

# “A Palace for the People”

## Claiming Space through Expressive Culture in Chicago’s South Shore Neighborhood

JEANNE LIEBERMAN, AB’16

### Introduction

The South Shore Cultural Center stands on sixty-five acres of parkland on Chicago’s lakefront. The building, filled with cascading chandeliers, embossed ceilings, and floor-to-ceiling windows, is set back from the busy intersection of 71st Street and South Shore Drive by a colonnade and a wide archway suspended between a pair of two-story towers with open-air wooden balconies. In a 1979 flyer for the American Dance and Music summer festival the colonnade melts into illustrations of figures and artifacts that wrap around the text, with an image of the clubhouse in the center. The building is a backdrop that opens onto a space filled with activity: faces and bodies of dancers, children, writers, bikers, and golfers connect the Mediterranean-style exterior to an African drum, a tennis player, two painters in Egyptian-style profile, and a bearded saxophone player. The flyer circulated as a part of a fight to save the former clubhouse of a private country club and turn it into cultural center. It places the clubhouse in an aspirational cultural geography, where Black bodies map a claim to space to which they were not yet guaranteed access. The collage of images depicts the lifestyles of many residents in the surrounding neighborhood, but it is also a selective representation



of an “inner-city” community that was not immune to the effects of postwar urban deindustrialization and disinvestment (Taub [1988] 1994, 34).

This essay examines the Coalition to Save the South Shore Country Club, which was, in its own words, “an affiliation of multi-ethnic individuals and neighborhood-based organizations that united to fight the Chicago Park District wrecking ball aimed at South Shore Country Club” in 1977 and transformed the former club into the South Shore Cultural Center.<sup>1</sup> The coalition’s story shows how a diverse group negotiated differing priorities about the role of the arts in shaping the future of their community to reinvent a club that had practiced racism and elitism. They established a public cultural institution on the South Side at a time when Chicago was experiencing municipal disinvestment. This story illuminates the potential of cultural politics to intervene in urban decline. The coalition’s representations of their community’s cultural and social resources ran counter to the dominant discourse that portrayed postwar urban Black communities as homogenous places of cultural and economic poverty and social disorganization—a portrayal that overlooked Black middle-class neighborhoods (Anderson and Sternberg 2012, 439–40; Beauregard 1993, 172–74). Coalition members worked to identify, preserve, and generate value in their neighborhood based on its unique cultural assets and connections to the vibrant history of Chicago’s South Side.

My analysis is informed by sociologist Diane Grams’s study of art production networks in three Chicago neighborhoods. I take Grams’s work as a starting point for understanding how projects centered on

1. “Coalition to Save the South Shore Country Club Park, Inc.,” brochure, 1985, unprocessed papers, Coalition to Save the South Shore Country Club Archives, Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Woodson Regional Library, Chicago Public Library (hereafter CSSS-CCA). Editor’s note: The coalition’s papers were unprocessed in 2015 when the author consulted them. The editor has added folder and box numbers, where listed at [www.chipublib.org/fa-coalition-to-save-the-south-shore-country-club-cssscc-archives](http://www.chipublib.org/fa-coalition-to-save-the-south-shore-country-club-cssscc-archives).

expressive culture have responded to changes in urban policy and policy-making discourse in Chicago:

Chicago’s cultural context in the twenty-first century can be understood by looking at the changes that have taken place as Chicago transformed from a modern, industrial city in which the hierarchies of race and ethnicity were structured as ascribed, subordinate statuses and maintained through industrial labor practices, to a postmodern, postindustrial one, in which identity and cultural meanings are no longer “fixed,” but are self-identifications that are asserted and then mobilized as a collective resource. In this context, where culture can be understood as “strategies for action,” race and ethnicity are collective resources for financial, political, and now cultural enfranchisement (2010, 5–6).

This case study asserts the importance of expressive culture—acts of creation and performance consciously concerned with aesthetics, especially music, dance, and visual art—in the transition from an industrial to a postindustrial city. However, my analysis diverges from Grams’s proposal that race in the postindustrial era functions as a voluntary identification. While the coalition did mobilize Black cultural identity as a resource and point of pride, the South Shore Cultural Center’s history also shows that the industrial-postindustrial transition generated new ways for elites to perpetuate racially uneven urban development.

This essay is also in dialogue with growing scholarship on the Black Arts Movement and sociology scholarship of uneven urban development, gentrification, and interdependent flows of cultural and economic capital since the sixties (Deener 2007; Gale 1979; Hackworth 2006; Lloyd [2005] 2010; Sassen 2001; Zukin 1987). Building on the work of sociologist Mary Pattillo and others, I pay close attention to the agency and experiences of the Black middle class as “mediators, conduits, [and] brokers” within existing patterns of resource distribution (Anderson and Sternberg 2012; Grams 2010; Hyra 2006; Moore 2005; Pattillo 1999, 2003, 2005, 2007,

307; Widener 2010). The story of the South Shore Cultural Center illustrates how Black middle-class individuals developed a new approach to urban development focused on culture and allows me to examine how the transition from a deindustrialized to a postindustrial America shifted debates about what expressive culture can do in and for an urban Black neighborhood. The coalition's work was often in tension with the dominant narratives of policy makers, elected officials, and the mainstream news media<sup>2</sup> about what is possible in urban settings.

The first two sections of the essay ("A Palace for the People" and the Cultural Logic of Uneven Development) weave together a brief history of the club with a conceptual framework for understanding the persistence of racial inequality in urban development (Goldsby 2006). They provide the context of urban politics, development decisions, and popular racial conceptions in which the coalition worked. I examine how the coalition contested the cultural logic of uneven development at a moment when a citywide response to urban deindustrialization was just beginning to emerge and its terms were not yet solidified. Rather than respond directly to negative narratives about Black communities in the dominant discourse, the coalition worked to associate the SSCC<sup>3</sup> and the South Shore neighborhood with positive representations of Black culture and Black Chicago as a generative part of a thriving city.

2. Newspapers and television news programs with nationwide and predominantly White audiences. Mainstream print media, particularly newspapers and magazines, gave me access to contemporary perspectives on the coalition's work and is the basis for histories of urban crisis and urban property values by scholars such as Mary Pattillo, Kevin Gotham, and Robert Beauregard, on whom I draw heavily. Rebecca Zorach's work on the Black Arts Movement shows how television news made images an increasingly important source of information about the conditions in American cities after the mid-century.

3. Editor's note: Before 1986 the abbreviation SSCC stands for the South Shore Country Club and afterwards for the South Shore Cultural Center.

The third section (A Coalition to Organize "the Community") outlines the emergence of the coalition, its membership, and its mission. This and later sections (Postwar South Shore, Knowing the Value of a "Lakefront Gem," Claiming Space, A "Community Aesthetic," and "Soulful Summer Saturdays") examine different visions for the SSCC and South Shore by the coalition and external groups, and how these visions changed over time. I pay close attention to rhetorical strategies. Coalition's members articulated an alternative narrative about the material, social, and cultural values in their neighborhood, in part by building on the conceptual and visual vocabulary of the Black Arts Movement a decade earlier (Zorach 2015, 98–100). They also capitalized on jazz—simultaneously identified with Black culture, urbanity, and middle-class lifestyles—to make the vibrancy of South Side history and the possibilities for an auspicious future for their community legible to other South Shore residents, policy makers, and citywide audiences. The coalition's fierce internal debates about the relationship between economics and culture reveal the members' complex stances towards Black empowerment, community development, the arts, and education.

The final section (Cultural Logic of the Postindustrial City) connects the coalition's work and the cultural development of downtown Chicago in following decades.

My research is based on archival documents in the Chicago Public Library and interviews in 2015 and 2017 with former coalition members. Though refracted through hindsight, the interviews contextualize the archive, which often only records the proposals that prevailed after much internal debate within the organization.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, I wrote this essay while a student at the University of Chicago, which has a long and

4. By creating a linear narrative out of many voices, I am aware that I have imposed my own priorities to make connections to long-term national trends in urban history; at the same time, I frame the history to draw attention to the issues that were important to those who shaped it.

fraught relationship with South Side communities and which was involved in many of the urban redevelopment policies that affected South Shore.

## “A Palace for the People”

In 1906 a group of prominent Protestant businessmen commissioned the South Shore Country Club.<sup>5</sup> These men moved their investments from Washington Park (four miles northwest of South Shore) when it began to change to a working-class Irish and Jewish neighborhood. Called the “jewel in the crown of South Shore” by mid-century sociologists, the club was the eastern anchor of the elegant 71st Street shopping district, “the principal upper-middle-class shopping area for the whole south-east quadrant of the city” (Molotch 1972, 42; Taub [1988] 1994, 31).

