] Juvenile justice and delinquency prevention ..., accessed July 4, 2025, and Lisa G. Southerland, "NCJRS Virtual Library," Extended Jurisdiction Juvenile Prosecution in Illinois: An Unfulfilled Promise | Office of Justice Programs, accessed July 4, 2025 on juvenile justice federally and in Illinois.

[86] Drugs and disparity: The racial impact of illinois' practice of transferring young drug offenders to Adult Court - Justice Policy Institute

[87] Figure 1: 1. Drugs and disparity: The racial impact of illinois' practice of transferring young drug offenders to Adult Court - Justice Policy Institute

Black communities were blamed for the increase in crime, without being provided an analysis for the socioeconomic conditions that created these crime waves to begin with, functioning to victimize and criminalize Black youth at increasing rates, and sensationalize the violent imagery of the city. The city was in crisis, but it was predominantly Black youth who were criminalized.[88] 90 Headlines from *The Reporter* such as "Inner-City Youth Find Crime Pays Better Than Fast-Food Options," "Black Youth Are City's Top Risk One Third of Murder Victims, Lake Meadows Residents Unnerved by Rash of Crimes - 12 new incidents," "TV News in Chicago Fuels Racial Anxiety," "Thieves, Prostitutes Prey on Elderly Poor in CHA Buildings - Crime Surge, Police deployment and crime in Chicago, 1982-1993," "Low income Blacks were 100 times more likely to be shot than middle-class whites" highlight news's coverage of crime as well as the sensationalization of this crime, codified as Black criminality and inner-city delinquency. This sensationalization was coupled with an increasing intergenerational breakdown: elders in the Black community increasingly viewed their youth as too defiant. In the *Bridges of Memory* interview with Wilks Battle, Battle explained

> Well see kids of today and kids of my generation there's very little comparison because at the time the conditions of the world was different. And we were striving to graduate and do the best to help our families. But the kids of today…[education] is more like a job to them and they don't have any commitment. They just come here and the way society is…we had gangs but it wasn't as violent as it is today.[89]

In his introduction on why he decided to embark on the *Bridges of Memory* project, Black explained that

> gangs, drugs and violence become common place. This continuously interested observer (me) noticed a steady and rapid decline in public and private services to the neighborhood from which these students were drawn. Furthermore there was a very sharp drop in interest and activities in all the neighborhoods, public schools (elementary and

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[88] "Analysis: How the Media Created a 'superpredator' Myth That Harmed a Generation of Black Youth," NBCNews.com, November 28, 2020.

[89] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 25, Folder 4]

> secondary). Another important factor aided and abetted by previously mentioned factors was an unusual deterioration and demolition of the housing stock.[90]

Together, these two statements highlight the older generations' dilemma regarding the problems facing 90s youth: they were able to acknowledge the systemic divestment that created these dismal conditions, yet at the system blamed a lack of discipline on the part of the youth that allowed for increases in violence and gang-affiliated behaviors.

Carceral Logics in Education: Surveillance, Suspension, and Pushing Out

As the political rhetoric of failure intensified, the educational response was not support, but rather discipline. Zero-tolerance policies, which had emerged in federal drug enforcement in the late 80s began to creep into the public-school systems. Minor infractions were met with increasingly harsh penalties: out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to law enforcements. School Resource Officers (SROs), metal detectors, and surveillance cameras were introduced in the late 80s urban schools under the guise of "school safety." These measures disproportionately affected Black youth, who were increasingly viewed as threats rather than students.

In 1995, Illinois passed the Chicago School Reform Amendatory Act, which granted full control of CPS to then-Mayor Richard M. Daley, transferred control of the district away from the Board of Education to the mayor's office and created the new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) position, denoting the shift towards market-based logics in education. This move was framed as a necessary response to the district's failures, but it also marked a dramatic consolidation of power that sidelined community voices and allowed for the implementation of aggressive top-down

[90] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 25, Folder 1]

reforms. These reforms included the expansion of zero-tolerance policies, which mandated harsh punishments for even minor rule violations such as dress code infractions or unruliness in classrooms.

Paul Vallas was elected CEO of CPS under Daley and introduced a corporate model of school governance that prioritized standardized testing, accountability metrics, and school choice. Under this regime, hundreds of schools were placed on "probation," test scores became the primary measure of school and student success, and students who failed to meet arbitrary benchmarks were held back, pushed out, or passed along without having developed the skills necessary to be competitive in the workforce or to advance on to college.[91] Schools on the South and West Sides - schools that were already suffering from decades of divestment - were labeled as failing, further stigmatizing the youth who attended them and the communities they served. Students who underperformed were not met with additional resources or support; instead, they were blamed for their own failure. Summer school, retention, and eventual dropout became routine outcomes for many. The convergence of the superpredator myth and punitive education policies produced a devastating double bind for Black youth. As they navigated underfunded schools and under resourced neighborhoods, they were simultaneously treated as latent criminals. An increasing trust in market logic would result in the increasing privatization of public goods - especially schools - the deregulation of markets and industries, devolution, efficiency over equity, competition as the path to improvement, and individual responsibility as opposed to structural analysis. Suddenly, conversations around "testing, accountability," and "choice" became code words for the privatization of schools and the continued isolation of underperforming Black students. This shift in political ideology and public opinion would set the

[91] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 130, Folder 14] and Chicago *Schools: "Worst in America": An Examination of the Public Schools That Fail Chicago* (Chicago, Ill: Chicago Tribune, 1988), 125-135.

foundation for the implementation of carceral logics as the reigning script for dealing with the deterioration of the city and the rise of the informal economy for Black youth.

Urban schools began to "push out" students rather than support them.[92] Many youth were actively driven away from schools through policies that pathologized their behavior and ignored the structural inequality that underlined their underperformance.[93] Zero policies in schools increasingly punished a wide range of "deviant" behavior, from weapons in schools to minor misbehavior like defiance in the classrooms, lateness, or insubordination.[94] By the late 1990s, most major school districts had adopted some form of zero-tolerance. Black students were disproportionately suspended, expelled, and referred to law enforcement for minor infractions. Metal detectors, school police, and surveillance cameras became commonplace in schools, while the same schools often lacked libraries, arts programs, and qualified teachers. In effect, these schools were turned into carceral institutions, were security prioritized over support, and where the school-to-prison pipeline became robust.[95]

Black Communities in the Age of "Cultural Deprivation"

Alongside the criminalization of youth, the 1990s also saw the demonization of Black mothers, especially with the revitalized trope of "welfare queens" in public imagery. Poor Black

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[92] George J. Sefa Dei, *Reconstructing "Drop-out": A Critical Ethnography of the Dynamics of Black Students' Disengagement from School* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 46-64. Dei argues that students are dropping out because they do not feel as though they belong within the school setting, framing it not as student failure, but as student disengagement; Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 164, Folder 6]; Monique W. Morris, *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* (New York: The New Press, 2016), on the female-coded experience of criminalization for young Black girls and an expansion on the term "push out" to highlight the ways in which Black girls especially are criminalized within schools.

[93] William J. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

[94] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 186, Folder 17]

[95] Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (S.I.: The New Press, 2020), 278.

mothers were framed as being lazy, irresponsible, and prone to raising deviant children.[96] Once again, the neoliberal logics operating under the guise of individual accountability functioned to rid the State or the wider society from any kind of responsibility or commitment to the social good. Instead, it framed the obstacles faced by poor and low-income Black families as direct results of some kind of cultural deficiency that they had that produced the conditions in which they lived.

> There is one thing the underclass is good at, and that is producing children. These children tend to inherit their parents' poor intelligence and adopt their sociopathic lifestyle, reproducing the cycle of deprivation from generation to generation."[97] -Richard Lynn

The 1991 General Social Survey explained that "the view of a majority of whites (58.9%) and a substantial minority of blacks (38.6%)" believed "that blacks 'tend to prefer to live on welfare rather than be self-supporting."[98] While the public's perception is biased towards a negative perception of the Black poor and working class, the reality is that, as of 1980:

> although only 12% of the population black workers constituted 37% of housekeepers, 53% of private house cleaners and servants, and 22% of janitors and cleaners and 27% of nurse aides, orderlies, and attendants.[99]

Black people "are disproportionately involved in the nation's most menial of labor, literally tin some cases society's 'shit' work."[100] The dominant narrative in America is that Black people are lazy, but the reality is that Black people engage in some of the most grueling jobs, with very little

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[96] Dorothy E. Roberts, Linda Gordon, and Jill Quadagno, "Welfare and the Problem of Black Citizenship," *The Yale Law Journal* 105, no. 6 (1996): 1563–1602.
[97] Richard Lynn, "Is Man Breeding Humself Back to the Age of the Apes?" *Times* (London), October 24, 1994, reprinted in *The Bell Curve: History, Documents, Opinions,* eds. Russell Jacoby and Naomi Glauberman (New York Times Books, 1995), 356.
[98] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 32, Folder 2]
[99] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 32, Folder 2]
[100] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 32, Folder 2]

insurance over job security or protections like sick days or pensions. This narrative of laziness, however, transcribes itself onto the rationale for disproportionate outcomes between Black and white students.

