

# Space for Whom? Negotiating Displacement and Development



# The Obama Presidential Center and South Side Community Benefits Agreement Coalition

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## Introduction

### Theoretical Problem and Research Question

The Obama Presidential Center is expected to open in Jackson Park in the South Side's Woodlawn neighborhood in 2021.<sup>1</sup> Controversial since inception, the center has provoked both excitement and fear within surrounding neighborhoods such as Hyde Park, South Shore, Washington Park, and Woodlawn. Some community groups wholeheartedly praise and support the Obama Foundation's plan, some deplore the use of publicly owned parkland as the site for the center, and still others celebrate the possibilities, but fear displacement stemming from gentrification. In September 2016, four South Side community organizations formed the Obama Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) Coalition and launched a campaign for a CBA.<sup>2</sup> The coalition asked the Obama Foundation, the City of Chicago, and the University of Chicago (collective *the Library* in the coalition's

1. Jay Koziarz, "Judge Dismisses Lawsuit Blocking Obama Center Construction in Jackson Park," *Curbed Chicago*, Jun. 11, 2019.

2. The coalition has six members and twenty-two ally members in 2018, see appendix 2.

discourse) to agree on a set of development principles.<sup>3</sup> In 2018, the coalition drafted a CBA that would legally bind the three institutions to specific measures concerning affordable housing, jobs, economic development, sustainability, education, and transportation infrastructure within the five-mile radius of the center.<sup>4</sup>

The foundation says that CBAs are appropriate strategies to control private developers wanting to profit from community change, not for a nonprofit organization whose goal is to invest in the community.<sup>5</sup> It states that the center will not cause gentrification in the near future.<sup>6</sup> The coalition has met with Michael Strautmanis, the foundation's vice president

3. "2016 Development Principles," CBA for the Obama Library, Sept. 29, 2016, [www.obamacba.org/principles.html](http://www.obamacba.org/principles.html); Meredith Ogilvie, "Local Organizations Launch Community Benefits Agreement Campaign," *Hyde Park Herald*, Sept. 30, 2016.

4. "2018 Ordinance Outline," CBA for the Obama Library, [www.obamacba.org/2018-ordinance-outline.html](http://www.obamacba.org/2018-ordinance-outline.html). The first CBA in the United States was established in 2001, negotiated between Los Angeles residents, businesses, and organizations and the Los Angeles City Council's Sports and Entertainment District development. "Los Angeles Sports and Entertainment District CBA," Partnership for Working Families, accessed Apr. 24, 2018, [www.forworkingfamilies.org/resources/staples-cba](http://www.forworkingfamilies.org/resources/staples-cba).

5. Barack Obama said that "the community benefit agreement concept is actually one that can be a really useful tool ... if you have a bunch of developers coming in that want to build a high-rise or for-profit enterprise in your neighborhood. ... But here's the thing: we are a nonprofit and aren't making money. We are just bringing money to the community." Lolly Bowean, "Obama Personally Answers Questions at Chicago Presidential Library Forum," *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 15, 2017.

6. Obama said that gentrification is "not what's happening. We have such a long way to go before you will start seeing the prospect of gentrification.... Right now, we've got to worry about broken curbs and trash and boarded-up buildings." Lolly Bowean and Blair Kamin, "Obama Makes Pitch for His Center in Jackson Park: 'Too Much Development' Has Not Been a Problem for the South Side," *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 27, 2018.

of civic engagement, but has not entered into any negotiations.<sup>7</sup> The city and the university have been silent on a CBA. After organizers showed up unannounced at the mayor's office, the office granted the coalition a meeting with a deputy mayor, who said the city would need to study CBAs signed in other cities before it could make a decision. The coalition last heard from the mayor's office in February 2018.<sup>8</sup> The coalition nonetheless persists, arguing that unless a CBA is negotiated, low-income black residents will be displaced.<sup>9</sup>

The foundation has a unique and unusual status, because it is neither a for-profit developer nor a public project.<sup>10</sup> It is a nonprofit organization dependent on fundraising, and it conceives of the center as a benefit to the South Side, as a space for collaborative civic engagement, and as a museum "celebrating President and Mrs. Obama's legacy."<sup>11</sup> The peculiarity of this situation is enhanced by the construction of the center on twenty acres in publicly owned Jackson Park, a National Historic Place designed by Olmsted and Vaux in 1871, which the foundation will lease from the city for a nominal fee.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the foundation occupies a liminal

7. Yunhan Wen, "More Say from the South Side." *South Side Weekly*, May 23, 2017.

8. Bowean and Kamin, "Obama Makes Pitch," *Chicago Tribune*.

9. Editor's note: for progress on the coalition's efforts since the thesis was written in spring 2018, see the epilogue and appendix 1.

10. The Barack Presidential Center "will be a privately operated, non-federal organization." The National Archives and Records Administration, which administers the separate Barack Obama Presidential Library, will lend some records and artifacts to the center. "About the Library," Barack Obama Presidential Library, accessed June 13, 2019, [www.obamalibrary.gov/about-us](http://www.obamalibrary.gov/about-us).

11. The Obama Presidential Center, Obama Foundation, accessed Jan. 22, 2018, [www.obama.org/the-center/](http://www.obama.org/the-center/).

12. Blair Kamin, "Obama Center Plans Won't Destroy Olmsted's Park," *Chicago Tribune*, Jan. 20, 2018; "City Council Unanimously Approves 99-Year Lease for Obama Center," *Chicago Maroon*, Oct. 31, 2018.

space between the connotations or common conceptions of “private,” and “public” organizations.

Out of this situation emerges a question: when an organization leading a major development project arrives in the neighborhood, how do neighborhood residents and the organization make geographic assertions? In other words, how do they justify and legitimize their use of a particular urban space? What happens when the residents are low income? How is this process complicated by the project’s participation in and departure from the tradition of presidential libraries? How are the geographic assertions further complicated by Barack Obama’s status as a beloved political figure in Chicago and especially on the South Side? How does this process unfold in surrounding neighborhoods, specifically in Woodlawn? This study will focus on the Obama CBA Coalition, which is one among many interested groups. The coalition does not speak for the entire neighborhood, but represents the interests of low-income black residents and allied groups.

In our contemporary urban landscape, in which gentrification pushes people of color out of their neighborhoods and cities, these are relevant questions to ask of developer-resident interactions. What tools do the coalition and the foundation use to claim their “right to the city”?<sup>13</sup> How does an institutional status versus a residential status, especially that of low-income residents, affect the way groups leverage identity, history, and world view to assert themselves as legitimate users of a space? How does the dominant discourse legitimize (or delegitimize) a person’s claim to a particular urban space and affect the way that neighborhood residents assert their claims? In other words, how do low-income black residents claim the right to an urban space when they do not have the credentials mandated by wider society? Besides the relevance of these questions to wider discussions about power and space, they are important because future presidential centers may likewise step out of the canon of a presidential

13. See, Henri Lefebvre, *Le Droit à la Ville* (Paris: Anthropos, 1968); Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York: Guilford Press, 2003).

library and envision themselves as community centers or platforms for enhancing a city's global reputation.

The Woodlawn neighborhood in and of itself is an interesting setting for such a study. It contains a rich history of black culture, and etched in the memories of residents are historical and contemporary experiences of institutional racism and disinvestment. Woodlawn is in flux, with a rising reputation as a "hot market" for real-estate developers. The changes that will come with the center are high stakes for residents and other interested parties.

## Literature Review and Methodology

From September 2016 to September 2017, I conducted exploratory interviews with Woodlawn residents, attended public community meetings, and carried out a two-month ethnographic survey in one of Woodlawn's community gardens, which included participating in the communal work days and speaking one-on-one with garden participants. Through these interviews, conversations, and interactions, I sought to understand neighborhood identity, the dynamics of gentrification and displacement, and residents' experiences of these changes. The arrival of the Obama Presidential Center was a lively topic of conversation for Woodlawn residents, and these conversations were the seeds of my study. The center emerged as a way to articulate topics of neighborhood identity and change. While my study relies on textual analysis rather than on ethnographic and interview data, the field work was the crucial beginning.

The most important methodological guide for my study is Gabriella Gahlia Modan, a cultural anthropologist and linguist. Modan studied a multiethnic DC neighborhood called Mount Pleasant that was undergoing gentrification in the 1990s. She uses linguistic discourse analysis to study how different community groups use language to "create and contest visions of their neighborhood,"<sup>14</sup> through claims about its identity and

14. Gabriella Gahlia Modan, *Turf Wars: Discourse, Diversity, and the Politics of Place* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 6.

its spaces. Modan examines spoken and written texts. She draws from casual conversations, community meetings, grant proposals, emails, press, and other literature generated by individuals or organizations.<sup>15</sup> Her working definition of discourse is the “ways of talking, writing, and signing; patterns of recurring themes, linguistic forms, and modes of conversational interaction.”<sup>16</sup> In her framework, discourse is relevant because how we talk about a place affects how a place changes and develops materially.<sup>17</sup>

Modan differentiates between two kinds of discourse: “big D” and “little d.” Big D involves linguistic constructions of large social categories (such as age, race, and geographical boundaries) and how these categories promote particular power relations. This approach looks at the general content of written and spoken statements without focusing on “specific instances of discourse [such as spoken sentences] . . . as objects of commentary or analysis”<sup>18</sup> Sentences themselves, called “utterances,” are the basis of little d analysis. A person’s utterances describe a particular world view by using “social knowledge, attitudes, and values.”<sup>19</sup> Modan uses little d analysis to determine how a person’s utterances effect meaning and uses big D to analyze the ways society talks about urban life.<sup>20</sup>

According to Modan, a person or an organization emphasizes certain perspectives and deemphasizes others by using “deictic centers.”<sup>21</sup> A deictic center is “the base point where a speaker locates themselves spatially, temporally, and socially” in their utterances.<sup>22</sup> In linguistics, a deictic

15. *Ibid.*, 24.

16. *Ibid.*, 6.

17. *Ibid.*, 7.

18. *Ibid.*, 293.

19. *Ibid.*, 276.

20. *Ibid.*, 277.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*, 148.

center is determined through context; it only exists relative to a group on the margins.<sup>23</sup> In grammar, the actor at the deictic center is the subject of the sentence and uses active verbs that communicate agency; conversely, the group at the margins is the object of the sentence and is described with passive verbs that communicate a lack of agency and suggests a real-world passivity.<sup>24</sup> Looking at the grammatical structure of utterances, Modan asks who is a core member and who is a marginal member of Mount Pleasant? Who are the “real” residents?