Club membership broadened in the first half of the twentieth century as the demographics of Chicago’s elite changed and definitions of whiteness shifted. In the interwar period the club aided the social mobility of the politically connected Irish middle class, introducing them “to the world of cotillions and champagne” (Pacyga and Skerrett 1986, 388). Yet, even as the surrounding South Side changed from predominantly White to predominantly Black, the club excluded Jews until its last years and never admitted Blacks (Molotch 1972; Taub [1988] 1994, 31–42). After WWII a declining industrial economy, redlining, and White flight had led to disinvestment and a decline in commercial life in many nearby areas of the South Side, including North Kenwood, Oakland, Bronzeville, and Woodlawn (Pattillo 2007, 64–66). Club members moved away and ultimately the country club was shuttered, leaving the building vulnerable to demolition.

5. Members included Potter Palmer, Marshall Field, and A. Montgomery Ward (Jennifer O. Schultz, *Friends of the Parks Newsletter*, Fall 1984, box 15, folder 8, CSSSCCA.)

The club closed in 1974 and was purchased by the Chicago Land Commission, which then sold it to the Chicago Park District for \$9 million.<sup>6</sup> Soon after, the Park District razed smaller structures surrounding the clubhouse, while a handful of formal and informal neighborhood groups attempted to influence the site’s future. The Park District’s July 1977 proposal to the Chicago Plan Commission to demolish the clubhouse galvanized activists, urban planners, and preservationists. A new grassroots organization, the Coalition to Save the South Shore Country Club Park, formed to mobilize widespread opposition to the demolition at public hearings and quickly expanded its efforts to ensuring community participation in the club’s redevelopment.

A commemorative article about a coalition music festival noted the symbolic significance of the transition of a private country club into a public cultural center: “in its brief, five-year existence, the [coalition] has transformed what had been an architectural metaphor for caste distinctions and ethnic exclusion into an elegant symbol proclaiming the power of community cohesion.”<sup>7</sup> The coalition’s struggle was more than an effort to save one historic building. The forces that had emptied out the country club were connected to larger forces shaping the surrounding neighborhoods, and American cities at large, during the late twentieth century (Beauregard 1993, 161–81). Many believed that their struggle was an avenue for non-elite residents to affect the trajectory of the deindustrializing city rather than become victims of its transformations. Raynard Hall, the coalition’s vice president, summarized this understanding of the coalition’s work in a speech to a Chicago City Council committee: “South Shore Country Club has always been symbolic. In the past it was a symbol of wealth and power and the exclusiveness those attributes often demand. Now since the Chicago Park District’s decision

6. Coalition to Save the South Shore Country Club Archives, [www.chipublib.org/fa-coalition-to-save-the-south-shore-country-club-cssscc-archives](http://www.chipublib.org/fa-coalition-to-save-the-south-shore-country-club-cssscc-archives).

7. Salim Muwakkil, “The Beat Goes On,” *Chicago Nightmoves*, souvenir Jazz Comes Home program issue, 1982, box 25, folder 7, CSSSCCA.

to rehabilitate the facility for public use, the buildings and grounds of South Shore Country Club metaphorically suggest for all to see the potential of victory for the everyday man in the struggle to overcome the problems that beset many urban communities today.”<sup>8</sup>

## The Cultural Logic of Uneven Development

The coalition aimed to transform the symbolic meaning of a country club from racial exclusion to inter-racial cooperation and Black pride and to associate the South Shore neighborhood and Black Chicago generally with cultural wealth rather than with cultural poverty or absence. This placed the coalition in a battle of competing representations of Black life in postwar urban America. To better understand the significance of the coalition’s actions, in this section I examine how dominant representations of race worked to naturalize urban segregation and racially uneven development by the private market and government programs, even after the Supreme Court outlawed restrictive covenants in 1948 (Gotham 2002, 3, 65–68).

The cultural logic of uneven development draws on the work of literary scholar Jacqueline Goldsby who uses of the concept of “cultural logic” to “trace how the operations of racism fit into and sustain a historical milieu not as an ever-present norm but as a process that is responsive to historical change in the economic and cultural life of the nation” (2006, 6–7). The cultural logic of uneven development refers to widely accepted rationales or justifications for the unequal distribution of capital and people across urban and suburban space. I use culture in the broadest sense as shared patterns for making meaning out of lived experiences and a shared vocabulary for interpreting the world in which they take place: “culture [is] the terrain on which political struggle unfolds and provid[es]

8. Raynard Hall, “Statement read to the Joint Housing and Development Coordinating Committee, April 19, 1978, at Percy Julian High School, by the Coalition to Save the South Shore Country Club,” box 3, folder 5, CSSSCCA.

the language of contention for that struggle” (Hale and Millamán 2006, 285). Using this framework allows me to consider how acts of representation, including expressive culture, facilitate material and demographic inequalities. The cultural logic of uneven development emerges when representations that depict the negative effects of disinvestment on urban Black communities, such as on Chicago’s South and West Sides, come to predominate in the dominant news media and in academic and policy discourse. The repetition of these representations and the lack of representations that emphasize other characteristics of these spaces reinforces narratives that racial inequality is unavoidable, rather than the accumulated product of active decisions (Taub [1988] 1994, 7–9). For example, disinvestment leads to visible decay, which leads to more disinvestment, and so on. This self-reinforcing cycle justifies the claims of policy makers, developers, investors, and reporters. They can assume that many members of the public will not question their (implicit or explicit) assertions that sizable investment in Black neighborhoods is untenable because of a shared belief that “ghettos”—and especially the society and culture of their residents—inevitably lead to “urban decay.” The cultural logic of uneven development defines this dialectical relationship between representations and material conditions, which work together to limit what occurs in certain urban neighborhoods.

Since the early twentieth century, the real estate industry and policy makers have circulated racialized depictions of neighborhood life that linked whiteness to social stability and for many became synonymous with concepts such as home, neighborhood, and homeownership. This discursive strategy accompanied the rise of racially restrictive real estate covenants:

During the first two decades of the twentieth century...social workers, public officials, and other elites began to associate the presence of Blacks living in a particular area with deteriorating neighborhoods, poor schools, high crime, and other negative characteristics...[and] provided ostensibly objective and scientific

evidence to reinforce emerging prejudices and stereotypes that made it appear that Blacks were responsible for the social problems found in their neighborhoods (Gotham 2002, 36).

With regard to Chicago, historian Davarian Baldwin writes that “the Black Belt appeared to constitute a structurally homogenous and socially deviant community primarily because of both the legal and informal modes of racial restrictions on mobility” (2007, 28). Real estate agents helped shape these perceptions of urban space by associating White neighbors with stable or rising property values and high social status and by associating Black neighbors with the opposite.<sup>9</sup> The constructed category and privileges of whiteness allowed Whites to achieve social mobility by distancing themselves from Blacks.

After the ban on racially restricted covenants in the post-WWII period, the “the language of maintaining ‘security,’ ‘stability,’ or ‘integrity’ of community space” were euphemisms for the need to maintain racially homogenous White spaces, which smoothed over the incompatibility between White liberal ideals of equal opportunity with the acceptance and perpetuation of segregation (Baldwin 2007, 23–29; Gotham 2002, 47). Under this guise, racially motivated investment and disinvestment continued throughout the postwar years.

From the postwar period through the middle of the seventies, Blacks occupied a growing proportion of neighborhoods in northern cities, while jobs and the White middle class left for the suburbs. Historian Thomas Sugrue writes that “the steady loss of manufacturing jobs in northeastern and midwestern cities occurred at the same time that millions of African Americans migrated to the urban North, driven from the rural South by disruptions in the agricultural economy and lured by the promise of freedom and opportunity denied to them in Jim Crow’s last, desperate days”

9. The real estate industry profited from these associations. Segregation allowed the industry to charge a premium on properties in White neighborhoods and to inflate rents for substandard housing in Black neighborhoods.

([1996] 2005, 46).<sup>10</sup> Urban renewal, including the placement of highways and public housing, encouraged movement of resources and people out of or through, but not into, Black areas of the inner city (Jackson 1985, 219–30; Polikoff 2006).<sup>11</sup> The resulting landscapes, visibly marked by disinvestment, functioned in the dominant discourse as “scene and symbol” of the “urban crisis” and the social unrest that threaten the “postwar economic and social order” (Beauregard 1993, 161–81; Ellison [1948] 2014; Jackson 1985, 217–19; Sugrue [1996] 2005, 46).

As urban historian Robert Beauregard writes: “no longer a physical attribute of the city as it had been in an earlier period of the discourse, urban decline became equated with a group whose presence was spatially and morally threatening and whose image dominated popular urban perceptions” (1993, 178). This was particularly true after the race riots in the late sixties. Debates about the future of American cities increasingly stressed the social disorganization and the economic and cultural dimensions of poverty in Black neighborhoods (as well as urban environments at large). In Beauregard’s analysis of national news coverage during the sixties and early seventies, the media associated US cities with “urban crisis,” emphasizing stagnation and material and social decay: “the spatial focal point moved from the metropolis to the ‘ghetto,’” and urban life was equated with “the ghetto” and the “culture of poverty” (1993, 164). Segregation and White flight facilitated these perceptions: “white suburbanites view[ed] the ghetto from a distance [and] saw it as evidence of the moral deficiency and intellectual inferiority of its residents.... As citizenship was redefined by home ownership and patterns of consumption, black people—denied access to credit—found themselves excluded from postwar prosperity” (Berlin 2010, 196).