Black students were increasingly framed as helpless victims to their circumstances. Take the string of *Chicago Tribune* articles depicting the tragedy of youth violence, with headlines like "Youth's 'Tough Life' Comes to Violent End," "Racial Incidents Divide Suburban High School," "Our Fear of Young Black Males," "Moral Poverty" and "Odds Stacked Against Young Black Males" creates a dismal scene, one where Black youth are resigned to a state of apathy instead of being seen as active agents in their own lives.[101] In educational discourse, Black students were increasingly through the lens of cultural deprivation theory. This theory suggested that the academic underperformance of Black youth stemmed not from the structural inequality but from deficiencies in their home cultures - absent fathers, uneducated mothers, and an overreliance on "street culture." In doing so, it pathologized Black life and erased systemic causes of educational failure.[102] Rather than offering structural support, the dominant response was compensatory education, an attempt to "catch up" Black children through remedial programming that assigned low-level, rote learning tasks that failed to sufficiently motivate

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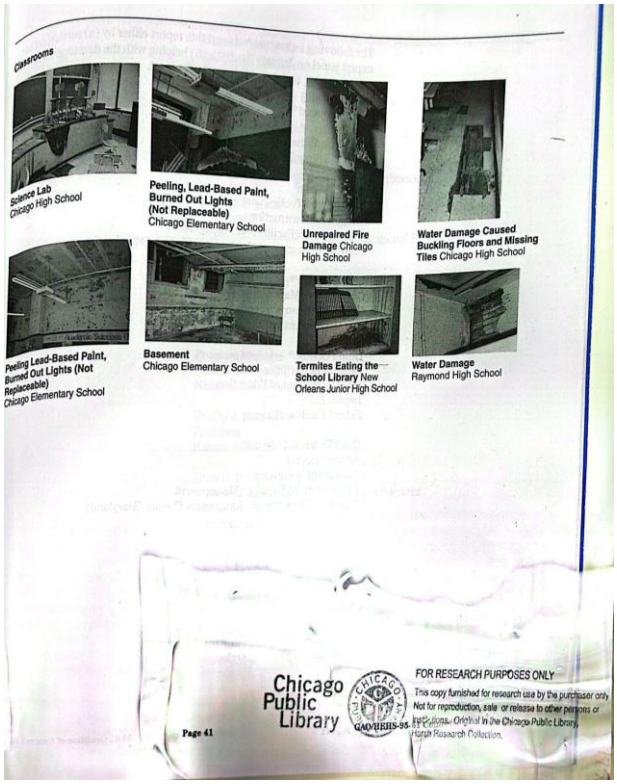
[101] Victimization/criminalization of Black youth, see four *Chicago Tribune* articles from the 90s that exemplify this trend: "Youth's 'Tough Life' Comes to an End," "Racial Incidents Divide Suburban High School," "Our Fear of Young Black Males," and "Odds Stacked Against Young Black Males." These articles painted youth as by-standers or victims of violence, or of active, but criminal, agents. There was little room for a structural analysis of how or why these conditions existed, and even less room explored for how community members resisted this framing.

[102] *Chicago Schools: "Worst in America": An Examination of the Public Schools That Fail Chicago* (Chicago, Ill: Chicago Tribune, 1988) and the evolution of deficit thinking, (p. 2) "the deficit thinking model, at its core, is an endogenous theory - posting that the student who fails in school does so because of internal deficits or deficiencies. Such deficits manifest, it is alleged, in limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn and immoral behavior." Seeing as researchers found that many teachers maintain this perspective when engaging with low-income Black youth, it is plausible that teachers during the 90s maintained this perspective in Chicago. The rich history of culturally-relevant pedagogy cultural studies builds off the teachings of Paulo Freire (1968) and Stuart Hall (1983), Delpit (1988), and continues with Ladson-Billings (2005), Tara Yosso (2005),Warikoo and Carter (2009), Baldridge (2014), Rowe and Tuck (2016), Chetty et al (2019), and Carey (2019) whom all have contested cultural-deficient model; however, its effects remain pervasive in how teachers engage in their classroom management and in their perceptions of the abilities of their Black students.

students, and was often taught by underprepared or less experienced teachers - if teachers were there at all:

> Jaton Felton arrives at Du Sable High School to find that her typing class has no teacher, not even a substitute to keep order. It is not the first time, nor is this an isolated case. On an average day in Chicago Public Schools, more than 5,700 students, like 15-year-old Jaton, have no teacher. Sometimes an adult shows up to watch over them, sometimes not.[103]

Not only did students have to endure subpar learning experiences in the classrooms due to inadequate or unprepared teachers, but they also were forced to confront deteriorating school conditions.



[Figure 10, Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers Box 175, Folder 4]

Chicago Public Schools faced classrooms where the "floors are in terrible condition…The stairs are in poor condition and have been cited for safety violations…Heating problems result in some

[103] *Chicago Schools: "Worst in America,"* 93.

rooms having no heat while other rooms are too warm."[104] These dismal material conditions of city schools were rarely attributed to a decreasing economic base in the city. Instead, the conditions were described as constant, if not stagnant, leaving no imaginative space for changes to be made. This kind of rhetoric maintains the Black community in a position of victimhood and removes the agency from these communities from being able to enact any kind of changes in their neighborhoods.

In 1988, The *Chicago Tribune* published a seven-month long examination of Chicago Public Schools they had conducted after being labeled "the worst," in which they discovered extraordinary needs not being met in the schools. Low-income children in CPS are left to face "crumbling buildings scarred by graffiti, battered equipment, and scattered trash," in which "at some schools, officials refuse to put toilet paper in the student lavatories, saying the children misuse it."[105] Among teacher shortages and budget cuts, students might only have just one hour of material, are frequently denied recess, and lack the facilities needed for extracurricular activities like music or art.[106] And yet, it is these same children who are expected to go on to high school, graduate, and have developed the skills needed to seek out gainful employment while businesses had been steadily moving their jobs overseas or into suburban communities. Even when jobs are available, there is little room for growth; young people increasingly prefer to turn to the informal economy. Tim Black, in conducting interviews for his *Bridges of Memory* project interviewed high school students at Du Sable, in which this young man - a senior - highlighted this phenomenon and his own rationale for why and how this issue occurred:

> Ricardo Woods: The guys outside don't pressure me or intimidate me at all, because I know better. About the gangs and stuff like that.

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[104] Timuel D. Black, Jr. [Papers Box 175, Folder 4]
[105] *Chicago Schools: "Worst in America,"* 36.
[106] *Chicago Schools: "Worst in America,"* 36.

> Tim Black: Why do you think these young men are involved like that? Or are there young women also?
> RW: Mostly the young men and women that are involved in selling drugs and stuff like that is because of the money.
> TB: They don't have jobs?
> RW: Most of them don't have the skills for jobs or whatever. When they graduate from high school all they have is a diploma. But nowadays that's not enough.
> TB: No, that's not enough.
> RW: So, to even sweep the floor at a MacDonalds and stuff like that you probably need a college degree…
> TB: Yes, it's getting tough.
> RW: So, it's just a way to get easy money. They expect the easy money to somewhat improve their living.[107]

How can children be expected to navigate such deteriorating conditions? The media blames the youth for not wanting to work - with headlines like "Inner-City Youth Find Crime Pays Better Than Fast-Food Options," upholding the imagery of lazy, unmotivated youth. However, further examination of the conditions in which the Black low-income youth were expected to find success denotes a misnomer: the schools were failing to teach inner-city youth skills needed to enter into the workforce, and the workforce was shrinking due to jobs being sent overseas or being outsourced to the suburbs.[108] Faced with these unbearable conditions, Black youth found resistance not only as a necessary element of identity-making, but also an opportunity to create new avenues for economic expression, free from any ideas imposed upon them by adults. The music industry certainly expanded in the 90s with the advent of "gangsta rap" in which the experiences of inner-city Black youth were explored through song, music videos, and dance, and spoke to the more real conditions in which they found themselves, rather than an ideal world that their elders would rather they live in. Reporting on the 1994 Subcommittee hearing before Congress entitled "Shaping Our Responses to Violent and Demeaning Imagery in Popular

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[107] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 25, Folder 5]
[108] *Chicago Schools: "Worst in America,"* 129.