Using Modan’s framework as a guide, I analyzed the written and spoken discourse of the Obama Foundation and the Obama CBA Coalition. These include websites, flyers, social media, spoken statements to the press, and my interviews with coalition members and Woodlawn residents.<sup>25</sup> The term *discourse* means the pattern of themes and linguistic forms in speech and writing that expresses particular views and ideas. My focus is primarily on thematic content, and I examine linguistic form only in the context of locating the deictic center of the speakers’ discourses.

Following Modan, I began by looking at the nexus of discourse and neighborhood identity. What does the use of language about the center say about the foundation’s and coalition’s identities and relationships to Woodlawn? How do both groups perceive change in Woodlawn? I predicted that both would leverage ideas about the “true” identity of the neighborhood in order to advance their goals, perhaps referencing South Side history and culture, as well as the figure of Barack Obama. However, an in-depth reading of the texts of the coalition and foundation reveals that a particular conception of Woodlawn identity was not the consistent thread of the discourse of both groups. Rather, the consistent thread is the justification and legitimization of their use of space in Woodlawn—

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid., 157.

25. I have given pseudonyms to some interviewees in order to protect their privacy.



both groups argue for their right to use and shape the space of Woodlawn, and why their argument is credible or authoritative.

In this study, the term *justification* refers to the ideas used by the organizations to respond to the question, “why do you have a right to use and change this space?” The term *legitimization* is the process by which the organizations answer the question, “how do you show you are credible or authoritative enough to make these claims?” Each organization’s position at the deictic center or margin of power affects the ideas that they use to justify and legitimize their geographic claims.

I combined linguistic analysis with an analysis of the cultural geography of Woodlawn. I use the term *geographic assertions* as adapted by black studies and the cultural geography scholar Katherine McKittrick.<sup>26</sup> The coalition frames its geographic assertions in terms of history, desire, and vision: members want to remain in their historically black neighborhood, not only to avoid displacement, but also to envision a kind of development that will benefit them. The foundation frames its geographic assertions in terms of mission and legitimacy: its mission is to bring resources into the South Side by leaders whose original homes were on the South Side. The claims of the foundation and coalition operate on two distinct scales: neighborhood and district.

26. Katherine McKittrick, “Freedom is a Secret: The Future Usability of the Underground,” in *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, ed. Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Adrian Woods (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2007), 97–111. McKittrick examines how the history of the Underground Railroad produces geographic assertions about who has knowledge, such as “the claim of black geographic ignorance, the intimate knowledge that black slaves had about their surroundings; and how the Underground Railroad, in the present, gets mapped as a knowable location.”

## Historical Inheritances and Contemporary Dynamics

### History of Woodlawn

Dutch farmers settled in the area now known as Woodlawn in the 1850s, and Chicago annexed it in 1889. The population was small (less than one thousand) until the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition brought twenty thousand new residents to the area.<sup>27</sup>

Since the 1930s and the beginnings of the Great Migration of blacks from the South to the North, the University of Chicago tried to control the racial composition of its neighborhood, Hyde Park, and the surrounding neighborhoods of Oakland, Kenwood, and Woodlawn.<sup>28</sup> A housing shortage during the thirties and forties and subsequent overcrowding led blacks to migrate from the "Black Belt," west of Cottage Grove Avenue.<sup>29</sup> The university and community groups, such as the Hyde Park–Kenwood Community Conference (HPKCC) and the university-sponsored South East Chicago Commission (SECC), shared the perception that Hyde Park was in danger. HPKCC sought to integrate middle-class black families into the neighborhood. SECC sought to keep the area white with restrictive covenants, redlining, and other "urban renewal" efforts.<sup>30</sup> The Blighted Areas Redevelopment Act of 1947 enabled the university to implement the "conserve" development model, initially in Hyde Park and later in Woodlawn.<sup>31</sup> Julian H. Levi, a University of Chicago alumnus

27. Amanda Seligman, "Woodlawn," *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, 2004, [www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1378.html](http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1378.html).

28. John W. Boyer, *The University of Chicago: A History* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005).

29. Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940–1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983, 1998), 136.

30. *Ibid.*, 5.

31. *Ibid.*, 137.

and SECC's executive director, developed the university's plan and persuaded the Illinois State Legislature to revise the related "Neighborhood Redevelopment Corporation Act of 1947 to give the university the right of eminent domain (if a redevelopment corporation secured the approval of 60 percent of property owners in a specific area, the corporation could take independent legal action to remove blighted properties)."<sup>32</sup> Historian Arnold Hirsch argues that the university tried to "create an economically upgraded and predominantly white neighborhood,"<sup>33</sup> an effort that extended into the Woodlawn neighborhood and resulted in the demolition of "blighted" properties and subsequent forced housing relocations.<sup>34</sup>

Until the 1950s, Woodlawn had remained mostly white and middle class.<sup>35</sup> By 1960, the area was predominantly black, with more than eighty thousand residents.<sup>36</sup> The public policies associated with urban planning and development "played a key role in fostering, sustaining, and, not infrequently, intensifying the separation of the races even in the absence of Jim Crow legislation."<sup>37</sup>

32. Boyer, 346.

33. Hirsch, 127.

34. Boyer, 35.

35. Loïc Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts: Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2008), 53.

36. *Ibid.*, 57–58.

37. *Ibid.*, viii.

## Contemporary Woodlawn: Development and the Obama Presidential Center

A 2015 study by the architecture firm Gentler found that Woodlawn has an “estimated fifty-nine acres of vacant city-owned land, with an additional eighty-five acres of vacant land owned privately.”<sup>38</sup> In 2017, the real estate brokerage, Redfin, classified Woodlawn as the country’s “third hottest neighborhood” in off-market home values.<sup>39</sup> In the first half of 2017, Woodlawn’s off-market home values increased by 23 percent, compared to 4.6 percent for Chicago overall.<sup>40</sup>

Besides the center, the three other high-profile development plans in Woodlawn are the University of Chicago’s new dorm and convention center and a privately build hotel.<sup>41</sup> The dorm, called Woodlawn Residential

38. Sam Cholke, “Will Obama’s Library Help the South Side? New Group Says That’s Their Goal,” DNAinfo, Mar. 13, 2017, [www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20170313/jackson-highlands/barack-obama-presidential-library-woodlawn-washington-park-south-shore/](http://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20170313/jackson-highlands/barack-obama-presidential-library-woodlawn-washington-park-south-shore/).

39. Jon Whitely, “Hot or Not? Redfin Reviews Its Hottest Neighborhood Predictions and Identifies 10 Areas That Are Just Heating Up,” Redfin, Aug. 18, 2017, [www.redfin.com/blog/hot-or-not-hottest-neighborhood-predictions.htm](http://www.redfin.com/blog/hot-or-not-hottest-neighborhood-predictions.htm). Off-market homes are not listed in the public databases that real-estate agents use to list properties and are only available in exclusive deals between agents and, usually cash, buyers. See, “About the Redfin Estimate,” Redfin, accessed Mar. 20, 2018, [www.redfin.com/redfin-estimate](http://www.redfin.com/redfin-estimate); Laura Agadoni, “Sell Your House without Putting It on the Market,” Trulia, Jan. 3, 2018, [www.trulia.com/blog/how-to-sell-your-house-pocket-listing/](http://www.trulia.com/blog/how-to-sell-your-house-pocket-listing/).

40. Sam Cholke, “Woodlawn Home Values Soar as Obama Library Draws New Interest to Area,” DNAinfo, Sept. 12, 2017, [www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20170912/woodlawn/home-values-increase-redfin-barack-obama-presidential-library-center-prices-real-estate-markets-hot-jackson-park/](http://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20170912/woodlawn/home-values-increase-redfin-barack-obama-presidential-library-center-prices-real-estate-markets-hot-jackson-park/).

41. Grace Hauck, “The Maroon Weekly, E3,” podcast, *Chicago Maroon*, accessed Mar. 5, 2018, [soundcloud.com/chicagomaroonpodcast/the-maroon-weekly-e3](https://soundcloud.com/chicagomaroonpodcast/the-maroon-weekly-e3).

Commons, will be located between Woodlawn and University Avenues on the north side of 61st Street and will house 1,200 students; construction began in 2018, and it will open in 2020.<sup>42</sup> Habitation 3, a New York firm, will build a 180-room hotel, called the Study at the University of Chicago, on the corner of 60th Street and Dorchester Avenue.<sup>43</sup> West of the hotel, at 60th Street and Woodlawn Avenue, the university's new conference center, named the Rubenstein Forum, will host academic conferences, workshops, lectures, meetings, and ceremonies.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, in 2016, the university purchased land in Woodlawn at 63rd Street and University Avenue for the new home for a university charter school.<sup>45</sup> Other recent construction in Woodlawn includes MetroSquash, an educational and recreational center, five apartment buildings and the Woodlawn Resource Center built by the nonprofit Preservation of Affordable Housing Chicago, and a Jewel-Osco grocery and pharmacy at 61st Street and Cottage Grove Avenue.<sup>46</sup>

42. University of Chicago, "University of Chicago to Continue Expansion of College Housing," UChicago News, Jan. 23, 2018, [news.uchicago.edu/article/2018/01/23/university-chicago-continue-expansion-college-housing](https://news.uchicago.edu/article/2018/01/23/university-chicago-continue-expansion-college-housing).

43. Sam Cholke, "U. of C. Unveils Plans for 15-Story Hotel One Block from Obama Library," DNAINfo, May 11, 2017, [www.dnainfo.com/chicago/2017/05/11/woodlawn/university-of-chicago-hotel-obama-library-the-study-rooms/](http://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/2017/05/11/woodlawn/university-of-chicago-hotel-obama-library-the-study-rooms/).

44. Calmetta Coleman, "UChicago Provides Construction and Safety Updates at Woodlawn Meeting," University of Chicago Civic Engagement, May 11, 2017, [civicengagement.uchicago.edu/features/uchicago-provides-construction-and-safety-updates-at-woodlawn-meeting/](https://civicengagement.uchicago.edu/features/uchicago-provides-construction-and-safety-updates-at-woodlawn-meeting/).

45. Sam Cholke, "U. of C. Buys 26 Properties," DNAINfo, Dec. 10, 2014; "New Woodlawn Facility Officially Opens," UChicago Charter, accessed Apr. 14, 2018, [www.uchicagocharter.org/page.cfm?p=538&newsid=30](http://www.uchicagocharter.org/page.cfm?p=538&newsid=30).

46. Mary Wisniewski, "Can a New 'L' Construction Project Turn a Dark Woodlawn Intersection into a Bright Spot?" *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 8, 2018.