10. See also Berlin (2010, 194) and Beauregard (1993, 170).

11. The University of Chicago and the Illinois Institute of Technology played a central role in shaping urban renewal policy in Chicago and on a national scale. For a detailed account, see Hirsch ([1983] 1998).

These depictions rendered invisible the growing Black middle class, which remained largely urban, and they obscured the “dominant fact of black political and cultural life in the aftermath of the civil rights and black power periods [which was] the parting of ways between the black middle class and the black poor” (Widener 2010, 225). This “vastly understated the diversity of black life in favor of an emphasis on the pathologies of the inner city” (Berlin 2010, 196) and naturalized private and public disinvestment in Black areas. Relying on the cultural logic of uneven development, landlords, investors, and policy makers justified their decisions as, in the eyes of the White public, a reasonable response to impending deterioration for which they were not responsible (Beauregard 1993, 5–8, 170).

The cultural logic of uneven development was an obstacle to the coalition’s goal of representing South Shore as a culturally generative Black community. An example of how this worked is found in Winston Williams’ coverage of the coalition’s first Jazz Comes Home Festival for the *New York Times*. He wrote that the festival was part of the “stand that many residents have taken against further deterioration of the South Shore community. After changing in the mid-1960’s from a white to a black middle-class area, the community then saw an exodus of blacks, some fleeing an increasing crime rate, to the suburbs.”<sup>12</sup> Williams does not explain the reasons for the rise in crime, physical deterioration, nor middle-class exodus; he focuses instead on what he views as the neighborhood’s trajectory from “blight” to “rediscovery” and “rehabilitation.” He quotes the coalition president, Henry English, who says that “South Shore is being rediscovered as a place to live.”<sup>13</sup> Williams elaborates that “in recent years there have been many conversions to condominiums and cooperatives, . . . and new residential construction is planned. Whites

12. Winston Williams, “Chicago Black Community Uses Jazz to Save Symbol of Its Past and Future,” *New York Times*, August 17, 1981.

13. Ibid.

are starting to trickle back into the area. Some, of course, never left. The festival has also attracted new interest. Many of the estimated 85,000 who turned out over the three weekends were from distant parts of town.”<sup>14</sup> Williams’s portrayal reflects the shift in the dominant discourse about cities in the early eighties from “racial unrest and fiscal crisis [to] urban revival” (Beauregard 1993, 219). This prediction of an auspicious future for South Shore replicates the cultural logic of uneven development, which connects whiteness to higher real estate values and social ideals; the article says little about the content of the festival itself and is silent about the rich history of jazz in Black Chicago.

## A Coalition to Organize “the Community”

In late 1977 the Park District withdrew its application to demolish the South Shore Country Club. The Chicago Plan Commission named the Coalition to Save the South Shore Country Club the official representative of the community and mandated a joint planning process, with the participation of five Park District representatives and five coalition representatives, to create a comprehensive plan for the restoration of the SSCC. In 1978 the coalition incorporated as a nonprofit and over the following decade advocated for and oversaw the transformation of the club into a cultural center that would be, as its letterhead proclaimed, a “Palace for the People.” The coalition formed standing committees to research the building’s architectural merits and possibilities, to survey the surrounding neighborhood’s cultural and educational assets, and to find organizations to administer programs. The coalition devised numerous plans for the club, guided by a twenty-one-point master plan for

14. Ibid.

the building's restoration, and brokered a commitment from the Park District to seek \$7 million for implementation.<sup>15</sup>

Coalition members included established neighborhood organizations, such as the South Shore Commission and the Hyde Park–Kenwood Community Conference, and historic preservation groups, such as the Chicago Architectural Foundation and the Illinois Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. At first, some of the coalition's members came from outside of South Shore or even outside of the South Side, and there were no residency requirements for participation. However, throughout its existence, a majority of the coalition's approximately thirty board members and eight officers, including those with connections to citywide organizations, lived locally. With limited financial resources, the coalition relied heavily on the social and cultural capital of members who brought varied kinds of expertise, professional credentials, and connections, which were central to the coalition's success in building public and Park District support for the site's restoration.

After the building was saved, the participation of citywide groups interested in architectural preservation waned. These groups valued the clubhouse apart from the immediate community and were mainly interested in preserving a part of Chicago's Euro-American architectural history.<sup>16</sup> The work of imagining programming fell largely to South Shore and Hyde Park residents. They were invested in the building's future as a community space that could influence the surrounding neighborhood's culture and economy, rather than as a marker of past architectural achievement.

15. The clubhouse's Mediterranean style was rare in Chicago; the prominent Chicago architectural firm, Marshall and Fox, had based its design on a club in Mexico City. "Master Plan for Development of Park #429 (formerly South Shore Country Club) and a Statement Describing the Proposed Development," 1979, unprocessed papers, CSSSCCA.

16. "South Shore Country Club Park," part of a master plan, 1984, unprocessed papers, CSSSCCA.

Many of the coalition's leaders were Black activists in South Side and Chicago-wide progressive politics. Their backgrounds were in civil rights and Black power organizations of the sixties, including the Urban League, the radical student movement at Chicago city colleges, and the Black Panther Party. The coalition's first president was Bob Williams and his reputation as a community organizer and Chicago Urban League leader attracted many early supporters. The White members were often activists who had chosen to remain in South Shore or lived in Hyde Park, an integrated neighborhood to the north of South Shore; some were Jewish and had a further personal motivation to transform a place that had symbolized anti-Semitism as well as racism. They had organizing experience ranging from neighborhood development to antiwar protests. Among those who made the coalition's daily operations possible were Laura Schneider, Polly Silberman, Kathy Henning, and Robert Lambers. Younger coalition members remember their dedication and political savvy; one recalls that they helped set the skeptical tone of the coalition's early efforts to engage the Park District, encouraging other members to "not [believe] a word that the Park District said, always [be] willing to fight the political battle...and not give in to the powers that be.... They were committed to being in charge of what happened in their own community" (Raynard Hall, pers. comm., Oct. 3, 2015).

The coalition also attracted a group of younger Black professionals. Raynard Hall, the coalition's long-time vice president of program planning and fifth president, joined at the coalition's inaugural meeting in August 1977: "I approached that meeting as a Black [public relations] professional looking for [paid] work." After a few months he "began to see [him]self as an organizer" who dedicated significant time to the coalition's daily operations as an unpaid volunteer. Hall and another community organizer, Harold Lucas, recruited other young Black professionals to the coalition. They were returning to inner-city neighborhoods from college with "different degrees of social activism," according to Hall. "[We] were returning from all over the country, back to the neighborhoods, and...South Shore was very attractive.... We were coming



home, from college this time, not from the army” (pers. comm. Oct. 3, 2015). While not all coalition members had college degrees were more common among the leadership, a fact that reflected the changing composition of the Black middle class in the seventies and eighties (Pattillo 1999).

Coalition members stressed that “the preservation of the building dictated” its proposed uses (Wyman Winston, pers. comm., Nov. 2, 2015). However, there were still many programming options to consider, including a handful of proposals from competing groups. Most were put forward by the South Shore Center on the Lake, a group that briefly participated in the coalition as an institutional member but quickly parted ways because of their divergent visions. The Center on the Lake’s proposals drew upon conventional models for cultural venues, including a suburban-style dinner theater, a conference center, and a museum.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, the coalition’s proposals drew heavily upon the assets of the South Side’s rich history and contemporary, distinctly Black, urban cultural forms.<sup>18</sup>

The coalition claimed to represent “the community” in part by differentiating itself from the Center on the Lake, whose members were considered the “neighborhood elites.”<sup>19</sup> The coalition’s middle-class leaders

17. South Shore Center on the Lake, “The Third Century American City Living Museum: A Proposal for the Use of the South Shore Country Club,” January 1978, unprocessed papers, CSSSCCA.

18. Some parts of the two groups’ plans did overlap, because both groups had to make use of the existing clubhouse, tennis courts, and golf course.

19. The Center on the Lake temporarily joined the coalition as part of the “unified community front [that] was so necessary during this crisis period... [but] conflicts arose” and the Center on the Lake eventually withdrew, though a few center board members remained active in the coalition. By 1978 the two organizations were competing for clubhouse access until the coalition became the official community representative in the redevelopment process. Margaret

unified a diverse demographic around a shared commitment to increasing the cultural and economic vitality of their neighborhood. The large numbers of local residents who attended coalition rallies and festivals demonstrated that individuals with differing visions of how that vitality would be manifested could cooperate effectively.<sup>20</sup> In her study of Black gentrification in Chicago’s North Kenwood–Oakland neighborhood, sociologist Mary Pattillo suggests a definition of “the Black community” that is able to encompass diverse interests and different interpretations of how Black identity and “racial pride and duty” should be expressed (2007, 3).<sup>21</sup> Pattillo writes that “choosing participation over abdication and involvement over withdrawal, even and especially when the disagreements get heated... is what *constitutes* the black community” (2007, 3). Examining the coalition’s work through the lens of this definition reveals the class tensions and incompleteness inherent in all processes of collective representation but also explains the coalition’s assertion that they represented “the community.” The coalition did fund<sup>22</sup> programs largely aligned with Black middle-class preferences, but they also created a flexible structure that would accommodate a wide variety of programs. They stressed that the SSCC should be “multi-ethnic,” “multi-racial,” and “inter-

Adams, “Briefing Booklet for Coalition to Save the South Shore Country Club,” 1984, box 7, folder 9, CSSSCC.