Music" the *Washington Post* interviewed Tim Sites, then senior vice president of Recording Industry Association of America. In this interview, Sites offered a more structural contextualization of the "violent" and "demeaning" content found prevalent in rap music, saying, that "Too many people are addressing the symptoms and not the disease itself. I think what Congress needs to address is *why* are kids singing such angry lyrics" [emphasis added][109] Although an acknowledgement was made of the white-owned record companies who profited off of "young Blacks 'who are struggling with their identity'" the question of family values returns, even in this article, with comments by William S. Cohen, a Republican senator from Maine who had attended the hearing at Congress, who asks "How do you get back family values at a time when you are glorifying the dehumanization of women and heroizing images of those who are propagating violence as a way of life?"[110] His question places blame on supposed lacking "family values" of urban Black families. His analysis, however, fails to address the structural nature of racism and poverty, and fails to account for the very real violence experienced in the daily lives of young, low-income Black youth, from their dangerously deteriorating schools to their collapsing homes to police brutality. The double-bind exhibited in this single news article demonstrates the ongoing tensions that shape the discourse surrounding Black urban youth: a capacity to acknowledge that conditions are at the root of many symptomatic reactions of Black youth (like skipping school because there is no teacher there anyway, or engaging in the informal economy because there are no jobs), yet there is this ongoing return to a question of culture and family values as being prescribed as being the real perpetrator for "bad" behavior. Navigating these stereotypes alongside the reality of a shrinking economy for entry-level work meant that Black youth had to use their creativity to create new avenues where they could both assert their

[109] Pop culture takes the rap as Congress Battles Violence - The Washington Post, accessed July 24, 2025.
[110] Pop culture takes the rap as Congress Battles Violence - The Washington Post, accessed July 24, 2025.

burgeoning identities as youth, and also respond to their material needs.[111] The need to fit in, in a society that constantly pushes you out, creates a new kind of double consciousness, one where Black youth are being surveilled both by the authority figures and formal institutions in their lives, and also each other.

Youth Culture, Peer Policing, and Internalization of Criminalization

The sensationalization of gang culture in popular media, alongside the disproportionate portrayals of Black youth as criminals in nightly news feeds and in the newspapers created the imagery of the young Black thug. Gang members and gang affiliated youth became the dominant representation of what Black culture would come to mean both in the States and abroad. In the absence of structural support, with public institutions crumbling and educational spaces restructured as punitive zones, Black youth responded by crafting cultural identities that both reflected and subverted their social conditions. At the same time, they were forced to navigate the expanding logics of peer policing and internalized criminalization, where the gaze of the state and white supremacy was replicated in the everyday interactions between students, parents, teachers, and the community at large.[112] Consider the situation at DuSable High School under Principal Charles Mingo (principal from 1988-2005):

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[111]Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education,* ed. John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241-258 on cultural capital theory and "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction," in *Knowledge, Education, and Cultural Change*, ed. Richard Brown (London: Tavistock, 1973), 71–112 for cultural reproduction theory. Taking care to not fall trap to the "culture of poverty" framework, it is equally important to understand Black youth's developmental stages in light of all of the structural changes in the city. Peer to peer interactions are influenced by how the child develops, and how they are able to position themselves in relation to their understanding of the world around them. To the extent that they seek to reproduce or reject societal norms returns to questions of safety, trust, and self-image. See also Amos N. Wilson, *The Developmental Psychology of the Black Child* (New York: Africana Research Publications, 1978).

[112] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 195–228 on his discussion of the panopticon. I would argue that as young Black students were faced with challenging decisions to make in order to assert their self-identity among their peers. As such, students would begin in self-monitoring behaviors, similar to that described in the "Chapter 3: Panopticonism," especially as they were influenced from media images, peer pressure, family expectations, and discipline practices in school. Also

> Challenges -unremitting and unrelenting challenges - remain, as Mingo, is the first to admint. Attendance last school year, for example, averaged 65 percent, lower than in 1988. Mingo attributes the drop to gang wars, especially in a section of the Robert Taylor Homes called the Hole. A computer analysis of police data shows a correlation between shootings and low attendance on the ensuing days, he says.[113]

In the national imagination, the figure of the young Black male "gangbanger" or "thug" came to dominate representations of urban youth. As news outlets broadcast a steady stream of gang-related homicides, drug busts, and school violence, the nuanced realities of the lives of Black youth were flattened into a singular image of pathologized violence. Their style - baggy jeans, hoodies, and Air Jordans - was interpreted as evidence of gang affiliation. Their music - especially hip-hop and rap- was interpreted as glorification of crime, violence, and deviancy.[114] In response to both actual gang violence and the media-induced fear of it, schools and city agencies implemented a range of formal and informal surveillance practices, including the installation of metal detectors in schools and city facilities, locker searches, and uniform policies in schools.

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consider Foucault's work in dialogue with Laurence Ralph, *Renegade Dreams: Living Through Injury in Gangland Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), in which Ralph, paraphrasing Tricia Rose's *The Hip Hop Wars* explains, "that hip hop is 'keeping it real' in response to criticism that their lyrics contribute to negative social conditions…hip hop remains one of the most accessible platforms from which black urban youth might tell their life stories both in their own vernacular and on their own terms" (p. 90). He concurs with Rose in that that this notion of "keeping it real" by playing into various stereotypes is "deeply flawed" because it "profits from 'negative' representations of Black people - as violent criminals, drug dealers, and sex fiends." (p. 90). Together, it can become clear how Black youth struggle to define their own self-identity amidst so many competing factors.

[113] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 186, Folder 11]

[114]Kelley, *Disfunktional*, 8-77.

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES, SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 1991

How many can we lock up?

BOCA RATON, Fla.—President Bush got heavy applause Tuesday night when he vowed to protect a "fundamental right: freedom from crime and the fear that stalks our cities." He said, "We need tough crime control legislation, and we need it now."

As the applause died, I wondered what the word "tough" meant to our president. Locking up more of this generation of black, brown and poor white men?

I wondered whether Mr. Bush and the applauding members of Congress knew which nation already has the world's highest rate of imprisonment. The Soviet Union? South Africa? Maybe some repressive Latin American or Asian country? The answer is the United States—by an embarrassingly big margin.

A new report from the Sentencing Project, a national, nonprofit organization that promotes sentencing reform and alternative sentencing, shows that the United States has more than 1 million prison inmates. That's a rate of 426 per 100,000 population, well ahead of the next two countries—South Africa, with an incarceration rate of 333 per 100,000, and the Soviet Union, with 268 per 100,000. Ten years ago, the United States ranked third, behind both South Africa and the U.S.S.R. Our prison inmate population has doubled since then.

No other nation for which incarceration rates are known even comes close.

Almost half of the prisoners in America—454,724 to be exact—are black males. This means black men in the United States are imprisoned at a rate four times that of their counterparts in South Africa, despite that nation's apartheid and harsh segregation laws.

A note of caution. The report points out that there are problems in comparing international rates of incarceration because crime reporting, the criminal justice system and methods of punishment and control vary greatly from one country to another. Still, the Sentencing Project feels it is useful to analyze and compare the data because they provide a perspective on America's approach to issues of crime and punishment.

One thing the statistics show is that jailing criminals does not necessarily make for a safe society. America's crime rate has not significantly changed in the last decade, while the incarceration rate soared. Last year, homicide records were shattered in one big city after another.

Our high crime rate and the war on drugs are major factors in the large increase in jail population. Just as important are the tougher criminal justice policies of the last 10 years, including minimum sentences, restrictive parole and sentencing guidelines.

"This report illustrates the long-term effect of the draconian criminal justice policies the United States has been implementing over the past decade and is indicative of policies that have failed our people," says Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.).

Carl T. Rowan is a nationally syndicated columnist of the Chicago Sun-Times.

Carl T. Rowan

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PAGE 12 • FEBRUARY 3, 1991 • PARADE MAGAZINE

Sobering Words

At a recent meeting of college and university administrators in Palm Beach, Fla., Prof. Robert Reich of Harvard called attention to the decline in upward mobility in the United States. Citing data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Reich, who teaches political economy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, disclosed: "The fastest-growing occupational group in the public sector in the U.S. is prison guards." One of the fastest-growing occupational groups overall, he added, is security guards.

Prison guards in Connecticut: Theirs is a growing group—but do we feel safer?

22 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES, SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 1991

State report says 13 new prisons needed to avert more crowding

By Phillip J. O'Connor
Staff Writer

Illinois would need to spend $755 million to build 13 more prisons in the next five years to keep crowding from getting worse, according to a state Corrections Department report.

The report, prepared for Gov. Edgar, added that it would cost $300 million a year to operate the new prisons, on top of the present operating budget of $652 million. The report also said:

"A policy of inaction in the short term will make it impossible to respond at all to overcrowding in the next two to three years, placing the entire prison system under significantly increased risk."

Illinois led the nation last year with a 20.9 percent increase in its prison population, which now stands at just under 28,000, said Nic Howell, a department spokesman.

Only one new prison, 950-bed Big Muddy Correctional Center near Mount Vernon, is under construction.

Two-thirds of the nearly 28,000 inmates now in the state's 23 prisons were convicted of crimes for which they could not receive probation, the internal report said.

Howell, citing an example of the problems judges face, said, "Say a kid goes into your garage and steals a bicycle. It could be his first arrest. He might be doing it for a lark.

"The judge must sentence him to four years in prison if he is convicted of residential burglary."

Tougher sentences for a number of crimes, including narcotics offenses, went into effect in 1987 and Illinois' prison population has risen sharply since, Howell said.

"We've had a 57 percent increase over the last two years in cases in which judges have sent people to prison," he said.

The Corrections Department and penal reform groups have advocated other forms of punishment such as work release, boot camps, home confinement, electronic monitoring, periodic imprisonment, stricter probation requiring frequent check-ins, community service, more fines and mandatory drug treatment.