The observations of one Woodlawn resident, called Lorenzo for the purpose of the study, captures the lived experience of residents that is not in quantitative data points:

I've watching the neighborhood change in front of my eyes.... It's changed so much since I've been here. You know, redevelopment with the tearing down of the projects, the tearing down of the housing projects on Cottage. It's been quite an experience, you know, seeing the demographics change. I think the property value's going up and I think rent's gonna go up.... It's going to be just a matter of time before a lot of us have to move. I mean, that's the only thing that's scary about that.... See with me, I'm going to school and soon I'll be worth a few more dollars, so I could probably maintain and manage. But the people that's rent is only \$800 for a two-bedroom, if that goes up to 1,000 or 1,200 then they're not gonna be able to do that. If it goes up an extra fifty dollars ... let alone, hundreds. It's gonna be a total shift, probably the next ten, fifteen years, I can guarantee you.... This is going to be Hyde Park Two. When the businesses start coming in and the rent starts going up and you know, people start moving out and the crime goes way down, it's going to look very attractive to anyone.<sup>47</sup>

It is in the context of these changes that community groups have developed stances concerning the effect, unintended or intended, of center on the area.

The Obama Foundation announced in 2015 that the center would be built in Chicago and selected Jackson Park for its location in 2016 (see appendix 1 for timeline).<sup>48</sup> Alderman Willie Cochran, whose 20th Ward

47. Lorenzo (Woodlawn resident), interview with the author, Nov. 6, 2016.

48. Julie Bosman and Mitch Smith, "Chicago Wins Bid to Host Obama Library," *New York Times*, May 12, 2015; Kathy Bergen, Blair Kamin, and Katherine Skiba, "Obama Chooses Historic Jackson Park as Library Site," *Chicago Tribune*, July 27, 2016.

**Table 1: Stakeholders and Their CBA Stances**

Center with CBA	Center without CBA	Relocate from Park
Obama CBA Coalition	Obama Foundation Emerald South Economic Development Collaborative*	Cultural Landscape Foundation Friends of the Park
20th Ward <small>WEST OF THE CENTER</small> Ald. Willie Cochrane Ald. Jeanette Taylor Mayor Lori Lightfoot	5th Ward <small>LOCATION OF THE CENTER</small> Ald. Leslie Hairston*** Mayor Rahm Emanuel	
(anecdotally) low-income or working-class South Siders, including West Woodlawn****	(anecdotally) middle- and upper-income South Siders, including East Woodlawn****	185 University of Chicago faculty

encompasses the majority of Woodlawn west of the park, indicated that, “the residents have mixed feelings [about the center]. Happy because of the promise of hope, jobs, safety, and a vibrant community with more food choices. Temper that with fear of displacement and strangers they know nothing about.”<sup>49</sup> Besides the Obama CBA Coalition, other groups that have responded to the center include Chicago’s Friends of the Park, the DC’s Cultural Landscape Foundation, a group of University of Chicago faculty, and the newly formed Emerald South Economic Development Collaborative (see table 1).

49. Stan West, “South Siders on Obama Library: Listen to Us!” *Chicago Defender*, May 1, 2017.

<b>Mixed Reaction</b>	
Citywide news media**	<p>* Previously, the Woodlawn, Washington Park and South Shore Community and Economic Development Organization.</p> <p>** <i>Chicago Defender</i>, <i>Chicago Reporter</i>, <i>Chicago South Side Weekly</i>, <i>Chicago Sun-Times</i>, <i>Chicago Tribune</i>, and DNAinfo.</p>
	<p>*** Hairston now supports a CBA after narrowly winning reelection in 2019; her opponent was pro-CBA.<sup>50</sup></p> <p>**** Surveys would be needed to determine the positions of residents in the surrounding neighborhoods.</p>
	<p>50. Aaron Gettinger, "Hairston Now Backs CBA for Obama Center," <i>Hyde Park Herald</i>, Mar. 25, 2019.</p>

The network of organizations in Woodlawn and nearby neighborhoods is too complex and intertwined to parse into two "sides," but in broad strokes, Emerald South represents the "establishment" and the Obama CBA Coalition, the "grassroots." Like the coalition, Emerald South wants residents to benefit from the center and not be displaced and encourages neighborhood economic activity, but unlike the coalition, Emerald South does not support a CBA.<sup>51</sup> In 2017, the Chicago Community Trust gave

51. Previously called the Woodlawn, Washington Park and South Shore Community and Economic Development Organization ([wwpss.org](http://wwpss.org)), as of 2018, it is called the Emerald South Economic Development Collaborative ([emerald-south.org](http://emerald-south.org)).



the new nonprofit half its start-up costs (\$25,000).<sup>52</sup> Its board includes leaders of the Obama Foundation (Michael Strautmanis, vice president for civic engagement), the City of Chicago (Andrea Zopp, a deputy mayor, and David Reifman, head of planning and development), the University of Chicago (Susan Sher, advisor the president and Michelle Obama's former chief of staff), Network of Woodlawn,<sup>53</sup> the Washington Park Consortium,<sup>54</sup> and the Chicago Community Trust.<sup>55</sup> The board also includes important community religious leaders: Reverends Torrey Barrett, Leon Finney, and Byron Brazier. Barrett is the executive director of the nonprofit Keep Loving Each Other in Washington Park, Finney is the cofounder of the Woodlawn Organization formed in the sixties, and Brazier is the pastor of Apostolic Church of God.<sup>56</sup> Finney and Brazier own

52. In 2018, the Chicago Community Trust gave Emerald South an additional \$250,000, and the organization is seeking an additional \$2 million from other foundations. See, Lisa Bertagnoli, "Next in the Obama Center Story: Neighborhood Development," *Crain's Chicago Business*, Mar. 7, 2018.

53. The nonprofit community-development organization focuses on education, health, safety, and economic development. "About," Network of Woodlawn, accessed Apr. 24, 2018, [www.facebook.com/pg/NetworkofWoodlawn/about/?ref=page\\_internal](http://www.facebook.com/pg/NetworkofWoodlawn/about/?ref=page_internal).

54. Convened by 20th Ward Alderman Willie Cochran, the Washington Park Consortium developed a "Quality-of-Life Plan," with the goal of community and economic development. Its Planning Task Force steering committee included Mattie Hunter, Illinois State Senator; Donna Hampton-Smith, staff member, 5th District Office of Illinois State Representative Ken Dunkin; Sonya Malunda, staff member, Office of Civic Engagement, University of Chicago; and pastors from local churches, such as Rev. Torrey Barrett. "Washington Park Quality of Life Plan," May 2009, LISC Chicago's New Communities Program, [www.newcommunities.org/cmadocs/WashPark\\_QofLPlan\\_2009.pdf](http://www.newcommunities.org/cmadocs/WashPark_QofLPlan_2009.pdf).

55. Lynn Sweet, "SWEET: Big Job for Obama Center Nonprofit," *Chicago Sun-Times*, Aug. 30, 2017.

56. Lynn Sweet, "Arne Duncan Is Co-chair of New Nonprofit Related to Obama Center," *Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 29, 2017.

significant amounts of land in Woodlawn and have good relationships with the University of Chicago,<sup>57</sup> residents consider them influential figures, and one columnist for the *Chicago Defender* called them “aristocrats.”<sup>58</sup>

Emerald South’s mission is to capture the economic benefits of the Obama Presidential Center for the surrounding neighborhoods.<sup>59</sup> A CBA is not part of their strategy, and individual members have said publicly that they disagree with a CBA. Emerald South’s website (as well as the Obama Foundation’s website) does not state who founded the organization, but the *Tribune* reports that it was created by the foundation, the city, the university, and the Chicago Community Trust, with help from the Network of Woodlawn and the Washington Park Consortium.<sup>60</sup> Barrett and Brazier were leaders in the planning process and Arne Duncan, Obama’s education secretary, is Emerald South’s cochair.<sup>61</sup> In 2018, the board was developing a business plan and operating model.<sup>62</sup> The symbiotic relationship between the foundation and Emerald South is reminiscent of the relationship in the 1950s between the University of Chicago and the South East Chicago Commission during the “urban renewal” period.<sup>63</sup>

The stance of Chicago journalists towards the center is mixed. *Tribune* architecture critic Blair Kamin argues that the center will not destroy the

57. Andre, Anthony, and Kevin (Woodlawn residents), interview with the author, Nov. 23, 2016.

58. West, “South Siders on Obama Library,” *Chicago Defender*.

59. Sweet, “Arne Duncan Is Co-chair,” *Chicago Sun-Times*.

60. Sweet, “SWEET: Big Job for Obama Center,” *Chicago Sun-Times*.

61. Bertagnoli, “Next in the Obama Center Story,” *Crain’s Chicago Business*; Sweet, “Arne Duncan Is Co-chair,” *Chicago Sun-Times*.

62. Woodlawn, Washington Park and South Shore Community and Economic Development Organization, accessed Mar. 12, 2018, wwps.org.

63. Anne Li and Mari Cohen, “The Past and Future of the SECC,” *Chicago South Side Weekly*, Apr. 26, 2017.

intentions of the nineteenth-century architect, Frederick Law Olmstead, who “embraced the need to adapt his parks to changing times and circumstances.”<sup>64</sup> *Tribune* columnist Dahleen Glanton characterizes the CBA proposal as counterproductive to improving conditions on the South Side and appeals to black South Siders to fully support the center. She writes that prolonged South Side disinvestment has left residents unnecessarily cautious and fearful of change: “sometimes we can become so accustomed to not having anything that we forget that we deserve everything. We fear that change could rob of us the few crumbs we have been able to scrape together for ourselves.”<sup>65</sup> *Chicago Reporter* contributor Jitu Brown argues that because of the history of racism in Chicago, a written legal agreement is essential to guarantee that the foundation’s development partners will invest without displacing residents: “while Obama urged residents to ‘trust’ him, we have good reason to want his assurances in writing.”<sup>66</sup>

## Canon of Presidential Libraries

The Obama Presidential Center departs from past presidential libraries in its self-presentation, funding structure, and vision. Presidential libraries have functioned historically as archives and museums—preserving presidential papers and presenting a particular narrative of his presidency, personal life, and aspirations.<sup>67</sup> A presidential foundation raises money

64. Kamin, “Obama Center Plans Won’t Destroy,” *Chicago Tribune*.

65. Dahleen Glanton, “It’s Time for a Heart-to-Heart with African-Americans Who Are Resisting the Obama Center,” *Chicago Tribune*, Mar. 1, 2018.

66. Jitu Brown, “Why the Obama Library Needs a Community Benefits Agreement,” *Chicago Reporter*, Oct. 30, 2017. Brown is a member of KOCO, one of the coalition’s founding organizations.

67. “Presidential Libraries promote understanding of the presidency and the American experience. We preserve and provide access to historical materials, support research, and create interactive programs and exhibits that educate and inspire.” “Presidential Library History,” National Archives, last reviewed on Aug. 16, 2016, [www.archives.gov/presidential-libraries/about/history.html](http://www.archives.gov/presidential-libraries/about/history.html).