20. Particularly relevant in this case is the slippage by the coalition and media between the “South Shore,” the “South Side,” and “citywide” community when defining who would benefit from a restored SSCC.

21. For the performance of cultural markers of class differences in a mixed-income Black neighborhood on Chicago’s South Side, see Pattillo (2003).

22. The coalition received funds from the City of Chicago City Arts, summer youth-programming grants, merchandise (posters, bags) sales, voluntary festival admissions, and private fund-raisers, including a 1984 party at Muhammad Ali’s Kenwood mansion called “The Building of the Cultural Now.”

generational”<sup>23</sup> and throughout the restoration process held open forums with Park District and elected officials where all community members were invited to voice opinions about the plans for the SSCC and what was of positive value to their community.

## Postwar South Shore

Communities on the South Side of Chicago changed from predominantly White to predominately Black from north to south—beginning with Grand Boulevard (a part of “Bronzeville”) and Woodlawn by the end of WWII, Grand Crossing in the fifties, and South Shore in the sixties (Best 2004; Molotch 1972; Taub [1988] 1994, 31–42). By the sixties redlining, disinvestment, and job loss had taken a toll on the commercial life and infrastructure of areas that had been Black middle-class enclaves, such as North Kenwood and Oakland (Pattillo 1999, 27; 2007, 61–70). Many upwardly mobile Black families moved farther south; South Shore became “a mecca” (Carol Adam, pers. comm., Dec. 3, 2015) for the Black middle class, which was rapidly expanding as a result of “the unprecedented economic growth and prosperity after World War II, along with the social and political pressures of the civil rights movement” (Pattillo 1999, 17). By the late sixties and early seventies lower-income Black families began to move into South Shore, some displaced by Hyde Park urban renewal. Redlining forced South Shore to grapple with increasing “tax delinquencies, crime rates, welfare rates,” absentee landlords, and disinvestment in the 71st Street commercial strip (Taub [1988] 1994, 40).

23. Coalition to Save the South Shore Country Club, “Preliminary Planning Document for the South Shore Country Club Park,” 1978, box 3, folder 17, CSSSCCA. The South Shore Commission, a community organization, first had the idea to convert the club into a cultural center; in the mid-seventies Carol Adams, organizer, sociologist, and employee of the South Shore Bank’s Neighborhood Institute, and artist Robert Paige had organized two art festivals at the club (Carol Adams, pers. comm., Dec. 3, 2015).

In the face of these changes, South Shore maintained active community organizations such as the South Shore Commission, a clearing house for middle-class amenities and activities (Moloth 1972, 223–25; Taub [1988] 1994, 32–36). A new anchor organization was established when the South Shore National Bank petitioned the US Comptroller of Currency to approve a routine application to relocate from the racially changing community to downtown in 1972. South Shore residents organized outspoken opposition. The comptroller’s denial of the application and the bank’s sale to Hyde Park investors created the nation’s first community development bank (Taub [1988] 1994, 18–20). Wyman Winston, a member of the coalition and an employee of the bank’s nonprofit subsidiary, the Neighborhood Institute, said that the bank was “the first [financial] institution that didn’t look at African American neighborhoods as neighborhoods of pathology” (pers. comm., Nov. 2, 2015). In an article celebrating the bank’s tenth anniversary, community leaders argued “that the bank has been instrumental in changing South Shore from a community on the way down to one on the rebound,” not because of any “programs started by the bank,” rather because it altered the symbolic landscape of the neighborhood.<sup>24</sup> A visible commitment to the neighborhood by a bank—an institution, like a country club, associated by many with conservative, elite interests and values—connoted “a certain moral standing in a community [that] is important to outsiders and insiders”; its “mere presence in the neighborhood [made] outsiders believe it [investment in the community] was viable” (Taub [1988] 1994, 12).

Throughout this period the Black Arts Movement was an alternative force on the South Side of Chicago. The Black Arts Movement had emerged in the struggle for Black empowerment in the sixties and had created a network of independent cultural venues in Hyde Park and

24. “South Shore Bank: Looking at 10 Years of Community Service.” *Chicago Journal: The South Side’s Free Newsweekly*, Nov. 30, 1983.

South Shore.<sup>25</sup> According to drummer and scholar John Runcie, participating artists, often themselves middle class, “recognized the validity and potential importance of ghetto culture and...sought to interpret, reinforce, validate, and direct this culture,” as part of a rejection of assimilation into the culture of the White middle class (Zorach 2019, 19). The movement encompassed “multiple visions of the politics of black culture” and was propelled by a “vision of community-based cultural politics focused on creative autonomy, collective organization, and the erasure of the border between art and life” (Widener 2010, 2). Many of the iconic works of the Chicago Black Arts Movement during the sixties were a product of community collaboration and institution building to counteract disinvestment in Black neighborhoods. Art historian Rebecca Zorach writes that “‘positive images,’ whose cultivation [sought] to combat an overtly racist visual culture, was a strongly shared and clearly articulated goal for the Black Arts Movement” (2019, 186).

Historian Ira Berlin considers “Black is Beautiful,” a refrain common in the movements of the sixties, a reflection of “ownership of the inner city” (2010, 197). However, for some in the Black Arts Movement and in the coalition expressive culture was not merely a reflection of ownership but a means for *creating* collective ownership of urban space. Art projects (murals, public sculptures, architectural/historic preservation, outdoor festivals, including those that precede the coalition, such as Everyday Arts and On the Beach) allowed Black residents to “enhance the liveability of [their] own communit[ies]” amid disinvestment, deindustrialization, and exploitative real estate practices that removed material and economic resources.<sup>26</sup>

25. For a more detailed account of the Black Arts Movement, see Zorach (2019). For a description of cultural organization in South Shore between 1981 and 1984, see the South Shore Cultural Council, “The Arts Are Building in South Shore,” report, n.d. (probably 1984), unprocessed papers, CSSSCCA.

26. Sarah Martini, “History of the Coalition to Save the South Shore Country Club,” in a Field Enterprise grant request, 1983, box 7, folder 2, CSSSCCA.

Whereas Chicago’s Black Arts Movement often sought to minimize differences between the Black middle and working classes, the coalition often emphasized the distinctiveness of Black middle-class culture and at times sought to distinguish South Shore from surrounding neighborhoods. Speaking of the coalition’s work, Raynard Hall said that “our vision for South Shore was a middle-class predominantly African American enclave, really. [Although] surrounded by whatever problems the rest of the city was experiencing, we thought we were [going to] be okay” (pers. comm., Oct. 3, 2015).

This was reflected in the coalition’s choice to focus much of their programming on jazz, which had come to occupy a specialized ‘high culture’ niche” by the seventies and eighties, with R&B, disco, house and other musical forms more popular among youth and working class African Americans (Zorach 2019, 109). Conflict over a mural at 71st Street and Jeffrey Boulevard provides another example of the diversity of opinions within the South Shore community about what forms of Black cultural expression were desirable. Mitchell Caton and Calvin Jones began work on the mural, *Builders of the Cultural Present*, in 1981.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps due to the associations of murals with graffiti and radical politics, a group of residents from the Jackson Park Highlands (a section of South Shore with expensive homes) felt that murals created a “ghetto-like environment,” according to Raynard Hall, then president of the South Shore Cultural Council. Hall recalls,

I found out the history of murals and how important they were, how in China and in Mexico murals were the people’s public expression.... Walgreen’s company [whose building would be

27. Caton and Jones were members of the Chicago Mural Group, now the Chicago Public Art Group, [www.cpag.net/guide/2/2\\_pages/2\\_6\\_07.htm](http://www.cpag.net/guide/2/2_pages/2_6_07.htm). For a biography of Caton, see Jeff Huebner, “Wailing Walls, *Chicago Reader*, Feb. 28, 1998.

painted] said, “we’ve been contacted by this other group, and they’re concerned.... We’d like to hear from the community.”... [So] we put together a meeting at the Country Club, of the Jackson Park Highlands group—there was about, I’m going to say generously, six.... We had about fifty people in the room who were associated with the Cultural Council at that time...mostly South Shore residents, but artists. South Shore and Hyde Park, but artists. And we went to the whole presentation and talked about the history of murals and we talked about this specific project, and we heard the objections of the Highlands people.... It got to be a little heated, to the point that I said “you know, the only way to resolve this is to put it to a vote. All those opposed, raise your hands.”... Five or six people raised their hands. “All those in favor of the project please stand up.” And it looked like the entire room stood up.... Walgreens approved the mural project the next day (pers. comm., Oct. 3, 2015).