"We're already using these," Howell said, adding they cannot be used for inmates who are prison-bound under state law.

[Figure 11, Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers Box 28, Folder 7]

What is more difficult to understand is how Black youth interpreted this positioning that was forced upon them by the media and their elders alike, and how they perceived themselves in relation to or resistance to these stereotypes.[115]

[115] Laurence Ralph, *Renegade Dreams: Living Through Injury in Gangland Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 90 on perceived notions of "authenticity" in the Black community as being misrepresented by popular culture icons (ie, rappers) as being "violent criminals, drug dealers, and sex fiends," creating a false identification between Blackness-authenticity-delinquency as a means to maintain their social prestige among their own peer groups.

Peer-to-peer interactions guided issues of safety and achievement in schools during the 90s. In environments saturated with criminalizing narratives, being perceived as "Black enough" among their own peer groups became entangled with proximity to danger, toughness, and resistance to authority. Academic achievement, the use of Standard English, and alignment with institutional norms were often ridiculed as "acting White."[116] Black youth began to internalize the idea that to be authentically Black meant to be street-savvy, emotionally guarded, and resistant to formal education. Students who excelled in school, dressed "neatly," or had close relationships with teachers were sometimes mocked or ostracized, accused of trying to distance themselves from their community or conform to the white gaze. This internalized double bind placed youth in an impossible position: striving for educational success often came at the expense of social acceptance, while embracing cultural codes risked punishment by school authorities or real-world consequences outside of the school building. The result? A distorted binary in which "Blackness" was equated with deviance and "success" with whiteness.[117]

While many youth internalized these logics, others resisted them. Hip-hop, graffiti, fashion, slang, and spoken word poetry emerged as key avenues through which black youth expressed their experiences, challenged dominant narratives, and built community. Open mic nights and poetry slams hosted by groups like the Young Chicago Authors and Street Level confronted the dominant narratives and stereotypes - not by denying their existence, but by reframing them in a more humanizing perspective through storytelling.

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[116] Kunjufu, *To Be Popular or Smart,* 11.

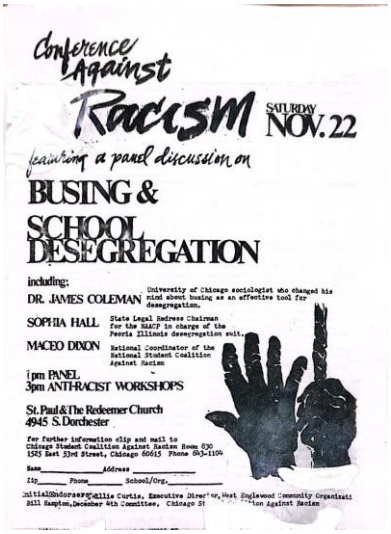
[117] Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu (1986), "Black Students' School Success: Coping with the Burden of 'Acting White,'" The Urban Review 18(3), pp. 176-206

ReWriting the Script: Black Community Resistance

The resistance of the Black community against the framing of their children as unteachable or incapable of learning functions within a larger tradition of the Black Radical Tradition and various efforts of grassroots organizing. This section explores the ways in which community members, leaders, and organizations worked together to combat the deteriorating conditions of their community and their schools, and fight for a fair future for their children. This section also explores the ways in which Black youth engaged in their own forms of resistance to dominant stereotypes that reified them as inherently violent, delinquent, and criminal by emphasizing the power of their own voices and lived experiences as legitimate alternative spaces for education and resistance.

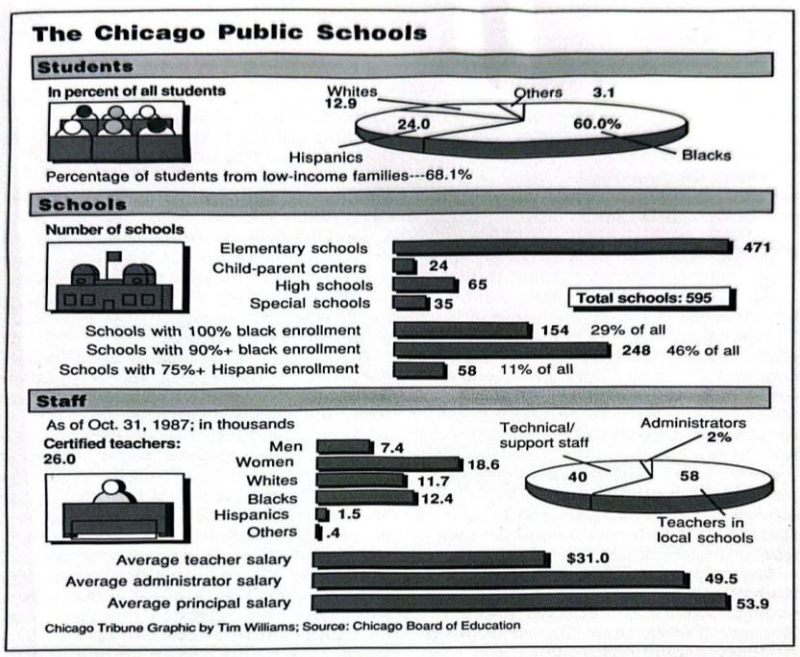
Behind the Scenes: Counternarratives, Grassroots organizing, and Resistance

Activism in the 1970s was dominated by desegregation efforts. Reports after reports detailed how Chicago Public Schools still failed to fully desegregate. The demographic of white students in CPS were decreasing steadily, as well as the funding needed to maintain infrastructure, professional development of teachers, and class materials. Students, community members, and formal institutions, organizations, and associations organized around desegregation efforts. One such organization, which highlights students' roles in organizing for equality in education, was the Student Coalition Against Racism, which organized speaker series on antiracism, school desegregation, and the question of bussing:


Conference Against
Racism SATURDAY NOV. 22
featuring a panel discussion on
BUSING & SCHOOL DESEGREGATION
including:
DR. JAMES COLEMAN University of Chicago sociologist who changed his mind about busing as an effective tool for desegregation.
SOPHIA HALL State Legal Redress Chairman for the NAACP in charge of the Peoria Illinois desegregation suit.
MACEO DIXON National Coordinator of the National Student Coalition Against Racism
1pm PANEL
3pm ANTI-RACIST WORKSHOPS
St. Paul & The Redeemer Church
4945 S. Dorchester
for further information clip and mail to
Chicago Student Coalition Against Racism Room 630
1525 East 53rd Street, Chicago 60615 Phone 643-1104
Name Address
Zip Phone School/Org.
Initial Endorsers: Willie Curtis, Executive Direc'or, West Englewood Community Organizati
Bill Hampton, December 4th Committee, Chicago St ton Against Racism

[Figure 12, Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers Box 137, Folder 12]

However, reports from the 80s and the 90s demonstrate that not only was total desegregation was never accomplished in Chicago, but that Chicago Public Schools began to experience an accelerated kind of deterioration due to the resource vacuum happening in the city due to White Flight, the disappearance of jobs, and a growing population of low-income people concentrated in the same geographical location.

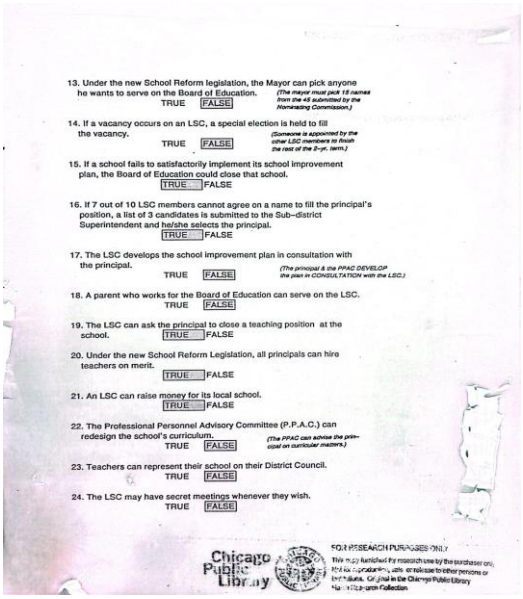


[Figure 13 *Chicago Schools: "Worst in America,"* 37.]

By the late 1980s, a decade worth of infrastructural neglect led many to develop a more structural analysis of the problems facing urban centers like Chicago, in addition to ongoing efforts towards desegregation.[118] While the 1988 Chicago School Reform Act created local school councils (LSCs), it was the result of constant grassroots organizing that gave the foundation needed for these councils to enact lasting changes. LSCs partnered with other community institutions, like the Chicago Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights, or created their own, like the Citizens School Committee, to ensure that their voices were being heard, and that

[118] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 161, Folder 2] The Student Desegregation Project prepared a desegregation plan for CPS in 1980, in which they detailed curriculum changes at both the elementary and high school levels, as well as gave updates on magnet, vocational and technical schools. They also provided updates on special education, bilingual education, and student discipline trends. This plan also highlighted the need for public buy-in, opportunities for further initiatives in the metropolitan area, as well as methods for evaluation and ongoing monitoring of efforts to integrate both students and staff in CPS. Still fresh with many of the aspirations of the 70s, the 80s efforts towards desegregation were overshadowed by growing crisis facing the structural security of buildings (ie, buildings in deterioration), and other social problems that would stem into the school environment (drugs, teen pregnancies, gang-related activities, and violence). The 80s denoted a shift, from solely focusing on desegregation efforts into a more systemic analysis of conditions facing Black Chicagoans.

they equipped their members with the skills necessary to engage in real change in their schools. Partner organizations came together to support the growing needs of LSCs so that parents and participating community members could be more effective communicators and efficiently get their needs met by the Board of Education, the Teacher's Union, and other formal organizations with which LSCs would work with.