The Obama Presidential Center

to build the library and prepares the opening exhibit. The National Archive of Records Administration (NARA) appoints a museum director, administers the library, and legally owns many of library's artifacts and papers.<sup>68</sup>

The center's mission envisions the center as a space for experimentation and collaboration and as an economic resource for Chicago, especially on the South Side:

More than a building housing documents from the past, we want this to be a place for visitors to play a real role in building our collective future ... where we will shape, together, what it means to be a good citizen in the 21st century.... For the Obamas, selecting the South Side of Chicago as the location for the Obama Presidential Center represents both a return home and an investment in the city's future.<sup>69</sup>

The center will house only digitized copies of non-classified papers from the Obama administration; the official papers will be stored in existing NARA facilities in Kansas City, Missouri, and College Park, Maryland.<sup>70</sup> The foundation, not NARA, will administer the center, and it cannot accept federal funds.<sup>71</sup> The foundation has used this departure from the canon of presidential libraries to justify and legitimize the presence of the center on the South Side and its use of Jackson Park. But this same organizational change prompted 185 faculty members at the University

68. Jodi Kanter, *Presidential Libraries as Performance: Curating American Character from Herbert Hoover to George W. Bush* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2016), 2.

69. Obama Foundation, accessed Jan. 22, 2018, [www.obama.org](http://www.obama.org).

70. "Information About New Model for Obama Presidential Library," National Archive, last reviewed on Mar. 1, 2019, [www.archives.gov/presidential-libraries/information-about-new-model-for-obama-presidential-library](http://www.archives.gov/presidential-libraries/information-about-new-model-for-obama-presidential-library).

71. Dahleen Glanton, "Breaking Free of Federal Money, Obama Library Could Better Serve Chicago," *Chicago Tribune*, May 15, 2017.

of Chicago to sign an open letter urging the foundation to find an alternative site to Jackson Park, noting that the center “has abandoned its original plans to be a Presidential Library. It will be a private entity with no official connection to the National Archives.”<sup>72</sup>

## Public Discourse of the Obama CBA Coalition

The coalition’s four founding members are Southside Together Organizing for Power (STOP), the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO), the Bronzeville Regional Collective, and the Prayer and Action Collective (see appendix 2 for a complete list members).<sup>73</sup> STOP and KOCO have a history of successful community organizing and use the Saul Alinsky model of community organizing, which was developed in Woodlawn in the sixties and which focuses on building grassroots community power.<sup>74</sup>

The coalition formed in 2016, conducted town-hall meetings that summer to develop a set of principles, and launched the CBA campaign in September. A second set of town-hall meetings in the summer of 2017 fleshed out the details of the CBA in the areas of housing, economic

72. “Letter from Faculty Concerning the Obama Center,” last updated Feb. 7, 2018, accessed through the Internet Archive, [facultyobamaletter.wufoo.com/forms/lz3524m71bfuyo8/](https://www.archive.org/details/facultyobamaletter.wufoo.com/forms/lz3524m71bfuyo8/).

73. STOP is based in Woodlawn, KOCO in Kenwood, BRC in Bronzeville, and Prayer and Action Collective (now UChicago for a CBA) in Hyde Park. Some of these organizations had earlier mounted pressure on the university to open a Level-1 Adult Care Trauma Center, which opened in April 2018.

74. Saul D. Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals* (New York: Random House, 1971); community organizing can be defined as the process of building group power around a particular problem. The group defines the problem, and using the group’s political leverage to assure that group representatives and ideas are part of the solution.

development, and sustainability, which the coalition proposed to the City of Chicago.<sup>75</sup>

## Self-Presentation

The coalition's website opens with a quote from Barack Obama: "communities ha[ve] to be created, fought for, tended like gardens," followed by a statement, "push back on being pushed back." Immediately, the coalition communicates affinity with Barack Obama's values, by invoking his history of community organizing on the South Side and positing displacement as its central issue.

After a short summary of principal aims (jobs, housing, investment, and schools), the website quotes Deborah Taylor, an activist with KOCO and STOP, two of the four organizations that founded the coalition: "typically, when something major comes into a community, taxes go up, low-income residents are displaced, there is an influx of new residents who want to be in the area—it's sexy—prices go up. We want to be sure when it floats, we float with it." Taylor is a Woodlawn resident who organized STOP with others living in subsidized housing.<sup>76</sup> The coalition presents her as a public face of its interests and mission to advocate for low-income, local residents by combating displacement.

## Principal Geographical Claims

The coalition seeks a "comprehensive South Side master plan, which sustains cultural heritage and prioritizes rewards and incentives to present

75. "2016 Development Principles" and "2018 Ordinance Outline," CBA for the Obama Library.

76. Andre, Anthony, and Kevin (Woodlawn residents), interview with the author, Nov. 23, 2016; for a description of STOP, see, "Southside Together Organizing for Power," Chicago Community Trust, accessed Jan. 22, 2018, [www.cct.org/what-we-offer/grants/southside-together-organizing-for-power/](http://www.cct.org/what-we-offer/grants/southside-together-organizing-for-power/).

residents.”<sup>77</sup> This statement expresses the cultural right of low-income residents to remain in the center’s proximate neighborhoods and to benefit from its economic changes.

Coalition member and Woodlawn resident Kayla Butler asserts her desire to remain in Woodlawn without paying higher rent:

You already know that your community is underfunded. Now you have somebody coming in with a big development that you’re not sure if you’re going to be able to stay around to even enjoy.... I want to know that [my daughter’s] gonna have a sustainable home school that’s going to be able to be open and fully functioning, and that she’s going to be able to have all the education she needs to be able to grow on and go to the next level.... I want to make sure that I’m still able to even afford to live in this neighborhood.... It’s no way that anybody really that lives in that area right now will be able to afford a 1,500 dollar a month studio apartment, one-bedroom apartment when they got five kids.<sup>78</sup>

If rents rise, Butler and her neighbors will only be able to remain in the neighborhood with rent-control measures. Haroon Garel, another coalition member and Woodlawn resident say, “yeah I’m excited, I really think [the center is] a good thing for the neighborhood. But we still want to be here as well, and that’s why we’re asking for a Community Benefits Agreement.”<sup>79</sup> Butler and Garel worry that outsiders with higher incomes will benefit from the neighborhood’s improvements; for them, the coalition and the CBA’s call for rent control and subsidized units in new apartment buildings breaks the pattern of exclusion from gentrification.

77. “2016 Development Principles,” CBA for the Obama Library.

78. Hauck, “The Maroon Weekly,” podcast, *Chicago Maroon*.

79. Ibid.



The coalition goes beyond advocating for continued occupancy of neighborhood space to propose a new vision for development:

While we recognize the old ways of redeveloping black communities have not created community wealth, we see exciting potential to develop differently now. We aim to catalyze measurable and substantial increases in our community wealth and well-being through sustainable, inter-generational land ownership and transfer; increased revenue streams through neighbor-owned businesses and buildings; and revived resources for vibrant lifelong learning.<sup>80</sup>

The coalition invites the center “in concert with the University of Chicago and the City of Chicago” to participate in a new model in which the geographic claims of low-income black residents are recognized and have decision-making roles.

## **Deictic Centers and Their Relevance, Part I**

Residents living in neighborhoods around the center who are at risk of displacement occupy one deictic center in the coalition’s discourse. The phrases “communities surrounding the library,” “surrounding neighborhoods,” and “communities within a five-mile radius of the library” appear repeatedly on the coalition’s website.<sup>81</sup> The coalition’s development principles focus on the most vulnerable populations in “the surrounding neighborhoods” and state that the majority of center jobs should “go to residents from the communities surrounding the library.” It invites the foundation, city, and university, collective the Library, to support the

80. “2016 Development Principles,” CBA for the Obama Library.

81. A five-mile radius includes Woodlawn, Hyde Park, South Shore, Avalon Park, Kenwood, Grand Boulevard, and parts of Auburn Gresham, Calumet Heights, and Back of the Yards.

formation of “a Federation of Community Land Trusts in the surrounding neighborhoods,” to set aside “new housing for low-income housing in the area surrounding the Library,” to “partner with local schools,” to increase “green open space for... local users,” and to “support local small business development.”<sup>82</sup>

The economically vulnerable also occupy this deictic center. The coalition asks the trio of institutions to reserve employment for “people in low-income housing, ex offenders, youth, seniors and long-time unemployed.” Regarding housing, 30 percent of new and renovated rentals should be “set aside for households earning between 0–50 percent of the AMI [Average Medium Income],” and there should be a community land trust. For property owners, the coalition wants a “property tax freeze or exemption for existing dwellings within a two-mile radius of the Obama Presidential Center for residents who can verify ten years of residency within a five-mile radius.”<sup>83</sup>

Individual coalition members likewise emphasize the economically vulnerable. Jeanette Taylor addressed then President Obama during one of the foundation’s public meetings: “the first time investment comes to black communities, the first to get kicked out is low-income and working-class people. Why wouldn’t you sign a CBA to protect us?” Kyla Butler, another coalition member, STOP organizer, and Woodlawn resident pointed out the economic straits of some residents, including her own: “right now I’m paying \$535 for my one-bedroom and I got that one by luck. But if you look at the rest of the one-bedroom apartments

82. “2016 Development Principles,” CBA for the Obama Library; a community land trust owns land collectively in urban neighborhoods, maintains rents at below the market rate, and helps build intergenerational wealth for low-income families. Usually each unit is rented by the same family for ninety-nine years. See, John Emmeus Davis, ed., *The Community Land Trust Reader* (Cambridge, MA: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2010).

83. “2018 Ordinance Outline,” CBA for the Obama Library.

within this area, they're \$800.... Some people is not even making \$500 a week at their job. It's just going to be a continuous cycle.<sup>84</sup>

The coalition itself occupies a second deictic center in coalition discourse, which uses active verbs (“push” and “demand”) to communicate force and agency. The coalition has “critical stakeholders” with the “perspectives, skills, and goals to coordinate, collaborate, and engage with the Library.”<sup>85</sup> These verbs imply that the coalition has the credibility and status to be an interlocutor to the Library. The Library may have material and political resources, but the coalition's discourse reveals a powerful and competing resource that the Library does not possess: its members are “seasoned community development practitioners and the leadership of low-income and working African American tenants, home and business owners, youth, seniors, and long-time residents.”<sup>86</sup>

What is more, the coalition is justified in being a deictic center, because it includes “long-term” Woodlawn residents, such as coalition member Haroon Gareh:

I grew up at the 6200 block of Kimbark. My grandmother, she was the block club president, Geraldine Moore, since 1985.... I'm one of the organizers with the Community Benefits Agreement.... We don't want the property taxes to go up sky high in the neighborhood, when the Obama Presidential Center comes, 'cus some people may be prized out of the neighborhood, if they grew up here, like me. I've been over here for thirty years.<sup>87</sup>

84. Hauck, “The Maroon Weekly,” podcast, *Chicago Maroon*.

85. “2016 Development Principles,” CBA for the Obama Library.