## Knowing the Value of a “Lakefront Gem”

The Park District was the main source of opposition to coalition ideas. Coalition members understood that the Park District’s proposed demolition of the “beautiful, ethereal edifices on the Country Club grounds”<sup>28</sup> was part of a larger pattern that denied cultural and material assets to Black communities. While no one in power questioned whether the club had a valuable purpose in the past for its wealthy White members, the Park District questioned whether the “grand ballrooms” and atriums could serve a different, but equally valuable purpose for Black residents (Carol Adams, pers. comm., Dec. 3, 2015). The district assumed that the

28. Martini, “History of the Coalition to Save the South Shore Cultural Center,” in a Field Enterprise grant request, 1983, box 7, folder 2, CSSSCCA.

buildings “were slated for inevitable decay.”<sup>29</sup> Harold Lucas, the coalition’s press secretary, summarized the conflict between the coalition and the Park District succinctly: “We know the value of this structure, and we’re not about to let you tear it down, because your perception...is that all Black men need to do is play basketball—so [you think you] can tear it down and put up some basketball hoops” (pers. comm., Nov. 30, 2015).

Like other urbanites, South Shore residents were aware of mainstream ideas that the inner city imperils middle-class values (Beauregard 1993, 209). In general, the coalition constructed positive images of the South Side’s history and cultural production, but on occasion, it had to oppose hegemonic ideas about inner-city neighborhoods directly. In an op-ed about the coalition’s first Jazz Comes Home festival, a coalition board member, Roscoe King, and South Shore Bank executive, Ron Grzywinski, explicitly confronted many readers’ misconceptions: “When the last notes drifted across the lake, the crowds dispersed quietly. There has been no disruption, no violence—only respect for the beauty of the music and of the place.”<sup>30</sup>

The toll of deindustrialization, disinvestment, and the diversion of resources to the suburbs was evident to coalition members as they moved through their everyday lives, especially in neighborhoods north of South Shore called the “Low End,” which had recently also been middle class (Pattillo 2007, 64–70). This gave a sense of urgency to their work:

The vitality, however, of the business district of 71st Street was then being threatened by the recent abandonment of the multi-storied National Tea Company Building, situated at 71st and South Shore Drive. It had held many long time professional services, now removed because of the abandonment. East Woodlawn was a shambles dominated by the massive hulk of the Southmoor

29. Ibid.

30. Roscoe King and Ron Grzywinski, “Jazz Comes Home to South Side,” op-ed, *Chicago Sun-Times*, Aug. 11, 1981.

Hotel at 67th and Stony Island, slowly disintegrating into a demoralizing tragedy before the eyes of all travelling south...to South Shore. Children of the area made it all too immediate by frequently stoning buses and trains and playing pranks with the railroad's main switching mechanisms at 67th Street and when armed properly by taking pot shots at the locals. But immediately to the east... and south...this effect was counterbalanced by the beautiful, ethereal grandeur of the Park District Grounds and landscaping with its perfectly integrated edifices.<sup>31</sup>

The excerpt shifts seamlessly from the built to the social environment of South Shore and Woodlawn and back again to the “integrated edifices” of the SSCC as a symbol of hope; it draws attention to the power of the SSCC as a reflection of traditional conceptions of beauty, contrasting the orderliness of the SSCC's grounds with the perceived abandonment and disorder of its surroundings. The SSCC exposed the public to luxurious ballrooms and a verdant park, which contradicted images of the South Side as enveloped by disinvestment and deterioration—common images on which the cultural logic of uneven development relied. Yet, this excerpt also uses fear of imminent deterioration to push for resources for the community to organize itself and act as custodians of the SSCC's aesthetic and social value.

The coalition stressed that local artists and musicians could create new value for the site, which would offer an intangible return on the city's investment, enrich the lives of citizens across the city, and give the local community access to cultural wealth that was rightfully theirs (Geraldine de Haas, pers. comm., Dec. 3, 2015). The coalition did not frame its argument for reinvestment in the “palatial spaces” and grounds as a remedy to a perceived lack of resources in an inner-city community, but as a way to tap into *existing* resources. It planned to capitalize on the

31. Martini, “History of the Coalition to Save the South Shore Cultural Center,” in a Field Enterprise grant request, 1983, box 7, folder 2, CSSSCCA.

cultural resources within the community to enhance the site's value. By proposing and realizing ambitious cultural and educational programming that responded to the recreational preferences of the Black middle class and integrated South Side audiences, the coalition attempted to demonstrate that Black cultural producers could more fully realize the club's potential than its previous elite owners. For local activists, the coalition's model of redevelopment allowed resident musicians and artists, who might lack economic capital, to invest in their community, to interrupt the cycle of disinvestment, and to reclaim the value contained in their neighborhood.

Another potential value of the SSCC was its lakefront location. Advocates stressed that the SSCC was on par with other “lakefront...gems [and] beautiful facilities,” most of which were located on the North Side. The coalition “wanted the Country Club to be one of those. So, in order to position it where we hope to get funding to the level of our vision, we were very careful—all of us—in using language that discussed it as a regional facility” (Raynard Hall, pers. comm., Oct. 3, 2015).

## Claiming Space

The coalition's initial task was to make the Park District, the media, and the city aware of the size of the opposition to the demolition. The coalition held frequent rallies in its first few months, filling the SSCC with as many bodies as possible, and held its first event, the Preservation Festival, in 1977. In a creative twist on a community-organizing staple, coalition members drove around South Shore in a big sound truck owned by a local resident known as “Cadillac Jack” to inform the neighborhood about the proposed demolition (Raynard Hall, pers. comm., Oct. 3, 2015). The Park District withdrew their application for demolition from the Chicago Plan Commission after an October 1977 rally of over a thousand people.

In a press release for the 1979 American Dance and Music: Chicago Style festival Harold Lucas connected the coalition's work to a larger

struggle against discrimination by the Park District: “in recent *Sun-Times* articles on the Chicago Park District, information gathered by news media research shows that in the last five years cutbacks of staff in predominantly black communities on the South, Southwest and West-side areas of Chicago have left a state of confusion with no programs for community people who are by now afraid to use these parks.”<sup>32</sup> The Park District’s systematic and illegal neglect of parks in Black neighborhoods fueled community outrage at the Park District’s 1977 plan to replace the SSCC’s clubhouse with a gymnasium:

The Park District by that time had such a horrible reputation for how they handled their assets, nobody believed that they would put back anything of equal value. We knew that it would be a concrete block building with toilets that weren’t in use. No one believed the Park District... Chicago government had intentionally divested minority areas of recreational assets. So people who grew up on the South Side who were used to learning how to skate when they were kids, the Park District wasn’t creating skating rinks anymore in minority areas. When the facility reached a certain level of disrepair, they would shut it down, room by room, toilet by toilet. So if something broke, they just shut it down and you didn’t have access. You had a period—because people quit using them in the late sixties—where the parks basically became the domain of the gangs. And that meant even fewer people were using the parks (Wyman Winston, pers. comm., Nov. 2, 2015).

The Park District’s attitude towards the SSCC changed after a 1982 lawsuit<sup>33</sup> over district racial bias: “the biggest result [of the lawsuit] is that it

32. Harold Lucas, “American Dance and Music: Chicago Style,” June 1979, press release, unprocessed papers, CSSSCCA.

33. In 1982 the US Attorney General sued the Chicago Park District for violating the 1974 Housing and Community Development Act for favoring parks in

took the demolition of the Country Club off the table” (Wyman Winston, pers. comm., Nov. 2, 2015).

The 1979 press release proclaimed that the “3 weekend summer showcase of art, music and dance at South Shore Country Club Park is a demonstration of how cosmopolitan artists and community people can come together, reflecting the ethnic diversity of South Shore/Chicago for a community celebration.”<sup>34</sup> Gathering in celebration in a South Side public park was an act of defiance against disinvestment in local public spaces, and the arts program claimed democratic community ownership of the site, based on the unique talents and identities of community members. The wide range of arts (including free jazz, gospel, blues, disco, and modern, square, and tap dancing) contradicted assumptions that South Side communities were culturally impoverished or homogenous.

During the early years, the coalition proposed year-round programs, such as film societies, locally broadcasted television stations, and educational programs, many of which they believed would also contribute to local economic development. Most were never realized for a combination of practical and political reasons. For instance, the Park District failed to heat the building in the winter of 1979–80, a pipe burst, and the district barred indoor programs until restoration was completed in 1985. The closure prevented a coalition agreement with the Illinois Board of

White communities. “U.S. Sues Chicago Park District, Charging Racial Bias in Programs,” *New York Times*, Dec. 1, 1982; “US Sues Park District on Bias Charge,” *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 1, 1982; Andrew Malcolm, “Accord is Reached on Chicago Parks,” *New York Times*, May 11, 1983.