13. Under the new School Reform legislation, the Mayor can pick anyone he wants to serve on the Board of Education. (The mayor must pick 15 names from the 45 submitted by the Nominating Commission.)
TRUE FALSE

14. If a vacancy occurs on an LSC, a special election is held to fill the vacancy. (Someone is appointed by the other LSC members to finish the rest of the 2-yr. term.)
TRUE FALSE

15. If a school fails to satisfactorily implement its school improvement plan, the Board of Education could close that school.
TRUE FALSE

16. If 7 out of 10 LSC members cannot agree on a name to fill the principal's position, a list of 3 candidates is submitted to the Sub-district Superintendent and he/she selects the principal.
TRUE FALSE

17. The LSC develops the school improvement plan in consultation with the principal. (The principal & the PPAC DEVELOP the plan in CONSULTATION with the LSC.)
TRUE FALSE

18. A parent who works for the Board of Education can serve on the LSC.
TRUE FALSE

19. The LSC can ask the principal to close a teaching position at the school.
TRUE FALSE

20. Under the new School Reform Legislation, all principals can hire teachers on merit.
TRUE FALSE

21. An LSC can raise money for its local school.
TRUE FALSE

22. The Professional Personnel Advisory Committee (P.P.A.C.) can redesign the school's curriculum. (The PPAC can advise the principal on curricular matters.)
TRUE FALSE

23. Teachers can represent their school on their District Council.
TRUE FALSE

24. The LSC may have secret meetings whenever they wish.
TRUE FALSE

[Figure 14, Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers Box 125, Folder 3]

They held training sessions, engaged with the community on the street level, and built networks for the purpose of political education so parents had the tools and strategies needed to challenge unequal school processes and demand more resources. Additionally, it provided community members a space to hold their school officials accountable to their needs as parents and community members. These LSCs advocated for smaller schools, culturally relevant pedagogy, and more equitable distribution of funding to support chronically underfunded schools in CPS, like DuSable and Wyatt High Schools. Through these councils and community

organizing, schools were able to create community gardens, fund arts programs, and provide students with college-ready and job-ready training.[119]

Although many elder community members felt as though their communities had deteriorated since their adolescence, there were many community members who fought against blaming the youth for these changes. Instead, they rightly identified the ongoing divestment from the public housing and the under-resourced nature of the schools as to why their neighborhoods had experienced so many negative changes within their lifetime. Still, there was the ongoing fear of crime and violence. Many community members felt that the crime was a secondary reaction, however, to the lack of jobs - they did not blame the youth, necessarily, but understood more intimately that the rising crime rates to be in relation to larger systemic issues confronting their neighborhoods, as opposed to the story that national narratives would support.[120]

Thanks to much of this organizing, there were tangible changes in laws, school norms, and in the community at large. The vigil against violence maintained its monthly sessions and is ongoing today. Local school councils advocated for increased parent involvement and control of the schools, which resulted in reports being created to address inadequate schooling conditions at varying levels from congress to the school board.[121]

Activism in the 80s was not limited to schools, however. Instead, there was an explosion of groups that worked towards improving various conditions for Black urban life by addressing systemic problems regarding housing, access to safe spaces for extracurricular activities for youth, and job opportunities. For example, Jim Martin, a filmmaker from Columbia College,

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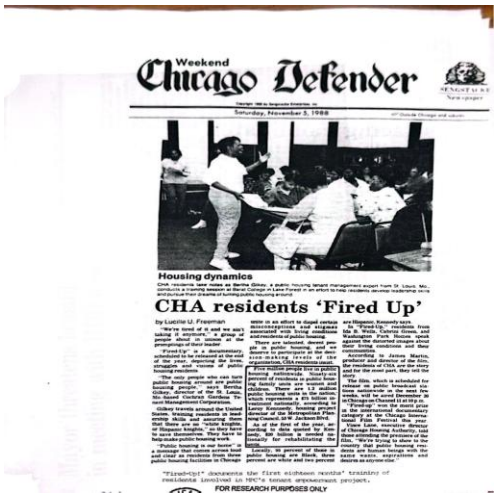
[119] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 163, Folder 1]

[120] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 175, Folder 4] In here, one of the many news articles explains how older residents feel afraid to leave their homes, even during the day, because of the uptick of violence within their community.

[121] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 175, Folder 4]

created a documentary called *Fired Up!* Which documented residents from Ida B. Wells, Cabrini Green, and Washington Park Homes who were involved with the Metropolitan Planning Council's (MPC) efforts to create a tenant-empowerment project, in which tenants would engage with "full-scale tenant management."[122] sought to develop their leadership skills and confront the systemic divestment that they experienced through the lacking infrastructure of their homes: "The only people who can turn public housing around are public housing people," stated one member of the group.[123]

Residents in CHA Housing were encouraged to participate in this program as a way of achieving self-determination for their housing conditions - to take the conditions into their own hands and demand change. Residents demanded change not only from their fellow tenants, but actively learned leadership skills and developed political education so that they could confront city officials and building owners with demands to fix the deteriorating conditions.[124]


Weekend
Chicago Defender
Saturday, November 5, 1988
Housing dynamics
CHA residents 'Fired Up'
by Lucille U. Freeman
FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES ONLY

[Figure 15 Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers Box 185, Folder 29]

Residents also formed community and resident councils to address the concerns they had that were otherwise going unanswered. Residents Patricia Perry and Peggy Byas, who lived in a CHA

[122] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 185, Folder 29]
[123] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 185, Folder 29]
[124] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 185, Folder 29]

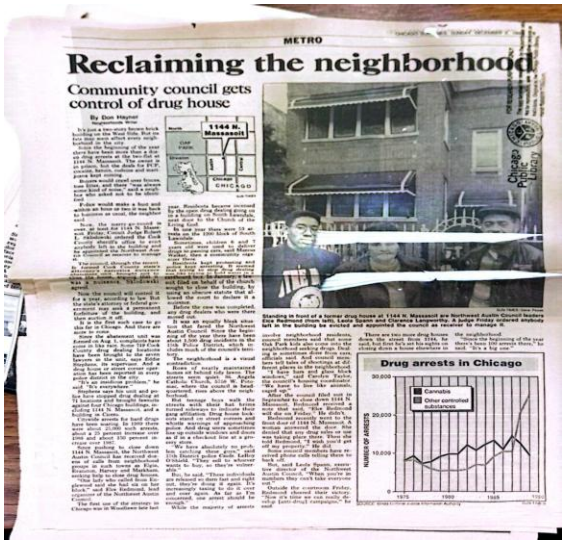
high rise at Pershing Road organized their fellow residents to bring their concerns to the attention of CHA and the Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC):

> "We had to go to the next building over." They put out fliers, got 17 or 18 people out, and established a regular meeting time, which they still have, 9 PM on the third Wednesday of every month. "We had documentation. At every meeting we took attendance, and filed it with the Local Advisory Council."[125]

The West Side community's capacity to organize around a common goal, organize to get the support of the courts, and organize to obtain the maintenance and control of this property demonstrate an ongoing effort on the part of the Black community to resist the negative influences from taking over their neighborhoods. They were not passive victims who *allowed* the circumstances to happen, they actively worked behind the scenes and center stage in order to combat and resist what was happening to their community. As one resident proclaimed, "This is not a project!" This was an effort on the part of residents to bring awareness to the broader community about the struggles they face within CHA housing, but also about the agency that residents and community members have to combat these problems and more importantly, assert their humanity.

By the 1990s, residents protested the open drug dealing happening in their communities, which they felt forced them to "live like animals, caged up." Residents organized into a community council and petitioned their local courts to allow for community control of the building instead, effectively "reclaiming the neighborhood" through these community councils and political engagement.