86. Ibid.

87. Brian Cassella, “Neighborhood Hopes for Obama Presidential Center Impact,” *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 14, 2018.

Garel's grandmother and one of her best friends, Ma Fuller, are two of the neighborhood's elder figures who led projects for social improvements earlier in their lives.<sup>88</sup> Garel interweaves his generational roots in Woodlawn and his identity as a CBA organizer to legitimize a geographic claim that places the Library at the margins of the discourse. Garel asserts that occupying a space ("resident"), having a connection to its history ("long-term resident"), and participating in it ("community member") grants him the right to stay in this space and to shape its future. The logic of his claim transcends free-market economics, which grants only private property owners rights to a particular space and which makes property rights "natural," a form of "common sense" and "hegemony."<sup>89</sup> The constructed paradigm of the free market favors those in power who can disregard and displace those who cannot pay rising rents or property taxes.<sup>90</sup>

The coalition's counter-hegemonic geographical claim derives from long-term residency, such as Garel's, and from historical and contemporary barriers to black ownership. The coalition's status as a primarily black organization, the cultural context of the South Side, and the goal of protecting primarily black low-income residents reflects a particular world view. People of color in the United States tend to conceive of identity as linked to the formation of and participation in a community. Community is not a loosely related circle of acquaintances; it is a group of people who

88. Andre, Anthony, and Kevin (Woodlawn residents), interview with the author, Nov. 23, 2016.

89. Mitchell, *The Right to the City*, 132. Mitchell argues that "in the context of an evolving capitalist American state, citizenship is defined through a process whereby owners of private property freely join together to create a public, which forms the critical functional element of the public realm"; see also, Tim Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3–4.

90. See, *ibid.*, 14. "The analytical power of the concept comes from the way it connects ideas of what exists, what is good, and what is possible to various forms of power relations. Ideology ... is 'meaning in the service of power.'"

have personal relationships with each other, make personal decisions conscious of the effect on the group, and depend on one another emotionally, financially, and spiritually. For African American culture, participation in a community affects how individuals define themselves, conceive of their personal purpose, make decisions, and interact with the world.<sup>91</sup> Dependence on others is a strength (not a sign of weakness or immaturity) and is sometimes necessary for survival.<sup>92</sup>

The community-focused construction of identity means that the threat of geographic displacement is not merely a threat of eviction from a physical space but an existential expulsion from the community developed in that space. For many residents of Woodlawn and nearby neighborhoods, like Kayla Butler and Haroon Garel, the space of their neighborhood provides a home in the form of a collective identity and deep relationships formed over time. Displacement means a destruction of the community fabric, which destabilizes and fractures the individual's identity. What is more, displacement separates residents from the social network that helps them survive economic and personal hardships.

The second aspect of the coalition's justification for remaining in Woodlawn is the historic exclusion of black neighborhoods from the resources necessary to own land. The legacy of slavery and Jim Crow—historical redlining, contemporary predatory loan practices, scarcity of

91. J. S. Phinney, J. Dennis, and S. Osorio, "Reasons to Attend College among Ethnically Diverse College Students," *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 12, no. 2 (2006): 347–66. A principal educational motivation for students of color, as compared to white students, is the desire to help their families.

92. "In comparison to White Americans, African Americans tend to have a more collectivist worldview." Collectivism can be defined as "a cultural orientation that drives an individual to put the needs of others in their group over the needs of themselves," opposite on the spectrum to individualism, which "is the tendency to put the needs of self over others' needs." Carmen McCallum, "Giving Back to the Community: How African Americans Envision Utilizing Their PhD," *Journal of Negro Education* 86, no. 2 (Spring 2017): 140.

employment and educational opportunities conducive to wealth accumulation, the mass-incarceration of black men, and discriminatory policing—have blocked black families from buying property and creating intergenerational wealth.<sup>93</sup> Only a minority of residents in black neighborhoods have the capital or property necessary to remain in their homes and neighborhoods once real estate development accelerates. Lacking capital, the coalition must use occupancy of a space, and the participation in community fabric this implies, as part of the justification for remaining and having some control over that space.

## Deictic Centers and Their Relevance, Part II

When the coalition talks about the political and economic authority to use and shape neighborhood spaces, and by extension to effect social and political changes, the deictic center is the Library, the combination of the foundation, the city, and the university. The coalition's discourse justifies its claim for a CBA by identifying the history of actions by the city and university on the South Side, Barack Obama's personal and political connections to the South Side, and the moral obligations that stem from this history and their political and economic power. As coalition member Haroon Garel says in a *Tribune* article,

Yes, I do agree that some voices are being heard more than others. You know, we live in a community where it's about one hundred units of government-subsidized housing. These are the majority of the people who are asking for the Community Benefits Agreement. We've been pushed to the side.<sup>94</sup>

93. Janelle Jones, John Schmitt, and Valerie Wilson, "Fifty Years after the Kerner Commission," Economic Policy Institute, Feb. 26, 2018, [www.epi.org/publication/50-years-after-the-kerner-commission/](http://www.epi.org/publication/50-years-after-the-kerner-commission/).

94. Cassella, "Neighborhood Hopes," *Chicago Tribune*.

Here, the residents are passive objects of the Library's actions, which pushes them to the margins, "to the side." The coalition's website uses forceful verbs to say residents are "being pushed out" and links the Library to theft, greed, and force:

What will the Obama library take? Obama's library will consume twenty-one to twenty-two acres of one of our public parks.... With this construction we'll face the loss of free public space, and we'll lose that space to a development that won't contribute to the neighborhood's tax base. (As a 501(c)(3), the library won't pay many taxes.)<sup>95</sup>

The future tense, "will," means the loss of space is certain and unavoidable; the verb "consume" communicates voraciousness; and there is a sense of unfairness: the Library will not be taxed for use of space.

The center's connection to other presidential libraries further cements it as the deictic center in the coalition's discourse about power. The 2017 template for coalition's "Dear President Obama" letter-writing campaign reads, "we are prepare for the arrival of a \$500 million Presidential Library in Jackson Park. Write a letter to President Obama explaining why your community needs a CBA for his Presidential Library." The coalition twice notes the center's participation in the canon of presidential libraries and frames the library as belonging to Obama, "his Presidential Library," hinting at Obama's political sway and abundant external financial resources.

In the coalition's discourse, the actions of the university in Woodlawn also marginalizes the coalition and residents. Garel explained that "this is a community that has been gentrified because of the University of Chicago is growing and expanded.... We stay over here in Woodlawn

95. "Background," CBA for the Obama Library, accessed Jan. 22, 2018, [www.obamacba.org/background.html](http://www.obamacba.org/background.html).

where the university is constantly building.”<sup>96</sup> The coalition’s 2018 flyer expresses a similar sentiment: “the Obama Center is coming to Jackson Park and now the University of Chicago is planning to build a Luxury Hotel and Restaurant, a new Dorm, and a Conference Center all in Woodlawn.”<sup>97</sup> The flyer concludes that the university’s expansion will lead to gentrification: “real estate interests are planning luxury condos and housing we can’t afford.”<sup>98</sup>

## Justification and Legitimization of Claims

### History of Development on the South Side

The coalition’s website and the 2017 “Dear President Obama” template letter outline a pattern of broken promises to black neighborhoods by developers, arguing that this history necessitates a legally binding CBA:

Keep in mind is Chicago’s long history of displacing poor people of color. It repeatedly seems that when our city and our government make “improvements,” Black families are displaced and disenfranchised. Construction of the Dan Ryan expressway displaced Blacks along State Street in the 1950s and 60s. In 2013, Chicago Public Schools closed 50 of our neighborhood schools. People’s homes have been demolished. Between 2000 and 2010, 180,000 Black people moved out of Chicago after the City’s “Plan for Transformation” to improve the Chicago Housing Authority’s public housing. And now President Barack Obama, in collaboration with the City of Chicago, the University of Chicago, and the Obama Foundation are planning to “improve” communities with a \$500 million library.<sup>99</sup>

96. Cassella, “Neighborhood Hopes,” *Chicago Tribune*.

97. “Stop Displacement,” flyer, Obama CBA Coalition, 2018.

98. Ibid.

99. “Background,” CBA for the Obama Library.



The scare quotes around “improvements” communicate the absurdity or dishonesty of this term in the eyes of the coalition. The implied question is “for *whom* were the improvements?” Here, “improvements” are synonymous with displacing low-income black residents of the South Side. The interests of displaced residents do not count in a city where the definition of “improvements” is their eviction or forced migration.

The memory of the 1999 Plan for Transformation, in which the city demolished public housing, is fresh among Woodlawn residents. The city “called for the demolition of 18,000 units of neglected public housing and the construction or renovation for 25,000 units” but only constructed 8,000 new units.<sup>100</sup> Many former public housing residents left the city, and those who stayed had to use government-issued vouchers (“Section 8”) for private housing, which is concentrated on the South and West Sides.<sup>101</sup> Some former Cabrini-Green residents moved from the near North Side to South Shore, Englewood, and Woodlawn.<sup>102</sup> Kayla Butler, a coalition member and STOP organizer, remembers the demolitions:

I used to live in what was once Stateway Gardens with my grandmother. And then I used to live in what was once LeClaire Courts,<sup>103</sup> which is on the West Side of Chicago.... Stateway Gardens ... was on 47th, 49th and State on down. They moved a lot of those people

100. Jake Bittle, Srishti Kapur, and Jasmine Mithani, “Redeveloping the State Street Corridor,” *South Side Weekly*, Jan. 31, 2017.

101. Maya Dukmasova, “The CHA’s ‘Supervoucher’ Program,” *Chicago Reader*, Apr. 28, 2016.

102. Joel Hammernick (Woodlawn resident and executive director of Sunshine Gospel Ministries and Sunshine Enterprises), interview with the author, Nov. 6, 2016.