34. Lucas, “American Dance and Music: Chicago Style,” June 1979, press release, unprocessed papers, CSSSCCA. Old Town School of Folk Music, Chicago Archives of Blues Traditions, Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, “Gospel Extravaganza,” Joseph Holmes Dance Company, Diamond Square Dancers, Great Senior Tap Dancers, Gus Giordano Dance Company, and Happy Music Inc.—Disco Party performed. “Summer Showcase: 3 Week-ends of Art, Music, and Dance,” flyer, 1979, unprocessed papers, CSSSCCA.

Education to use part of the main building for environmental education by local schools.

After 1980, the coalition channeled its energy into summer festivals and a youth training program, which sparked heated disagreement about what art forms and kinds of programs to prioritize. For some, the primary purpose of programs should be to educate audiences about the past and present cultural wealth of the South Side; for others, programs should convince residents and outsiders to invest in South Shore. Musical festivals with nationally recognized artists fulfilled both educational and economical priorities and allowed coalition members to reconcile their different priorities.

## A “Community Aesthetic”

Although many changes in South Shore were beyond the control of residents and coalition members, saving the SSCC did allow them to fill an empty space at an anchor location between the 71st Street commercial district and the lakefront. Margaret Adams, a Northeastern Illinois University student who worked with the coalition, described the basis for this model: “in light of what Dr. Carter G. Woodson writes in *Mis-Education of the Negro* the potential of the South Shore Country Club would fall into the area of developing opportunities already present in our community and creating institutions and a social atmosphere that we control.”<sup>35</sup> Carol Adams, leader of the South Shore Cultural Council and a supporter of the coalition, discusses her approach to empty spaces, like the shuttered country club: “It started first with the community aesthetic. How do we want to look? Okay. Because at this point, you’re starting to see the vacant stores, for instance, on 71st. People are moving away, the high-end stores, those small stores; they can’t make any money there. They were going to be malls and this and that. So what do we do with

35. Margaret Adams, “Briefing Booklet for Coalition to Save the South Shore Country Club,” 1984, box 7, folder 9, CSSSCCA.

those spaces? How do we make them look good? How do we keep our community looking a particular way? Also the mural movement came from there” (pers. comm., Dec. 3, 2015). Emptiness was not neutral: it communicated a lack of resources and provided reason for credit denials, which lead to further emptiness and invited the dangers associated with “the ghetto.” Filling empty spaces was a key concern for many in the coalition who otherwise had divergent views on cultural politics.

The coalition’s emphasis on community control and use of culture to mobilize people circumvented the limitations of conventional channels of urban politics. The seventies and eighties witnessed the rise of Black voters’ influence in municipal politics and the simultaneous fall in the power of municipalities, whose tax base shrank due to deindustrialization and suburbanization—a process sociologist William Julius Wilson called the “politics of dependency” (1978, 122–43). During this period, artists, such as those in the community mural movement, demonstrated that they could disrupt the cultural logic of both dependency and uneven development by seizing visual control of urban landscapes. With significantly less upfront capital investment than traditional urban development projects, artists’ widely visible and large-scale work chipped away at narratives that naturalized urban decline with images of celebration.

In the coalition’s first three years (1977–80) the urgency of the struggle to preserve a beautiful and valued resource united members from varied political backgrounds. The coalition’s “campaign for cultural and economic self-determination at SSCC Park”<sup>36</sup> would allow local residents to decide collectively what was of value to their community by selecting and participating in public cultural events. Should they use their time and funds for a jazz series, classical concerts, and/or gospel music? For many the priority was programs that would “bring large numbers [of people]. We also hoped to raise money...and demonstrate that we, we the community, could develop programming and pay for it” (Raynard

36. Roscoe King, “Campaign for Coalition President,” speech, January 14, 1985, unprocessed papers, CSSSCCA.

Hall, Nov. 29, 2017). An example of this eclectic programming was a twelve-day summer festival called “The Renaissance Idea? Chicago ’80,” a reference to the Harlem and Chicago renaissances of the twenties and thirties. There were performances of classical music by local residents and the Lyric Opera Ballet, and a jazz set by Oscar Brown Jr., a prominent figure in the Black Arts Movement; the festival’s twelve themes included Sacred Music: Gregorian to Gospel, Swing Era to Gershwin, and a Historical Pageant of Black Arts.<sup>37</sup> Rather than stress working-class Black culture, as had some in the Black Arts Movement during the sixties,<sup>38</sup> many coalition programs emphasized the influence of Black culture upon “mainstream” American culture. Such programs as *Dance in Chicago: Ragtime to Rock* recuperated the historical contributions of Black Chicago to the city’s vitality and reconceptualized Black communities as places where cultural value is created.

Coalition members held a range of perspectives about which programs to support. The most important and enduring debate was the importance of educational programs versus building economic power as the primary strategy for improving conditions in Black neighborhoods. Among the coalition members who stressed education was the prominent jazz musician and producer, Geraldine de Haas. Quoted in a coalition grant, de Haas said that the arts could “affect both the physical and spiritual welfare of the persons in the community” and “provide the young with a continuing vision of their own heritage, the intimate knowledge of tradition and input into the continued direction of [their] development.”<sup>39</sup> The ability of the SSCC to educate local residents in

37. “The Renaissance Idea? Chicago ’80,” flyer, 1980, unprocessed papers, CSS-SCCA.

38. For an example of the political segregation of Black art, see Jones (1963). For a historical discussion of related perspectives in Chicago, see Zorach (2019).

39. Martini, “History of the Coalition to Save the South Shore Cultural Center,” in a Field Enterprise grant request, 1983, box 7, folder 2, CSSSCCA.

their history was joined to the salutary benefits of parks: the SSCC would “stimulate and encourage both young and old in the wholesome leisure time use of our parks, and to ensure in every possible way that the time they spend in the parks is mentally and physically satisfying and beneficial.”<sup>40</sup>

Other coalition members, such as Henry English, promoted the SSCC as an anchor for local commercial development. English, president when the coalition produced its first *Jazz Comes Home* festival in 1981, was quoted extensively in a special issue in *Nightmoves*, which was dedicated to the next annual *Jazz Comes Home* festival:

“In the area the Country Club was the first facility built and the community was sort of built around the facility,” English said. “That building is a symbolic representation of what has to take place in this community. I see it symbolizing the rebirth of the community.” English said a “restructured, rebuilt, and renovated” South Shore is already underway, partially as a result of last year’s *Jazz Comes Home* series. The New Apartment nightclub on 75th Street and Mother’s on 79th Street regularly feature live music “since they saw that people will come out to see it,” he said. Now that South Siders are spending more money for entertainment in their own community rather than taking it to other communities, the South Shore will begin to prosper again. “You have to do more than live in a community, you have to invest in it,” English said. “When we go outside our community to spend money—whether on entertainment or on business goods and services—our community loses. Keeping money in our community keeps jobs. It makes good economic sense to keep it all at home. And that after all is how the original patrons of the South Shore Country Club

40. Park District Fall and Winter Program, n.d., unprocessed papers, CSSSCCA.



became wealthy enough to build their exclusive little enclave in the first place.”<sup>41</sup>

The coalition’s goal of preserving the grand and luxurious clubhouse reflected a middle-class economic position secure enough to look beyond questions of economic survival—even as that was becoming increasingly precarious for their working-class neighbors (Widener 2010, 248–82; Wilson 1978, 136). In his study of Los Angeles, the historian Daniel Widener connects the rise of public practices of celebration to the economic divergence of Black middle and working classes during the late sixties and early seventies. He speaks of “a ‘practice of celebration’ and an ‘aesthetic of survival’...correspond[ing] to class positions within the African American community that shaped broader sensibility toward understanding the place of African Americans within the urban setting” (2010, 225).

Following the successful fight to save the clubhouse, as the coalition began to focus more on programming, tensions grew among members. By 1982 English and de Haas had parted ways, due in large part to the differences in their goals. De Haas created Jazz Unites in 1981 and began producing separate jazz programs at the SSCC beginning in 1983 (pers. comm. with Henry English, Oct. 27, 2015; Geraldine de Haas, Dec. 5, 2015; and Raynard Hall, Oct. 3, 2015). Similar tensions over the relative merits of culture and economics had arisen in the earlier struggles for civil rights and Black power movement. Widener, who analyzed collaborations among radical Black political organizations and Black artists in the sixties and seventies, writes that the artists who had

their own ideas about black culture, politics, and art forced each group to sharpen its ideological positions, a process that often revealed considerable differences between politically conscious artists and

41. Muwakkil, “The Beat Goes On,” *Chicago Nightmoves*, souvenir Jazz Comes Home program issue, 1982, box 25, folder 7, CSSSCCA.

culturally concerned political activists.... Retracing the cultural strategies and programs of black nationalist organizations thus reveals how the attempt to bring black art to black communities created different imperatives for political radicals than for either community-oriented artists or proponents of a cultural war on poverty (2010, 188).