[125] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 185, Folder 29]


METRO

Reclaiming the neighborhood

Community council gets control of drug house

Drug arrests in Chicago

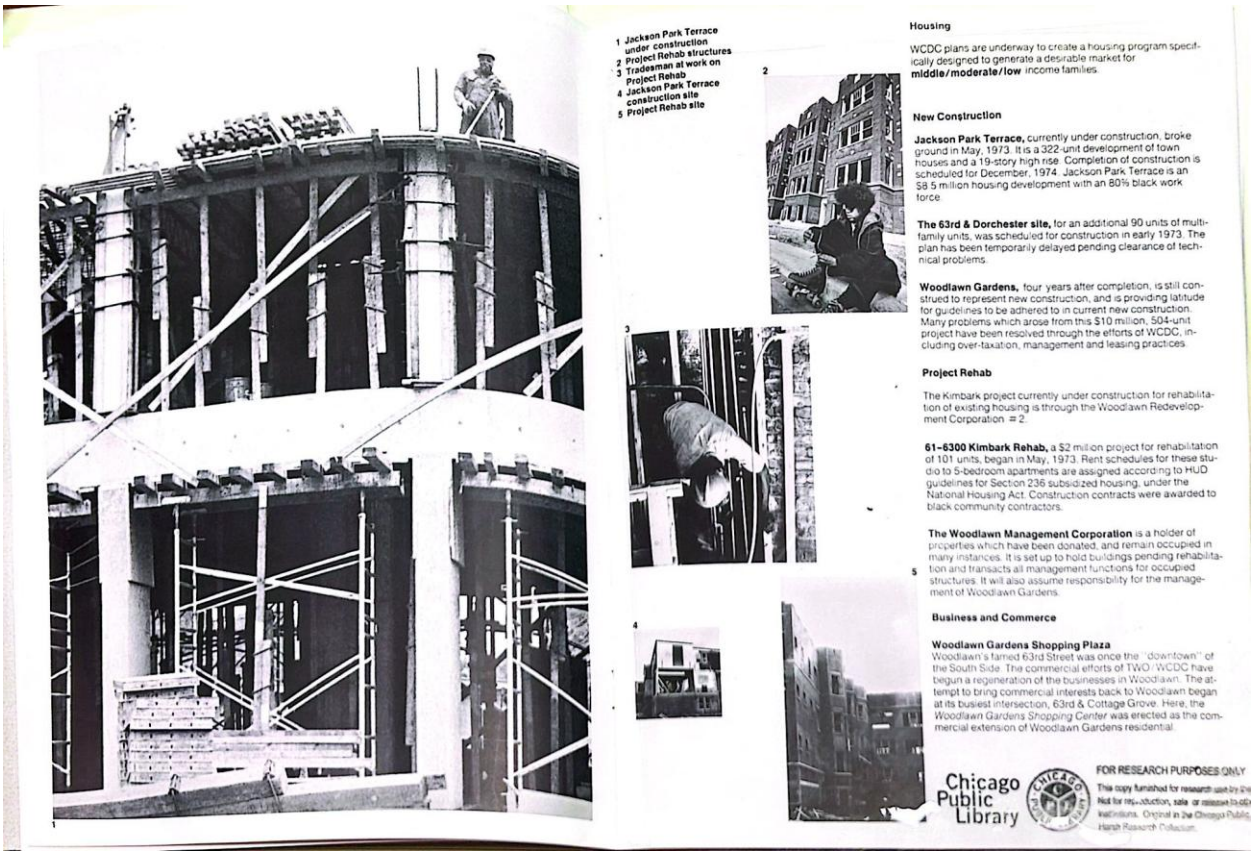
[Figure 16 Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers Box 185, Folder 30]

Another prominent community-based organization was The Woodlawn Organization (TWO). TWO was originally founded in 1959 to address problems in the community from predatory business practices to fair housing, community renewal, and education.[126] TWO, alongside other community partners and organizations like the Board of Education for Woodlawn and the Woodlawn Community Development Corporation (WCDC) sought to "provide a stable educational community by revitalizing the school system to meet demands of new housing plans currently underway by WCDC, retaining Certified and qualified teachers, providing continuity in education within the community, [and] developing alternative plan for substitute teachers (eliminating the use of uncertified substitutes)."[127] They were not only engaged in improving the educational conditions for the Woodlawn community, but were also dedicated to the improvement of the structural needs of the community. TWO and WCDC bought and revitalized buildings thanks to the assistance of the South East Bank, which allowed for a more professionalized atmosphere and retention of staff into safer, more up to date

[126] Arthur M. Brazier, "Black Self-Determination: The Story of the Woodlawn Organization.," ERIC, November 30, 1968, https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED035799

[127] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 137, Folder 21]

buildings. As formal organizations with paid staff members, they were able to have centralized staffing thanks to these purchases and continue their work at the grassroots level. Some of their projects included new construction sites for parks, gardens, rental apartments, and businesses, creating opportunities for the development of businesses and an increase in property values.



1 Jackson Park Terrace under construction
2 Project Rehab structures
3 Tradesman at work on Project Rehab
4 Jackson Park Terrace construction site
5 Project Rehab site

Housing

WCDC plans are underway to create a housing program specifically designed to generate a desirable market for **middle/moderate/low** income families.

New Construction

Jackson Park Terrace, currently under construction, broke ground in May, 1973. It is a 322-unit development of town houses and a 19-story high rise. Completion of construction is scheduled for December, 1974. Jackson Park Terrace is an $8.5 million housing development with an 80% black work force.

The 63rd & Dorchester site, for an additional 90 units of multi-family units, was scheduled for construction in early 1973. The plan has been temporarily delayed pending clearance of technical problems.

Woodlawn Gardens, four years after completion, is still construed to represent new construction, and is providing latitude for guidelines to be adhered to in current new construction. Many problems which arose from this $10 million, 504-unit project have been resolved through the efforts of WCDC, including over-taxation, management and leasing practices.

Project Rehab

The Kimbark project currently under construction for rehabilitation of existing housing is through the Woodlawn Redevelopment Corporation # 2.

61-6300 Kimbark Rehab, a $2 million project for rehabilitation of 101 units, began in May, 1973. Rent schedules for these studio to 5-bedroom apartments are assigned according to HUD guidelines for Section 236 subsidized housing, under the National Housing Act. Construction contracts were awarded to black community contractors.

The Woodlawn Management Corporation is a holder of properties which have been donated, and remain occupied in many instances. It is set up to hold buildings pending rehabilitation and transacts all management functions for occupied structures. It will also assume responsibility for the management of Woodlawn Gardens.

Business and Commerce

Woodlawn Gardens Shopping Plaza

Woodlawn's famed 63rd Street was once the "downtown" of the South Side. The commercial efforts of TWO / WCDC have begun a regeneration of the businesses in Woodlawn. The attempt to bring commercial interests back to Woodlawn began at its busiest intersection, 63rd & Cottage Grove. Here, the *Woodlawn Gardens Shopping Center* was erected as the commercial extension of Woodlawn Gardens residential.

[Figure 17 Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers Box 137, Folder 21]

Through these efforts, TWO was also able to create the Woodlawn Mental Health Center and Woodlawn Child Care Center, which were free for residents in Woodlawn and other local residents. Young people were also encouraged to get involved. The Harris YWCA, Opportunity Centers for tutoring services, Boys Club, Beatrice Caffrey Youth Services, South Parkway Community Center, and Boys Scouts are just some of the organizations that youth were directed to through TWO. TWO also worked with the youth over the question of job placement. Another

crucial element was the connection that TWO built with many of the local churches. Totaling at 25 church partnerships, TWO encouraged youth and their families to get involved and build community. Through these many community partnerships, TWO became and remains one of the most grassroots based organizations to advocate for the needs of its community members while also functioning to meet their immediate material needs.

Target Hope is another community-based organization that sought to bridge the gap between intergenerational communication breakdowns, while also meeting the material and psychological needs of Black youth. Described as "a city-wide community not-for-profit organization that seeks to proactively address issues facing African-Americans and other disadvantaged populations in the greater Chicagoland area," Target Hope sought to organize and mobilize community members into action by providing youth with mentors and engaging in fundraising endeavors for their organization, for Local School Councils, and for schools themselves.[128] They also had a Youth Leadership Development Committee created for the specific purpose of providing mentorship to young Black Chicagoans to cater to the needs of Black youth.

Consider also the words from the Black MBA Association, critical of Black professionals who would leave Black neighborhoods for white suburbs:

> "We must get involved in those organizations that are trying to do something about gang violence, teen pregnancy, and education…Once you move out of the Black community, and into one of the nice white suburbs, your concerns and commitments shift to where you live. Your dollars are no longer spent at the corner Black grocery store or dry cleaners, they're spent in the suburbs. Your concerns about the schools in Black neighborhoods are greatly diminished because your kids do not go there. Your involvement in Black community organizations is curtailed at best, and most likely eliminated.
>
> What we must have from the Black professionals is a commitment to remain in the community, and yes, that will involve some sacrifices. It means foregoing the big fancy

[128] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 37, Folder 16]

> house in the suburbs and living in Black neighborhoods. It may mean a longer commute every day because many corporations are now located in the suburbs.[129]

The Black MBA Association clearly identified part of the problem was the resource-drain that had begun in Black neighborhoods as Black middle class families slowly but steadily began to move out to predominantly white suburbs, creating a vacuum of wealth in the city center.[130] Not only this, but the MBA group was also able to concretely say to its members actionable items - stay in your neighborhoods, invest in your communities - because it was clear to them that governmental provisions would not fill this gap. It was a family matter - something that could only be accomplished if Black people from different socioeconomic backgrounds decided to stay and invest into each other time, resources, and energy it takes to build a community.