103. “Lucia Anaya, ‘Former LeClaire Courts Residents Are Still Fighting to Go Home,’” *Chicago Reader*, Aug. 4, 2016, [www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/leclaire-courts-redevelopment-controversy-cha/Content?oid=23039100](http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/leclaire-courts-redevelopment-controversy-cha/Content?oid=23039100)

out of that area, out of those buildings, promised them they were gonna be able to come back. Only so many of them was able to come back. Only a small percentage of them was able to come back... I'm also a product of what happens when you push everybody of a low-income residency into one area.<sup>104</sup>

The lived experience of Chicago residents in their twenties, thirties, and forties creates a bond with the memories of their elders of the city's broken promises and displacement. Butler, who is in her early twenties, went on to observe how new development around her former home is creating an upper-income neighborhood attractive to whites: "Now when you go to 49th and State you see it's a Starbucks and you see it's a bunch of things there that are not for people that, you know, would typically live in that community, or live in that area at a different time." Lorenzo, another Woodlawn resident, told a similar story of displacement from Cabrini-Green Homes:

I come from the Near North Side, so I've seen that neighborhood get destroyed and get gentrified.... It's got shopping centers and police stations and easy transportation. Its buses go every which way through there.... There's a Target over there. The people that have stayed, they enjoy the new environment and the opportunity to be able to be a part of it, [but] a lot of people weren't even allowed to [stay], and I think that's how it's going to be over here. A lot of people aren't going to be allowed to stay.... Nobody's really forcing them out, but they're pricing them out.<sup>105</sup>

104. Hauck, "The Maroon Weekly," podcast, *Chicago Maroon*; "Chicago Housing Authority LeClaire Courts Transportation Access Study," Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, Dec. 2013, [www.cmap.illinois.gov/programs/ltal/cha-leclaire-courts](http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/programs/ltal/cha-leclaire-courts).

105. Lorenzo (Woodlawn resident), interview with the author, Nov. 6, 2016.

The coalition also remembers the history of the university's interventions in Hyde Park and surrounding neighborhoods. A student leader in the coalition says that the university has "a long, long history of supporting urban renewal policies in the Hyde Park area that were specifically intended to keep black people out of the neighborhood. There were a lot of demolitions that went on to get rid of low-income housing and replace it with less-dense, higher-income housing so that you wouldn't have more African Americans moving into the neighborhood."<sup>106</sup> The university's actions against its black neighbors continue today with the construction of a new dorm, hotel, and convention center in Woodlawn, which "keep driving up rent prices in the neighborhood," and driving out current black residents.<sup>107</sup>

### **Morality**

The coalition's discourse frames the resistance of the Library's three constituent institutions' resistance to a CBA in moral terms. The Library "can help build the kind of communities that Obama fought for, OR it could displace longtime residents." The coalition appealed to the Library's conscience by organizing a prayer vigil before the foundation's second public meeting on February 27, 2018.<sup>108</sup> Charles Perry, a coalition member, led a prayer: "Father God, we thank you for your loving kindness, your grace and your mercy, Father God. We're asking you to change their hearts, that they would not come in and do destruction in the community by displacing folks in the community and running folks out."<sup>109</sup> As a form of discourse, a pray intensifies the extent of the Library's immorality by arguing that the three institutions have failed in their moral obligation to legally guarantee benefits to its neighbors.

106. Hauck, "The Maroon Weekly," podcast, *Chicago Maroon*.

107. Ibid.

108. Bowean and Kamin, "Obama Makes Pitch," *Chicago Tribune*.

109. Ibid.

### Barack Obama's Political Career

The coalition's campaign materials draw on the values, slogans, and images of Obama's 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns, arguing that Obama's own principles should lead him to support a CBA, which

holds the promise of helping our community to help ourselves. The CBA promises to affirm the hope, change, and progress that your Presidency and legacy represents to us. You have said that "communities ha[ve] to be created, fought for, tended like gardens," in that spirit we are doing just that by organizing for a CBA. We hope you will support us.<sup>110</sup>

The coalition's discourse transforms the emblematic campaign slogan, "Yes We Can," into a Twitter hashtag, "#yeswecan," to reference negotiating for a CBA. It uses the 2008 HOPE poster, replacing "HOPE" with "CBA" to express the idea that the CBA continues the ideals of Obama's first presidential campaign (see fig. 1).



**Figure 1:** Obama's 2008 "HOPE" poster recast with "CBA."

110. "Dear President Obama," template letter, CBA Campaign, 2017.

The coalition draws a parallel between Obama's community organizing on the South Side and its own strategies. Its campaign epigraph, "communities ha[ve] to be created, fought for, tended like gardens," is from Obama's memoir, where he speaks of the motivations and ideals that led to him becoming a community organizer:

I wasn't alone in my particular struggles, and that communities had never been a given in our country, at least not for blacks. Communities had to be created, fought for, tended like gardens. They expanded with the dreams of men—and in the civil rights movement those dreams had been large. In the sit-ins, the marches, the jailhouse songs, I saw the African-American community becoming more than just the place where you'd been born or the house where you'd been raised. Through organizing, through shared sacrifice, membership had been earned.... This community I imagined was still in the making.... This was my idea of organizing. It was the promise of redemption.<sup>111</sup>

The coalition's quotation calls forth an entire set of values and worldview, in which community organizing develops black communities and fights for the rights of blacks. By connecting to Obama's personal history, the coalition legitimizes its geographical claims that a community is more than "just the place where you'd been born or the house where you'd been raised."

## Home

In a portion of the 2017 "Dear President Obama" template letter the deictic center is shared by the coalition and the center: "your library is coming home to the South Side, where I live. With a Community Benefits Agreement, your legacy too has a chance to come home, to its roots in communities organizing for the greater good." By establishing that

111. Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1994, 2004), 134–45.

Obama is returning to his origins, which made him into who he is today, the coalition positions itself as a legitimate petitioner, one that “lives,” and Obama as the returning son, the one who “is coming home.” The South Side gave, and now it is its time to receive.

## Public Discourse of the Obama Foundation

In January 2018, I analyzed the discourse on the Obama Foundation’s website in order to understand the foundation’s self-presentation to the public. The foundation is responsible for raising funds for the Obama Presidential Center and developing programming. The foundation’s mission is

to inspire and empower people to change their world. From leaders who are already making an impact, to people who are interested in becoming more involved, but don’t know where to start, our goal is to make our programs accessible to anyone, anywhere. We’ll equip civic innovators, young leaders, and everyday citizens with the skills and tools they need to create change in their communities. It’s a big job, and we’re just getting started. Learn about our first set of projects and join us in this experiment in citizenship for the 21st century.<sup>112</sup>

### Self-Presentation

The foundation presents the site of the future center as the “heart” of the South Side:

We’re building a campus for active citizenship in the heart of Chicago’s South Side.... The Obama Presidential Center will be

112. “Our Mission,” Obama Foundation, accessed Jan. 22, 2018, [www.obama.org/mission/](http://www.obama.org/mission/).

... an economic engine for the city of Chicago, ... creating thousands of new jobs on the South Side—and will help to continue the revitalization of historic Jackson Park.<sup>113</sup>

The biological and generative language positions the center itself—not just its location—in the “heart” of the South Side. The choice of “active” to describe the kind of citizenship that the center seeks to foster and the organic description of the campus as a “living” space, communicate ideas of life and movement.

At the February 2018 public meeting, the foundation framed the center as a means for the South Side to be known to a wider audience. On an eight-by-eight-foot poster, attendees could answer the question, “what do you want to showcase to the world?”<sup>114</sup> The website says the center will draw “hundreds of thousands of visitors every year, ... allowing the Foundation to encourage and affect change locally, and showcase the South Side to the rest of the world.”<sup>115</sup> In the foundation’s descriptions of the center’s future programming and architectural design, “visitor” appears repeatedly, suggesting a tourist or someone from another part of Chicago.

The planned design for the center has five elements: a forum building, museum, branch of a Chicago Public Library, athletic facility, and plaza.<sup>116</sup> The 859-word description of the plan barely mentions architectural features, but instead focuses on what will happen in and around the building: the word “public” appears eleven times, “visitors” seven times, “community” five times, and “free and open to the public” three times.<sup>117</sup>

113. *Ibid.*

114. “The Obama Presidential Center Public Meeting,” Obama Foundation, Feb. 27, 2018, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdMlB2c8keM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdMlB2c8keM).

115. “Sign Up for Presidential Center Updates,” Obama Foundation, accessed Jan. 22, 2018, [www.obama.org/chicago-community-newsletter/](http://www.obama.org/chicago-community-newsletter/).

116. “The Obama Presidential Center,” Obama Foundation.

117. *Ibid.*

## Deictic Centers and Their Relevance

The foundation is the deictic center of its own discourse. The future center in the geographical and metaphorical “heart” of the South Side will be a “platform” for the reputation of the South Side to expand. The foundation’s discourse places the center in the middle of action, like a magnet, “drawing hundreds of thousands of visitors every year.” Relative to resources, the center is at the core and the South Side and the general public are on the margins. In terms of inherent value or importance, however, the deictic center is the South Side, visitors, and the community. The center’s location “in the heart of the South Side” suggests that the neighborhood is a living being. The center’s status as a “platform” facilitates outsiders’ knowledge of the South Side’s already existing value.

The presence of two deictic centers—the center relative to resources and the importance of the South Side and its people—communicates an idea of equality or comparability between the center and the South Side. The foundation’s website and spokespersons use terms like *partnership* and *collaboration* repeatedly:

The Center is a work in progress, built in direct partnership with thousands of people who have offered their feedback in-person and online.... The Obama Presidential Center is, first and foremost, a collaboration with our neighbors.... As Chicago-area residents, you’re our neighbors and partners in building this campus for active citizenship.<sup>118</sup>

We want this to be a place for visitors to play a real role in building our collective future... [a] project where we will shape, together, what it means to be a good citizen in the 21st century.<sup>119</sup>

118. “Chicago, Join Us #ObamaFoundation,” *Scene Magazine*, Feb. 27, 2018, scene-chicago.com/scene/index.php/chicago-join-us-obamafoundation/.

119. “The Obama Presidential Center,” Obama Foundation.



The foundation describes the center as a democratic collaboration with the community, and, according to Board Chair Martin Nesbitt, the foundation's leaders are open to suggestion: "we came to this with open minds and a plan to have an iterative process, and that's reflected in where we're going."<sup>120</sup> The foundation's February 2018 RSVP states, "we will host a public meeting to continue gathering input from our neighbors across Chicago on the design and development of the Obama Presidential Center as well as future programming ... share your thoughts, questions, and ideas."<sup>121</sup> Obama told meeting attendees, "we'll have the opportunity to continually upgrade and update the programs that we're doing and the community will have continuing input in how that evolves."<sup>122</sup>

The foundation's discourse expresses that collaboration is not only an ideal or the jargon of public relations, but a reality: the website's "You spoke—and we listened" section lists twelve examples of public input and the foundation's response. For example, to "you wanted to see more landscaping," the foundation responded,

We added a berm to the East Side of the campus. Landscape berms now surround the garage and the sides of the garage were opened for ventilation. [The] vehicle entrance at the parking facility [is] now covered by landscape. [The] parking facility was lowered a half floor below grade. [The] size of the above-grade volume of the Forum building was reduced.<sup>123</sup>

120. Lisa Bertagnoli, "Obama Foundation Puts a Price Tag on Presidential Center," *Crain's Chicago Business*, Jan. 10, 2018.