## “Soulful Summer Saturdays”

The special issue of *Nightmoves* dedicated to the second Jazz Comes Home festival captures the SSCC’s transition from exclusivity to inclusivity: “Back when the only blacks in the neighborhood were there to clean house or cut grass, the South Shore Country Club was a great white shrine.... It was a very private place for members only who knew they owned exclusive rights to the good life. Things changed about a generation ago. They became as different as day and night. Black and White. Open and closed. Now instead of chamber music or sedate evenings of symphony orchestras, there’s soulful summer Saturdays and Sundays of ‘Jazz Comes Home.’”<sup>42</sup>

Gone were the wide variety of art forms of past years; the festival was now all jazz. Though not a product of consensus, the decision to focus on jazz was not surprising. Within the Black Arts Movement “jazz became the *primur inter pares* among expressive forms,” which bound together diverse, and at times discordant, views about the evolution and influence of a uniquely Black culture in America (Widener 2010, 252). Despite disagreements about the relative economic and cultural value of various art forms, most coalition members could agree upon jazz, a consciously Black and increasingly middle-class art form (Berlin 2010, 199). And jazz proved profitable: over one hundred thousand people came to hear Count Basie, Muddy Waters, Oscar Brown Jr., Sarah Vaughan, the Staples Singers, Duke Ellington and His Orchestra, and Dizzy Gillespie.

42. Monroe Anderson, “South Shore County Club: More Philosophical than Commercial,” *Chicago Nightmoves*, souvenir Jazz Comes Home program issue, 1982, box 25, folder 7, CSSSCCA.

The Coalition built on jazz's long history in Chicago. Since the turn of the twentieth century the South Side of Chicago had attracted jazz musicians who excelled in live performance (Kenney 2004). During the seventies and eighties South Shore was home to the AACM (Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians) and many leading jazz musicians. At the same time, the South Side club scene declined due to the overall effects of redlining as well as discriminatory enforcement of licensing and tax laws. This decreased opportunities to experience live jazz, blues, and R & B (Lewis 2008, 85–95). As historian and musician George Lewis writes:

By 1967, 63rd Street was a musical ghost town, except perhaps for bluesman Arvella Gray's frequent appearances with his steel guitar under the El station at 63rd and Cottage Grove. Concomitantly, music clubs were opening up in nonblack areas of the city, notably the white North Side and western suburbs.... Musicians began to connect this musical outmigration from the South Side with notions of exile and stolen legacies of culture. Speaking to AACM cofounder Philip Cohran, trombonist Martin "Sparx" Alexander put the situation plainly: "Phil, you mentioned about us being 'robbed,' about the music being taken away from us. When I first came to Chicago in the Fifties—around 63rd and Cottage—that was a kind of Mecca. The music was all over. You could walk up and down the street and hear brothers playing everywhere. You didn't need to go in no joint.... They were localized in terms of our community. But something happened" (2008, 87).

Jazz Comes Home sought to rectify this loss as well as "to educate African American people and particularly African American children about the kind of history that we have given to this nation" (Geraldine de Haas, pers. comm., Dec. 3, 2015):

When the music was beginning to evolve, you had your spirituals,...

then the blues came out of the spirituals,...and then you came into bebop, which was really intricate music,...and that's when jazz became an art form.... It was America's art form, this music that evolved out of one chord or two chord music was now some very intricate music.... This was the art form that was created right here in America.... It came out of the African people, but it was not created in Africa; it was born and evolved right here in this country. The music was America's culture.... All contemporary music is based on one little aspect of the total picture of what jazz is all about (Geraldine de Haas, pers. comm., Dec. 3, 2015).

Jazz allowed de Haas to focus on the central role Black people played in American history, not confined to struggling against oppression, but as producers and innovators who created a sophisticated urban art form that grew out of the Great Migration.<sup>43</sup> This narrative of successive cultural progress, which culminated in jazz, opposed prevailing assumptions about inner-city obsolescence, industrial decline, and social and cultural disorganization (Beauregard 1993, 173).

De Haas summarized Chicago's jazz scene during the late seventies:

The major artists...were not coming to the South Side. They were mainly performing on the North Side, where they had better salaries and made more money. They just don't come to the South Side, for all the people, to see the greats, the jazz greats, the people who actually helped to make the music. So, you had good jazz people, younger ones coming up, and they played the clubs, there were a few clubs on the South Side that catered to jazz music. But it had

43. De Haas, like others, were spurred to focus on neighborhood development after the city released the 1973 *Chicago 21* plan to revitalize the downtown: "Chicago's substantial black and Latino population began to focus on securing what Bourdieu termed 'legitimate' forms of political and cultural power through establishment of ethnic cultural institutions and ethnic accounts of history" (Grams 2010, 35).

become so divisive, in terms of those people on the South Side trying to make a decent living, because you didn't have the audiences that you used to have, from all over Chicago, coming to the South Side of Chicago. So you didn't have that anymore... So you know, those people were lost to our community. And all I wanted to do was to talk about the history of the music and the people that it came out of. And a lot of those people now are either performing at other places, on the North Side or in Europe, where they can get a better salary, or anywhere else but in our community. So we didn't get a chance to see them (pers. comm., Dec. 3, 2015).

Jazz had the potential to reverse the flow of musicians, audiences, and money out of the South Side. The SSCC's "elegant ballrooms, dining room, ceilings held up by marble columns, and floor-to-ceiling windows looking outward to the lake" befitted the dignity of these performers and signaled the value that the community placed on their cultural heritage (Taub [1988] 1994, 31). De Haas felt that South Shore "was a very nice place. That the Count Basie's and the Duke Ellington's [orchestras] would love to come out to a place like this to perform" (pers. comm., Dec. 3, 2015). As a venue for jazz, the SSCC explicitly broke with representations of Black Chicago as economically and culturally impoverished by making the Black middle class, and Black middle-class culture, visible.

Coalition board member, Roscoe King, and South Shore Bank executive, Ron Grzywinski, declared optimistically in an op-ed in the *Chicago Sun-Times*: Jazz Comes Home "offers strong evidence that the conventional wisdoms of yesterday are not the truths of today." They argued that cultural consumption could create a new investment opportunity: "just as the private sector pays its dues to assure that Chicago has a world-class symphony orchestra, art museum, and opera company, it should acknowledge the special place of jazz music in the cultural heritage of millions of black citizens and assess the business value of a major new tourist attraction outside of downtown." The goal of the festival was to

make "the city's leadership...see that there is vitality and economic opportunity south of Congress St."<sup>44</sup> As the eighties progressed, coalition documents increasingly used language like this, stressing the SSCC as "a major tourist attraction," able "to enhance and attract businesses to the South Shore community."<sup>45</sup>

## The Cultural Logic of the Postindustrial City

In the seventies the coalition emphasized the "multi-ethnic" nature of their proposals, well before the White middle class embraced "multiculturalism" (a usage that strips culture of ethnicity/race) as "a renewed interest in an 'urban lifestyle'" in the eighties (Beauregard 1993, 240–41).<sup>46</sup> Coalition documents emphasized SSCC's proximity to predominantly Latino residential communities to the south (as well as the integrated Hyde Park neighborhood to the north) and early programs included Latino culture, such as the 1979 South of the Border festival. This emphasis also connected the struggle for funding at the SSCC to the federal lawsuit against the Chicago Park District's discriminatory practices that affected all non-White communities.

The coalition's 1978 preliminary proposal explicitly framing their goal to create a public space for the "celebration of the diversity of cultural, social, and ethnic differences which make urban life rich, exciting,

44. King and Grzywinski, "Jazz Comes Home," *Chicago Sun-Times*, Aug. 11, 1981.

45. "Coalition to Save the South Shore Country Club Park, Inc.," brochure, 1985, unprocessed papers, CSSSCCA.

46. The coalition's multiethnic festivals reflected a more flexible definition of "community" than later downtown festivals, which created neat boundaries between largely White audiences and ethnic performers.

and nourishing to those of us who live in cities.”<sup>47</sup> In the eighties the inclusion of Black Chicago in the shifting conceptions of urban culture in America—from a place of perceived cultural pathology to the cosmopolitan, newly valued, postindustrial city—was tenuous.<sup>48</sup> Jazz allowed the coalition to assert rightful community ownership over the SSCC while highlighting Black Chicago’s contributions to the city at large: “Chicago is the home of jazz, just as Nashville is the home of country music and Milan is the home of grand opera,” and “Jazz Comes Home represents a rare opportunity for Chicago to build part of its bright future on a unique part of its heritage.”<sup>49</sup> Through such assertions, the coalition foreshadowed Chicago’s postindustrial urban economic revitalization, which would center around cultural consumption.

The coalition’s model for urban revitalization—built around cultural amenities and tourism, supported and maintained by a public-private partnership—was adopted on a larger scale by White urban boosters later in the eighties. The educational value of arts, though, was replaced by culture as entertainment. This rise of cities as cosmopolitan nodes in a global economy is often depicted as a top-down process (Beauregard 1993; Hackworth 2006; Lloyd [2005] 2010; Sassen 2001). Linked to neoliberalism and an economic response to the urban financial crises of the seventies, “cities...offset declining [industrial] production by increasing consumption” (Hackworth 2006, 80). According to urban planner Robert Beauregard, “through most of the 1980s and 1990s, the discourse on urban decline shrank to insignificance. Revival, revitalization, renaissance, and rediscovery were dominant themes,...an abrupt shift in

47. Coalition to Save the South Shore Country Club, “Preliminary Planning Document for the South Shore Country Club Park,” 1978, box 3, folder 17, CSSSCCA.