Community based initiatives aplenty, there were also a plethora of formal organizations and associations that organized around the education of Black youth and the conditions of Black neighborhoods, such as the League of Women, National Black Child Development Institute, the African American Education Reform Institute, V.O.T.E. (Voice of the Ethnic Community), the Chicago Urban League, the Southside Partnership, Story Corps/Griot and many others. These organizations came together to address various problems facing the Black community. Frequent problems addressed revolved around the questions of education, employment, and housing for Black urban youth and their communities. These organizations found creative ways to engage

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[129] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 120, Folder 11]

[130] For additional sources on class dynamics within the Black community, see Karyn R. Lacy, *Blue-Chip Black: Race, Class, and Status in the New Black Middle Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Mary E. Pattillo, *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril among the Black Middle Class* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013); Vershawn Ashanti Young, Bridget Harris Tsemo, and Jeanette Berry, *From Bourgeois to Boojie: Black Middle-Class Performances* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011); and E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeosie* (Glencoe, Ill: The Free Press, 1957). The competing factors in the city that led to its deterioration were also a reason as to why many Black Americans, once they achieved a higher socioeconomic status, wanted to live the urban centers - not necessarily to live in predominantly white suburbs, although some did this- but to create their own enclaves that would provide them a sense of prestige and separation from the city and all of its implicit connotations.

with the grassroots level to address these problems, while also engaging with these problems on a national level, as many other Black-majority cities like Detroit and Philadelphia experienced similar problems as Chicago.[131]

More localized efforts at the level of schools are evident through the various organizations and associations that were started to support the students at DuSable High School such as the DuSable Parents United Committee, the DuSable Alumni Foundation, the DuSable High School Foundation, the DuSable Booster Club, and several other committees that were started by former alumni to give back and support current student efforts. The capacity for the community to come together and engage each other on these problems demonstrates not only the resilience of these communities, but the long-term planning, organizing, and grassroots mobilizing it requires to have long-lasting changes.

At DuSable, the local community came together to address the onslaught of violence that the community was facing. In the 1993-94 academic year, there had been a series of violent crimes that occurred in the Woodlawn area and surrounding neighborhoods that fed into DuSable. Community members organized an ongoing series entitled "Vigil Against Violence" in which they would organize a vigil on the first day of every month to honor those who have fallen victim to violence in their neighborhoods.[132] In this light as well, DuSable High School and New Tier High School came together to organize a safe space dedicated to students and community

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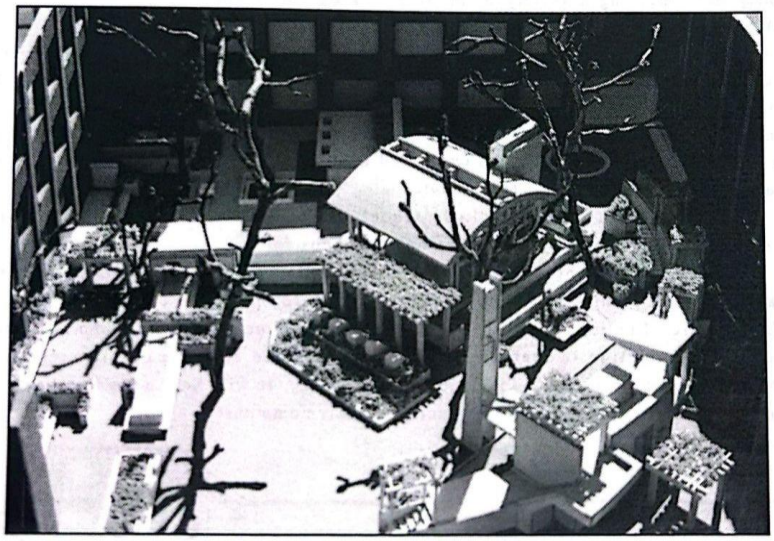
[131] Dennis Judd, "Symbolic Politics and Urban Policies: Why African Americans Got So Little from the Democrats," in *Without Justice for All: The New Liberalism and Our Retreat from Racial Equality*, ed. Adolph Reed Jr. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 123-150. Highlights how Black politicians were placed in a complicated position to meet the needs of their Black constituents but also effectively communicate their white - often business elite - counterparts on what they could do within their time as a politician. This trend is typical of many Black-majority cities that also have a Black politician in a lead roll, such as mayor, for example. In the end, simply having a Black person be representative in a political office is often not enough to ensure that working class and poor Blacks (often the same constituency who voted the politician in) is not enough to guarantee that the demands of the masses will be met.

[132] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 145, Folder 2]

members to engage in extracurricular activities and gardening, known as "The Urban Ecology Sanctuary."[133] There was also a memorialization of students from Du Sable who had passed on due to violence in the community:



[Figure 18, Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers Box 99, Folder 2]

[133] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 99, Folder 2]

In total, this repertoire of documentation demonstrates how the community came together to organize around the many problems facing their children, from violence and education to job opportunities and housing. The struggle for civil rights and social justice is an ongoing struggle that requires consistent efforts on the part of the community to organize and mobilize around not only singular issues, but around the structural constraints that have placed them in these conditions to begin with. Beyond this, a crucial element to highlight is the agency of community members to resist the framing of their communities as inherently criminal or delinquent, and to demand that outsiders view not only the problems facing their communities, but to bear witness to their humanity as they struggle for justice.

This rich tradition represents solidarity among the elderly and youth and initiatives on the part of the adults in the community to address the concerns they have regarding the future and outcomes of their children. This also demonstrates the organizing spirit that is sustained between the decades; while there is much organizing around specific problems and individual moments of crisis, there is also continual efforts to organize the community on an ongoing basis that demonstrates community solidarity, pride, and the ongoing nature of struggling for social justice and civil rights.

Still, communication breakdowns along intergenerational lines between the elderly, adults, and the youth during this period continued to plague these various efforts. In order to combat this disintegration, Tim Black organized much of his classwork at the city colleges and his *Bridges of Memory* project to combat this. He frequently assigned his students to ask their parents and grandparents about their histories, with an emphasis on the periods in which Black people migrated North and during the Civil Rights Era.[134] Black had his students interview

[134] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 8, Folder 5]

someone from an older generation on their life experiences. In one homework assignment a student wrote:

> "In the old days, there was a lot of segregation, said my father. People couldn't go to certain places when they felt like it. Akk the blacks (young and old) had to respect the whites with calling them: "yes sir," and "yes maam…" My father told me, "he didn't have a lot fancy clothes because his momma and daddy were poor."[135]

A second student wrote:

> I decided to find out ~~just~~ how much of Grandma's memory is left. Her name is Onna Jean Benni, (or Di Bennedetto - Grandpa didn't like his slave name). Her maiden name was Tadey, pronounced Today. With her twin sister, Mary, she says "everyone used to call us Today and Tomorrow". Grandma's parents were Croation immigrants that came ~~over here~~ to America at the turn of the century…She use to tell me stories about doing the Charleston, but when I asked her about it she couldn't remember. She use to talk about these things with great enthusiasm. Once she got started she's never stop. I've heard these stories hundred of times. Now it seemed the more she couldn't remember, the less she wanted to talk. Finally I said, "Well Grams', you have lived through two world wars, a conflict, a Vietnam, a desert storm, a Great Depression, Watergate, you've seen television invented, a man put on the moon, swing, bop, [and] rock n roll.[136]

A third student wrote:

> In the early 1800's Paul and Cynthia Sullivan (my great great great grandfather and mother) were sold as slaves. Slaves were auctioned similar to real estate or automobiles in today's society. Notices were posted stating when and where it would be held. It gave a description of all the "Negroes" that were going to be auctioned. Paul and Cynthia were bought by Master Curtis. When a slave was purchased, a bill of sale was granted and the slave would inherit his slave masters' last name. Paul and Cynthia Sullivan became Paul and Cynthia Curtis. They were stripped of their identity as well as their dignity.[137]

The complexity of the stories shared, as well as the physical task of having to interview someone else older than you, are tributes to Blacks' dedication that the younger generation would overcome the intergenerational divide, and be able to tell the story of their family and of their community. While most students interviewed family members, some students interviewed

[135] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 8, Folder 5]
[136] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 8, Folder 5]
[137] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers [Box 8, Folder 5]

faculty and staff at DePaul (which is where this class was based) and others interviewed elder community members. Together, these works demonstrate Blacks' efforts to engage with young people, to develop their own skills, self-identity and purpose, and to encourage them to learn about the histories of their families through dialogue, oral histories, and interviews. Many different kinds of struggle - continuity of family histories, the sharing of oral histories, engaging with community members, creating formal institutions, developing leadership skills and political education - are all forms of direct struggle against a system that sensationalizes the dehumanization of your community and your people. The efforts of Tim Black and all of these different organizations his archive represents highlight the structural nature to which organization across the decades takes place, and the ongoing nature of fighting for civil rights and social justice.