121. "Rooted in Chicago and Designed with You, Obama Foundation, accessed Jan. 22, 2018, [https://www.obama.org/chicago\\_/](https://www.obama.org/chicago_/).

122. "The Obama Presidential Center Public Meeting," Obama Foundation.

123. "Rooted in Chicago and Designed with You, Obama Foundation.

Scattered throughout the site are invitations to participate and examples of past public input, such as, “learn more about our plans for the Center—and how you’ve helped shape them.”<sup>124</sup> The principal public contributors are the “community,” “neighbors across Chicago,” “visitors,” and “you.”

Together with the large February 2018 public meeting in McCormick Place (a prominent convention center in Chicago), the foundation and various city entities (the Chicago Park District, the Department of Transportation, the 5th Ward) held eight public meetings in 2017.<sup>125</sup> By throwing a wide net to the public, the foundation furthers the idea of equal power between itself and those interested in the center. These meetings also made it difficult for detractors to argue that the center’s planning is exclusive, self-interested, and not community-centered. Obama encapsulates this ethos of equality, saying “Michelle and I are absolutely grateful to all of you for being a part of all this remarkable process.”<sup>126</sup> However, given the foundation’s resources, ability to raise \$500 million, and political power, the idea of equality is strained.

## Principal Geographical Claims

To legitimize geographical claims to Jackson Park, the foundation needs the support of the residents of the South Side neighborhoods around the center. It must assert that its use of Jackson Park will be aligned with the well-being of the South Side and not with for-profit businesses or the university’s expansion plans.

124. Ibid.

125. Lynn Sweet, “Obama Foundation Officials Host Meeting Sept. 14 for Public Input,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, Sept. 7, 2017. On December 1, 2017, the city’s Departments of Transportation and of Planning held a private meeting with the Obama Foundation to discuss the impact of the center on Jackson Park, which was part of the formal federal government review process.

126. Leah Hope, “Obama Foundation Submits Presidential Center Plans amid Opposition,” *Eyewitness News*, ABC 7, Jan. 10, 2018.

## Justification and Legitimization

### Home

The foundation legitimizes the center's presence in Woodlawn by showing that the Obamas have the moral, historical, and cultural authority to change the neighborhood they once called home.

During a November 2017 summit for young leaders, Michelle Obama addressed the reasons the Obamas selected Chicago for the future center:

It is so good to be home. Home!... Bringing the foundation [to Chicago] was important to us because we love this city. It is a special place. This is the city that raised me. It is the city that connected me to the love of my life.... The question isn't why would we be here in Chicago on the South Side, but why not? Why not. Chicago has an amazing array of resources. We have great organizations, we have great faith-based leaders, we have strong culture, we have music, we have talent, we have history, we have organizing, we have beauty.<sup>127</sup>

All of the characteristics she names are attached to a specific South Side quality. The South Side is known for faith leaders and congregations heavily involved in community activities and activism. It is the birthplace of community organizing by Saul Alinsky and the Woodlawn Organization against the University of Chicago's "urban renewal" policies of the fifties and sixties.<sup>128</sup> Michelle Obama's identification of "strong culture, music, talents, history, and beauty" refers tacitly to black culture on the South Side. She stands next to Chance the Rapper, a nationally known hip-hop artist who grew up in the South Side neighborhood of West

127. "We Love This City: First Lady Michelle Obama Speaks to Chicagoans," Obama Foundation, Nov. 7, 2017, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=3RBt198C5VE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3RBt198C5VE).

128. Edward McLelland, "Meet the Community Organizers Fighting Against Barack Obama," *Politico*, Feb. 28, 2018, [www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/02/28/barack-obama-library-chicago-217093](http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/02/28/barack-obama-library-chicago-217093).

Chatham.<sup>129</sup> The site of the center is blocks away from sections of 63rd Street that were the hub of the jazz and blues scene in the fifties and sixties, in clubs owned by black business owners and bands led by black artists.<sup>130</sup>

In another foundation video, Barack Obama establishes Chicago as pivotal in his life:

All the strands of my life came together and I really became a man when I moved to Chicago. That's where I was able to apply that early idealism to try to work in communities in public service. That's where I met my wife. That's where my children were born. And the people there, the community, the lessons that I learned, they're all based right in these few square miles where we'll be able to now give something back and bring the world back home after this incredible journey.<sup>131</sup>

He presents the center as an opportunity to “now give something back” to his home, cementing the idea of the center as inherently community focused and concerned with the public good.

The foundation's website reinforces the theme of South Side as “home,” with a timeline of landmarks in the couple's life, showcasing pictures and information about Michelle's childhood, the Obamas' first date, and their wedding on the South Side.<sup>132</sup>

The relationship between the Obamas and the South Side gives the foundation the credibility to build the center and also to negate a CBA.

129. David Drake, “Who Is Chance the Rapper?” *Complex*, Mar. 23, 2013, [www.complex.com/music/2013/03/who-is-chance-the-rapper/](http://www.complex.com/music/2013/03/who-is-chance-the-rapper/).

130. Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts*, 53.

131. “Obama Foundation Announces South Side as Home for Library,” Obama Foundation, May 12, 2015, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2Q3xFpf-KE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2Q3xFpf-KE).

132. “Our Story,” Obama Foundation, accessed Jan. 22, 2018, [www.obama.org/our-story/#raised-south-side](http://www.obama.org/our-story/#raised-south-side).

The foundation's website traces Barack Obama's professional history with a timeline of his community organizing in Chicago's Roseland neighborhood, his position as a professor of constitutional law at the University of Chicago, his leadership in Illinois Project Vote! (an initiative to increase turn out of voters of color in Illinois), and his term as a US senator.<sup>133</sup> Obama responded to a Woodlawn resident and community organizer's question—"why wouldn't you sign a CBA to protect us?"<sup>134</sup>—by saying,

I was a community organizer. I *know* the neighborhood. I know that the minute you start saying well, we're thinking about signing something that will determine who's getting jobs ... next thing I know I've got twenty organizations that are coming out of the woodwork, some of them I've never heard before.<sup>135</sup>

Jitu Brown, a CBA supporter and member of KOCO, one of the coalition's founding organizations, asked Obama the same question and reported that Obama told the audience to "trust" him.<sup>136</sup> The foundation says it "shares the goals of many in the community" that South Side neighborhoods "are enhanced and supported, that families are able to stay in their homes, and that our workforce is representative," but it argues against a CBA, saying it would only benefit a few. It concludes by saying it has joined with the Emerald South Economic Development Collaborative to "addresses systemic challenges."<sup>137</sup>

The foundation also evokes the collective hope of Obama's 2008 and

133. "Where It Began," Obama Foundation, accessed Jan. 22, 2018, [www.obama.org/chapter/chicago-where-it-began/](http://www.obama.org/chapter/chicago-where-it-began/).

134. McLelland, "Meet the Community Organizers," *Politico*.

135. Hauck, "The Maroon Weekly," podcast, *Chicago Maroon*.

136. Brown, "Why the Obama Library Needs a CBA," *Chicago Reporter*.

137. "About the Obama Presidential Center," Obama Foundation, accessed July 27, 2019, [www.obama.org/chicago/opc-faq](http://www.obama.org/chicago/opc-faq).

2012 presidential campaigns with the campaign slogan, “Yes We Can,” and suggests that the foundation is part of a democratic grassroots effort, similar to Obama’s campaign, by inviting the public’s feedback with a quote from a 2012 Obama speech: “Your voice matters. Your voice makes a difference.”<sup>138</sup>

### **Departure from Tradition**

The foundation uses the center’s relationship to the canon of presidential libraries and their “public” character to justify its presence in Woodlawn:

The Obama Presidential Center is more than a building or a museum. It’s a space for all of us to come together, collaborate, and leave ready to go change our worlds.... The Library Building is the third main building of the campus—a portal for visitors to engage with the world beyond the Obama Presidential Center. More than a building housing documents from the past, we want this to be a place for visitors to play a real role in building our collective future.... The Museum... will have a relatively small footprint within the Campus.<sup>139</sup>

The foundation distinguishes the center from past presidential libraries that enshrine the legacy of a particular president, “we are not like other presidential libraries.”<sup>140</sup> “More than a library or a museum, it will be a living, working center for citizenship,” according to Obama.<sup>141</sup> The center is described as a “campus,” which communicates a sense of activity and

138. The “Yes We Can” slogan was repurposed as a foundation logo at the February 2018 public meeting and the 2012 campaign quote appear on Obama Foundation’s website devoted to public input, accessed Jan. 22, 2018, [www.obama.org](http://www.obama.org). As of 2019, the quote has been removed.

139. “Rooted in Chicago and Designed with You,” Obama Foundation.

140. *Ibid.*

141. “What’s Next for Barack and Michelle Obama,” Obama Foundation, Jan. 20, 2017, [youtube/ODVxuN6m6E8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODVxuN6m6E8).

learning, a place where participants have agency, exchange knowledge, look to the future, and seek transformation: “it’s a space for all us to come together, collaborate, and leave ready to go change our worlds.”<sup>142</sup>

## Conclusion

Having examined the Obama Community Benefits Agreement Coalition’s and the Obama Foundation’s use of language in their public discourse, this study’s opening and central question returns: how do residents and a major developer make geographic assertions?

The foundation’s and coalition’s discourses overlap in several ways. Both use almost identical material to justify and legitimize claims to space: the Obamas’ history on the South Side, the status of the South Side as their home, Barack Obama’s history of community organizing, the mission of the foundation, and the center’s status as an innovative presidential library. Both make geographical assertions about the same area, but the scale is different: The foundation’s claim is the South Side (a district) and the coalition’s claim is Woodlawn (a neighborhood). The foundation plans to bring resources to the South Side and make the South Side a “destination.” The coalition also wants resources on the South Side for the residents who already live there, but they do not want the South Side to become a “destination” for real estate speculators who will displace the most vulnerable.

Both organizations are concerned with the historical lack of investment in the South Side and agree about the need for resources, but they differ in how to address the problem. For the foundation, the problem is the lack of economic activity on the South Side as a whole and the devaluation of the South Side by the rest of Chicago and the country. For the coalition, the problem is displacement of low-income residents, and the solution is prioritizing surrounding neighborhoods as the beneficiaries of resources brought by the center.

142. “Rooted in Chicago and Designed with You,” Obama Foundation.