48. As the celebration of diversity entered the dominant discourse in the eighties, mainstream urban boosters tended to focus on Latin American and Asian enclaves (Beauregard 1980, 240).

49. King and Grzywinski, “Jazz Comes Home,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, Aug. 11, 1981.

emphasis from the 1970s” (2003, 211). Beauregard quoted the editor of *Builder* magazine from the eighties who described the renovation of downtown buildings for cultural consumption, which would have a “unique urban style [to] rekindle sparks of life in...cities, and, in turn, [become] celebrations of the vibrancy and diversity of city life” (2003, 213). Yet what White commenters characterized as a “rediscovery” and appeared from their vantage point to be an “abrupt shift” was for the coalition, other black middle-class cultural brokers, and their allies connected to their persistent revindication of the generativity of black communities.

In Chicago a cultural policy for the downtown emerged slowly from the political machine:

Though [Mayor Richard J.] Daley...did invest in public art—for instance the Chicago Civic Center, as well as public sculptures by Picasso, Calder, and Chagall—he took a strong stand against the 1960s social movements and their core concerns with more citizen responsive, egalitarian, multicultural, and tolerant politics.... [After Daley’s death], slowly and steadily the picketers outside the 1968 DNC [Democratic National Convention] have been invited into City Hall and their programs pursued.... The [emergent] policies all helped to enliven street life and create a downtown that is more visible to the affluent.... Many included free concerts by top stars in Grant Park, and were much appreciated by low-income Chicagoans. This inaugurated a trend...of using public music festivals to generate allegiance through consumption and leisure for all (Clark and Silver 2013, 30–31).

The institutionalization of cultural policy began under Harold Washington. Chicago’s only Black mayor (1983–87) had been a long-time supporter of the coalition while a state senator (Raynard Hall, pers. comm., Oct. 3, 2015, and Oct. 20, 2015). In 1983 Washington appointed Madeleine Murphy Rabb as executive director of the city’s Office of Fine

Arts,<sup>50</sup> and a comprehensive cultural plan was part of his reform agenda (Clark and Silver 2013, 32). He strengthened city support for annual festivals featuring Black music in Chicago's downtown Grant Park: the blues festival inaugurated in 1984, the jazz festival inaugurated in 1979 by Geraldine de Haas, and the gospel festival (first held in 1984 in the SSCC and downtown since 1987).<sup>51</sup> By the late eighties the city's official cultural festivals were rarely located in Black neighborhoods.

The City of Chicago was increasingly interested in showcasing the downtown as a place of "attract[ive] ethnic and racial pluralism" (Beauregard 1993, 253). Like the "glimmering new office towers" that proclaimed urban revival (Beauregard 1993, 246–50), most venues for cultural consumption sponsored or subsidized by the city (including jazz clubs) were located downtown or on the predominantly White North Side (Clark and Silver 2013, 31; Kenney 2004). Governing elites siphoned Black cultural capital out of Black neighborhoods, using art forms initially produced through collective processes (1) to create the image of a culturally vibrant, diverse, and "global" city that could compete with New York and Los Angeles for international investment (Clark and Silver 2013, 28); (2) to domesticate the radical political sources of Black art under the banner of multiculturalism (Hale and Millamán 2006, 284); and (3) to claim a multicultural inclusivity for Chicago as a whole

50. Madeleine Murphy Rabb "was the first African American and professionally trained artist to head the city's fine arts program.... Rabb succeeded in making the cultural activities of Chicago more accessible, inclusive, and reflective of the city's racially and ethnically diverse arts community." Madeline Murphy Rabb Papers, Chicago Public Library, [www.chipublib.org/fa-madeline-murphy-rabb-papers](http://www.chipublib.org/fa-madeline-murphy-rabb-papers).

51. Flynn McRoberts, "Gospel Fest Gets City's 'Amen,'" *Chicago Tribune*, June 19, 1988.

without disavowing policies of disinvestment in the South Side.<sup>52</sup> This type of multiculturalism provides bounded and staged experiences, which encourage residents to view "the urban landscape as a site of celebratory diversity" without the need for them to interact with one another as neighbors or through quotidian social exchanges (Widener 2010, 254, 247).

The coalition's history is an important example that expands Mary Pattillo's conceptualization of the Black middle class as cultural "brokers" and highlight the innovation that can emerge from that position (2007, 121). They created a rationale and a vocabulary that made postindustrial urban development possible, which was later taken up by predominantly White governing elites with a multicultural agenda centered on the downtown. The coalition's work foreshadowed a full-fledged cultural policy apparatus that popularized cities as "center[s] of creativity or positive action" (Widener 2010, 226–27). The coalition's use of culture for economic recovery anticipated the more widespread rediscovery of the deindustrialized city as culturally and economically vibrant during the eighties and nineties.

When proposals from the margins coalesced with dominant visions for the future of US cities, they were turned on their heads by governing elites. The coalition had used Black culture to oppose the cultural logic of uneven development; elites coopted Black culture for an economically and racially exclusionary downtown with the stark contrasts of today's global cities: pockets of concentrated wealth just a few dozen blocks from streets of vacant storefronts in disinvested neighborhoods (Beauregard 1993, 224).

This process demonstrates the cultural logic of uneven development, and racism at large, and merits further investigation. The scholarship on Black urban populations during the eighties and nineties, which often

52. The relocation of the SSCC festivals demonstrates the continued centrality of race in uneven development: the coalition assumed the risks of testing new large-scale cultural events and the central city reaped the benefits.

diagnoses a deepening “culture of poverty,” does not explore this dynamic. One of the few exceptions, Daniel Widener’s account of Black cultural politics during the rise of “incorporative municipal multiculturalism” in Los Angeles, parallels the coalition’s story in many ways and suggests that the coalition’s legacy upon the wider city is not an isolated occurrence (2010).

## Epilogue

The coalition successfully achieved their worthy goal of establishing a regional cultural center in South Shore, which is still used today for events ranging from exhibitions of local visual arts to performances by the South Shore Opera Company. However, its legacy of programming and community participation is mixed. The coalition disbanded in 1986, replaced by an advisory council in the summer of 1986, which “promotes community interest and participation in the activities of the Cultural Center by developing cultural, recreational, social, and educational programs.”<sup>53</sup> The Park District now largely dictates when and on what terms members of the surrounding community can give input. Within this structure, a few of the programs initially championed by the coalition have come to fruition in subsequent years, such as a culinary school.<sup>54</sup>

Some coalition activists remain active in advisory council affairs, but many became involved in other projects. Carol Adams and Wyman Winston continued to work for the Neighborhood Institute for some

time on educational programs and affordable housing development in South Shore; Geraldine de Haas organized Jazz Comes Home at the SSCC through her organization, Jazz Unites, until her retirement in

53. “South Shore Cultural Center Advisory Council,” [www.facebook.com/pg/SouthShoreCulturalCenterAdvisoryCouncil](http://www.facebook.com/pg/SouthShoreCulturalCenterAdvisoryCouncil).

54. See Washburne Culinary & Hospitality Institute, [www.washburneculinary.com/facilities/the-parrot-cage](http://www.washburneculinary.com/facilities/the-parrot-cage).

2013.<sup>55</sup> Henry English founded the Black United Fund of Illinois and fought for better public schools in South Shore until his death in 2016.<sup>56</sup> Raynard Hall and Harold Lucas, two of the coalition’s younger members, promote public art and architectural restoration in the Bronzeville neighborhood, which, unlike the SSCC, includes buildings built by Black entrepreneurs in the early twentieth century (Grams 2010).<sup>57</sup>

These coalition members continue to connect Black Chicago’s rich cultural history to the present, and scholars such as Diane Grams, Derek Hyra, Mary Pattillo, and Kesha Moore have begun to study the implications of their work. However, the role of race and the Black middle class in municipal politics and social-movement action that sparked a full-fledged cultural policy apparatus in Chicago and a postindustrial urban revitalization remains to be systematically examined. This essay is a small step in that direction.

55. Jazz Comes Home was cancelled in 2013; efforts to revive it have been unsuccessful. Howard Reich, “Saying Goodbye to Geraldine and Eddie de Haas, with Music,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 28, 2013; Howard Reich, “A Grand Concert for South Shore Jazz Festival,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 14, 2016.

56. Toure Muhammad, “Celebrating the Life and Legacy of Henry L. English,” *Chicago Final Call*, March 22, 2016.

57. “About Us,” Black Metropolis Convention & Tourism Council, [bviconline.info/about-us](http://bviconline.info/about-us); Bronzecom, [www.bronzecom.com](http://www.bronzecom.com).

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