In many of these instances, the adults and elders of the community realize that their youth are being placed into impossible conditions with a shrinking workforce, deteriorating homes and city infrastructure, and subpar education, as evidenced by their constant organizing.[138] Instead of blaming their children, they sought proactive ways to engage with the youth and to meet their physical and psychological needs. However, in these works, it should be noted how absent youth voices are from the conversation. There are plenty of archival documentation of adults talking *at* the youth on what they think the problems are and how they are to go about and fix these problems, but there is very little documentation to speak to how Black youth understood their position within the wider scheme of Chicago life, economics, and politics in relation to their own

[138] Timuel D. Black, Jr. Papers: nearly all of the papers, except his biographical information, are related to community organizing, activism, and education, demonstrating the extent to which the Black community in Chicago and nationally were concerned about the growing problems in their cities and of their youth. Adults did not totally blame youth for the problems facing them, although there were tensions regarding intergenerational communication and respect.

economic possibilities (ie, jobs) and educational experiences. However, the archive lacks a robust documentation of youth voices on how they perceived the world and came to understand their own positionality. As such, youth fought to create their own spaces that would better cater to their needs.

Young Chicago Authors, Street Level, and Cultural Resistance

Street Level was an organization that began in 1991 as a response to the negative stereotypes of Black youth, particularly the demonization of hip-hop and rap music. This organization questioned these dominant narratives by asking, "what if young people had video cameras to document the world as they saw it? What stories would they tell?"[139] Similarly, the Young Chicago Authors (YCA), founded in 1998, also sought to provide an alternative space for young Chicagoans to find community and engage in making their own poetry and prose.[140] Finding archival materials from the 90s has proven difficult; however, these organizations are still in existence today, and continue to offer similar programming to what was originally offered in the 90s. These spaces have become sites of resistance for Black youth and the community to express their voices without the red-tape, creating an alternative space for both education and struggle.[141]

Realizing how limited this archive is with regard to youth voices between 1970 and 2000, it is important to highlight what little information *is* available surrounding youth voices. My original intention in this thesis was to highlight the youth as key actors in this city drama. However, the archival silences demonstrate that youth, although capable of being agents of

[139] "History," Street Level, January 27, 2020.
[140] "About," Young Chicago Authors, October 19, 2020.
[141] "History," Street Level, January 27, 2020.

change, were often ignored in terms of their capacity to achieve self-determination or to enact meaningful, lasting change in their communities. Without the backing of strong formal organizations, Black youth would not be able to legitimize their position in relation to their elders who have decades of the organizing tradition under their belt. With their usual creativity and vibrancy, Black youth sought to create their own spaces where they could tell their own stories and restore agency within their spheres of influence.

Today, Street Level offers video, audio, music production, automation, photography, graphic arts, and other forms of media as outlets for young people to share their stories.[142] YCA continues to provide a safe space for young poets and rappers to share their stories through an annual poetry festival, summer internship, open mic and songwriting workshops. Thinking about the many challenges that continue to shape the educational trajectories of many low-income Black youth in CPS, we can imagine the kinds of things that Black youth in the 90s would speak about. This past-present continuum is important for understanding education as a continual site of struggle for Black Americans, and as an opportunity for Black Americans to engage in practices that affirms their citizenship rights, and their human rights.[143] As Black history and other groups' histories continue to be attacked and marginalized in the current political climate, it is essential now more than ever that we have spaces available to engage young people so that they may tell their own stories from their own perspectives, from the inside-out instead of giving prescriptions to conditions we interpret from the outside-in.

Conclusion

Off Script:

[142] "History," Street Level.
[143] Nuamah, *Closed for Democracy* and Ewing, *Original Sins*.

A note on the 2010s school closings, community resistance, and the Black radical tradition

Storytelling is a crucial element to how racism in America is reproduced. It is through the narratives we tell ourselves, and the narratives that become reproduced in the society at large, that allows for the ongoing disappearance of Indigenous bodies and criminalization of Black bodies in popular discourse/imagination, in our policies, and in our schools.[144] This thesis is an effort to combat the dominant narratives that function to create a reigning *logos* that dehumanizes Black and Brown people by revealing the structural nature of systemic divestment as well as the extent to which the Black community resisted these labels and tactics for survival and community building. In this thesis, the Black community become agents of active resistance to the attempts to narrate them as stagnant actors. It is not because of inherent delinquencies in their culture, nor is it a foregone conclusion that they must be confined to conditions of abject poverty, systemic divestment, and marginalization. Black people are active agents in their own histories and storytelling, if we can base our analysis from the perspective of the grassroots as opposed from a top-down approach to our analysis. In this way, I hope this thesis can contribute to the Black radical tradition of resistance to the violence of colonial narratives surrounding them as subaltern subjects.

From the systemic divestment of the 70s to the punitive carceral logics of the 80s and the superpredator typologies of the 90s, Black youth were caught in what I have called a double bind: expected to thrive in systems designed to fail them, and then blamed for not excelling when they were forced to navigate the desolated academic and economic landscape in the wake of systemic divestment. Black youth and predominantly Black communities were experiencing the fallout of decades long divestment and the inculcation of carceral logics to under-resourced

[144] Ewing, *Original Sins*.

communities, resulting in an increased police presence, increased surveillance, and an increased demonization of Black communities, particularly of Black youth. This criminalization was constructed through policy, media, and institutional neglect. Black majority cities like Chicago were punished for its poverty, ongoing trauma, and for resistance, and for simply existing in bodies that had been denoted as inherently delinquent and dangerous.[145] Arguably, these carceral logics are what set the foundation for the set of school closures in the 2000s and 2010s, resulting in a reproduction of systemic divestment and inequalities as communities lost one of the few institutions that are a consistent cornerstone in a constantly evolving urban environment: their public schools.[146] The purpose of this thesis is to uncover how the criminalization of Black youth in Chicago came to a head in the 90s through a structural analysis of policies and media. I traced the political and cultural arc from the 1970s-1990s that created the foundation for the application of carceral logic in school settings, high-stakes testing, and racialized punishment and surveillance. What this history reveals is that the conditions facing Black youth in CPS during the 90s were not natural, inevitable, or as some kind of direct result of the shortcomings of Black culture: they were the result of deliberate political choices, racist media narratives, and structural abandonment. Additionally, I hope this research helps to further contextualize the latter carceral logics and criminalization that were applied to commend the string of school closings in the 2010s as the best option through the framework of market logics. Once again, Black bodies were reduced to numbers and statistics for the purposes of efficiency and profit, resulting in disproportionate effects being endured by predominantly Black communities.

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[145] Mary E. Pattillo, *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril among the Black Middle Class* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 70.
[146] Nuamah, *Closed for Democracy*.

While the archival work focuses on schools in CPS, many of the secondary sources explain a similar phenomenon across the United States, implying that this framework not only applies to Chicago; rather, it is a manifestation of the kinds of problems that structural racism can create that all majority-minority cities in the United States experience at varying degrees. In today's world, the media's role in constructing narratives of Black youth deviance has only intensified with the rise of social media and real-time surveillance with increasingly advanced technologies like artificial intelligence. Viral clips of Black students in altercations circulate the internet with little context, reinforcing the same fears that animated the superpredator panic three decades earlier.[147] Meanwhile, school districts continue to face scrutiny under decreasing budgets and federal aid cutbacks characteristic of the second Trump administration.[148] Beyond this, this "achievement gap" remains a central feature of education discourse, but still fails to develop a structural analysis of how or why Black youth routinely underachieve in comparison to their white peers, and continues to rely heavily on scripts of cultural deficiency to explain away decades of structural divestment and abandonment. The study of Chicago allows for broader implications across other Black-majority cities in the United States that faced similar trends of divestment, the criminalization of Black-bodies in the media, facing the effects of "shrinking cities," and their efforts in resisting the educational crisis as a result of these culminating factors.[149]

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[147] "School Fight Videos," WorldstarHipHop, accessed July 26, 2025. I include this to demonstrate that not only are fights going viral in today's media, but that there is an appetite to see Black pain and trauma repurposed as entertainment. This website produces hundreds of school fight videos, many of which have hundreds of thousands of views, with virtually no context as to why the fights occur. The website has hundreds of videos in which young Black high schoolers engage in altercations, often on school property, with each other, teachers, administration, and staff. This feed of imagery functions to uphold Blackness as something criminal and deviant, perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

[148] Trump administration withholds $7 billion from schools; advocates to Sue - The Washington Post, accessed July 4, 2025,

[149]Desimini, "From Planned Shrinkage."

More than anything, this thesis seeks to highlight the many ways in which community members and youth resisted their positioning as criminal and deviant. Through grassroots organizing, these community members were able to build powerful counter-narratives to contradict the dominant narratives being reproduced by the society at large of what it meant to be young and Black in the 90s. Future research should take seriously the process of documenting, archiving, and uplifting the voices of the youth - especially youth of low socioeconomic status - who often do not have access to traditional avenues to share their own lived experiences. It is crucial that we understand the processes surrounding the kinds of stories we tell about ourselves and about others. The best way to ensure that a holistic understanding of these stories are preserved is through dedicated memory work, sharing oral histories, and creating accessible, living archives where communities can come together to tell their story from the inside out.

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