The coalition is keenly aware of the power differential between itself—whose core constituents are low-income residents—and the Library. The coalition's discourse uses multiple deictic centers to reflect prevailing power dynamics. When the coalition make claims over space of Woodlawn, the deictic center is occupied by long-term Woodlawn residents. They are the active agents; other players remain at the margins of the discourse in mere "experiencer roles." When the coalition talks about political and economic power, the deictic center is the Library's three institutions (foundation, university, and city). They are the active agent; coalition members and long-term residents are marginal figures who passively experience the consequences of the institutions' actions. Although the coalition recognizes that this power differential can lead to displacement, its discourse does not solely dwell on community helplessness. By stressing the power that residents have due to their cultural history and long residency in the neighborhood, the coalition legitimizes and justifies the demand for a CBA.

Two factors make the possibility of a CBA both possible and extremely unlikely: the departure of the center from the canon of presidential libraries and the figure of Barack Obama. The mission and vision of the center make it the type of enterprise that would be open to negotiation or even willingly supportive of a CBA. The foundation states that the center is meant to be a space of change, a partnership between the foundation and visitors and South Side residents in which the public's input is a guide, a source of economic development and resources for the South Side, and a "gift" to the South Side. Its mission is expressly for the public good. The Obamas' history and relationship to the South Side makes a CBA seem like a viable option.

As a former organizer, Obama could understand the conditions and experiences that necessitate a CBA, and his personal commitment to the South Side could make him open to negotiating a CBA. Although the foundation has no authority over certain aspects of the CBA, such as rent control and better public transportation, Obama has the political status and influence necessary to convince the City of Chicago and University



of Chicago to guarantee CBA measures. Finally, South Siders strongly supported Obama during his campaigns; the Obamas remain beloved figures of hope and pride, regardless of the disappointments of his presidency. These characteristics, however, also make a CBA unlikely. According to journalist Edward McClelland,

Obama is not a rich outsider developing real estate. He is one of the most beloved, if not the most beloved, politicians in Chicago. Obama does not need to sign a CBA in order to gain the city's goodwill, obtain land, or quicken the construction process. He is Mayor Emanuel's former supervisor and has received twenty acres from the city to build his presidential library. In Emanuel's words, the center is a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the city." Thus it is extremely unlikely that the coalition will convince local politicians to "throw their weight against the wishes of both Obama and Emanuel."<sup>143</sup>

The foundation's mission of public good and self-envisioned role as a community resource makes it an unlikely CBA candidate: if its intentions are to bring resources into the South Side, rather than to make a private profit, why does it need to sign a CBA? In the foundation's argument, the essence of the center mirrors the goals of a CBA. Obama's history on the South Side allows him to say, "trust me," without a CBA.

Given the city's and the university's history of "urban renewal" on the South Side, the coalition's propositions might seem quixotic or futile. I asked Lorenzo, a Woodlawn resident, "do you feel like there is a way to resist these changes in rent and demographics?" He answered,

I doubt it. I've seen a lot. I mean, you can resist all you want but you know, once your rent goes up, it goes up. There ain't nothing you can do about it. You're either going to have to pay it or leave.

143. McLelland, "Meet the Community Organizers," *Politico*.

A lot of people have been moving on their own, out to the suburbs  
 ... [for a] more affordable way of living.<sup>144</sup>

What possible tools does a group representing the interest of low-income black residents, led by low-income tenants and some middle-class residents, have to pressure the foundation, the city, and the university to sign a CBA? The coalition wants the three institutions to do more than simply refrain from harming low-income residents through the unintended consequences of development. The coalition is asking them to actively improve their living conditions, which completely reimagines how development is conducted in urban communities.

The coalition see housing, education, and transportation as human rights. For those who care about the quality of life in cities, the coalition's demands, especially those that pertain to the ability to stay in the neighborhood, express the "right to the city."<sup>145</sup> Free-market capitalism, however, frames these demands as unrealistic and incompatible with the "common sense" rights of private property owners.<sup>146</sup> Consequently, gentrification is the "natural" process of the market and the flow of capital. Displacement is inevitable; it is part of the natural shifts in the urban fabric, even as more and more neighborhoods become unaffordable and larger groups of lower-income people must move.

The coalition advocates for low-income black people. In a society where the interests of whites and white power structures are the "natural state," the call for a CBA becomes even more unattainable. The experience, culture, and perspective of white people remain normative, so the claims of low-income, marginalized black people are easily dismissed.

Given the strength of the free market and the history of the United States' enslavement and disenfranchisement of black people, the demands

144. Lorenzo (Woodlawn resident), interview with the author, Nov. 6, 2016.

145. Mitchell, *The Right to the City*.

146. See, *ibid.*, 132.

of the coalition are fruit of a kind of radical hope. To recognize the radical hope within their demands, however, does not mean romanticizing the power that low-income people have or operating under the false illusion that people power always wins. Nor is the hope a superficial, self-deceptive, or placating kind of hope. The coalition imagines a more equitable future, but it knows the material limits of its power. Its members know that a CBA is unlikely, yet they persist.

## Epilogue

In July 2019, Alderwomen Leslie Hairston (5th Ward) and Jeanette Taylor (20th Ward) introduced a CBA ordinance to the Chicago City Council.<sup>147</sup> Compared to the comprehensive ordinance drafted by the coalition, the introduced ordinance focuses on housing policies to prevent displacement.<sup>148</sup> Lori Lightfoot, elected mayor in 2019, supports a CBA. In July 2019, Lightfoot convened a private meeting of center stakeholders, “to make sure that we give justice to people in those communities. We can’t have development mean displacement.”<sup>149</sup> This meeting was the first time that the coalition and the Library (foundation, university, and city) occupied the deictic center at the same time. ○

147. Aaron Gettinger, “CBA Housing Ordinance Introduced in City Council, but Long Road Awaits before Passing,” *Hyde Park Herald*, July 24, 2019.

148. Ibid.

149. Aaron Gettinger, “Mayor Resets Timeline for Discussion on Center,” *Hyde Park Herald*, July 29, 2019.

## Appendix 1: Timeline<sup>150</sup>

- **Mar. 20, 2014**  
Barack Obama Foundation issues a request for qualifications for the Obama Presidential Library.
- **Sept. 15, 2014**  
Foundation issues a request for proposals for the Obama Presidential Library from Columbia University, University of Chicago, University of Hawaii, and University of Illinois at Chicago.
- **Dec. 11, 2014**  
Foundation uses the name, Barack Obama Presidential Center, for the first time.
- **Mar. 19, 2015**  
Chicago City Council unanimously approves the use of Jackson Park or Washington Park for the center.
- **May 12, 2015**  
Foundation selects the University of Chicago's proposal and the South Side of Chicago for the center.
- **June 30, 2016**  
Foundation selects Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects.
- **July 29, 2016**  
Foundation announces Jackson Park as the site for the center.
- **Summer 2016**  
Obama CBA Coalition forms and conducts town-hall meetings with South Side residents to design a set of development principles.

150. For major foundation and center milestones, see "Updates" (press releases), Obama Foundation, [www.obama.org/updates/](http://www.obama.org/updates/).

- **Sept. 29, 2016**

Coalition launches the CBA campaign.<sup>151</sup>

- **May 3, 2017**

Foundation announces that the center will no longer be a presidential archive controlled by the National Archives and Records Administration. This changes the center from a federal to a private operation.

- **Summer 2017**

Coalition conducts a series of town-hall meetings to draft the CBA.<sup>152</sup>

- **June 11, 2019**

A US District Court judge dismisses *Protect Our Parks et al. v Chicago Park District and the City of Chicago*, which argued “that the city could not legally transfer twenty acres of the historic Frederick Law Olmsted–designed park to a private entity.” Protect Our Parks plans to appeal.<sup>153</sup>

- **July 18, 2019**

Coalition website changes from “CBA for the Obama Library” to “CBA for the Obama Center.”

151. “2016 Development Principles,” CBA for the Obama Library.

152. Coalition for a CBA (@ObamaCBA), “Our next #GetItInWriting forum is at 6 p.m.,” Twitter, Jul. 11, 2017, 10:00 a.m., [twitter.com/ObamaCBA/status/884819578894688257](https://twitter.com/ObamaCBA/status/884819578894688257).

153. Koziarz, “Judge Dismisses Lawsuit,” Curbed Chicago.

- **July 24, 2019**

Alds. Leslie Hairston (5th) and Jeanette Taylor (20th) introduce a CBA ordinance, which focuses on housing issues in a two-mile radius around the center site, to the Chicago City Council.<sup>154</sup>

- **July 28, 2019**

Chicago's new mayor, Lori Lightfoot, convenes a private meeting of "grassroots" (e.g., the coalition, the Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization, etc.) and "establishment" (e.g., the Chicago Community Trust, the Emerald South Economic Development Collaborative, etc.) organizations. The meeting included representatives from the foundation, various city departments, and the university.<sup>155</sup>

- **July 29, 2019**

Chicago's Department of Planning and Development determines that the center "will have an *Adverse Effect* to historic properties [emphasis in original]" in Jackson Park, which the foundation must mitigate in consultation with the National Park Service, the Federal Highway Administration, and the Illinois Department of Transportation. The meeting is scheduled for Aug. 5, 2019.<sup>156</sup>

- **2021**

Anticipated ribbon-cutting ceremony for the center.

154. Gettinger, "CBA Housing Ordinance Introduced," *Hyde Park Herald*.

155. Gettinger, "Mayor Resets Timeline," *Hyde Park Herald*.

156. Department of Planning and Development, *Assessment of Effects to Historic Properties: Proposed Undertaking in and adjacent to Jackson Park* (Chicago: City of Chicago, July 2019), 53, [www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/dcd/supp\\_info/jackson/aoe\\_for\\_public\\_review.pdf](http://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/dcd/supp_info/jackson/aoe_for_public_review.pdf).

## Appendix 2: Participating Organizations of the Coalition<sup>157</sup>

### Members

Black Youth Project 100

Bronzeville Regional Collective, founding member

Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization, founding member

Southside Together Organizing for Power, founding member

UChicago for a CBA (formerly Prayer and Action Collective, formerly Trauma Center Prayers), founding member

Westside Health Authority

### Ally Members

Alliance of the Southeast

Brighton Park Neighborhood Council

Chicago Jobs Council

Chicago Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights

Chicago Rehab Network

Chicago Teachers Union

Chicago Women in Trades

Community Renewal Society

Environment, Transportation, Health, and Open Space

Friends of the Parks

Indivisible Chicago–South Side

Metropolitan Tenants Organization

Poor People's Campaign

157. "Obama Community Benefits Agreement Coalition," CBA for the Obama Center, 2018, accessed July 27, 2019, [www.obamacba.org/coalition.html](http://www.obamacba.org/coalition.html).

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Showing up for Racial Justice Chicago

South Side Chicago Democratic Socialists of America

Nathalie P. Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community

Improvement, University of Illinois at Chicago

Westside Health Authority

Wolf Pack Youth Football

Woodlawn Baptist Church

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