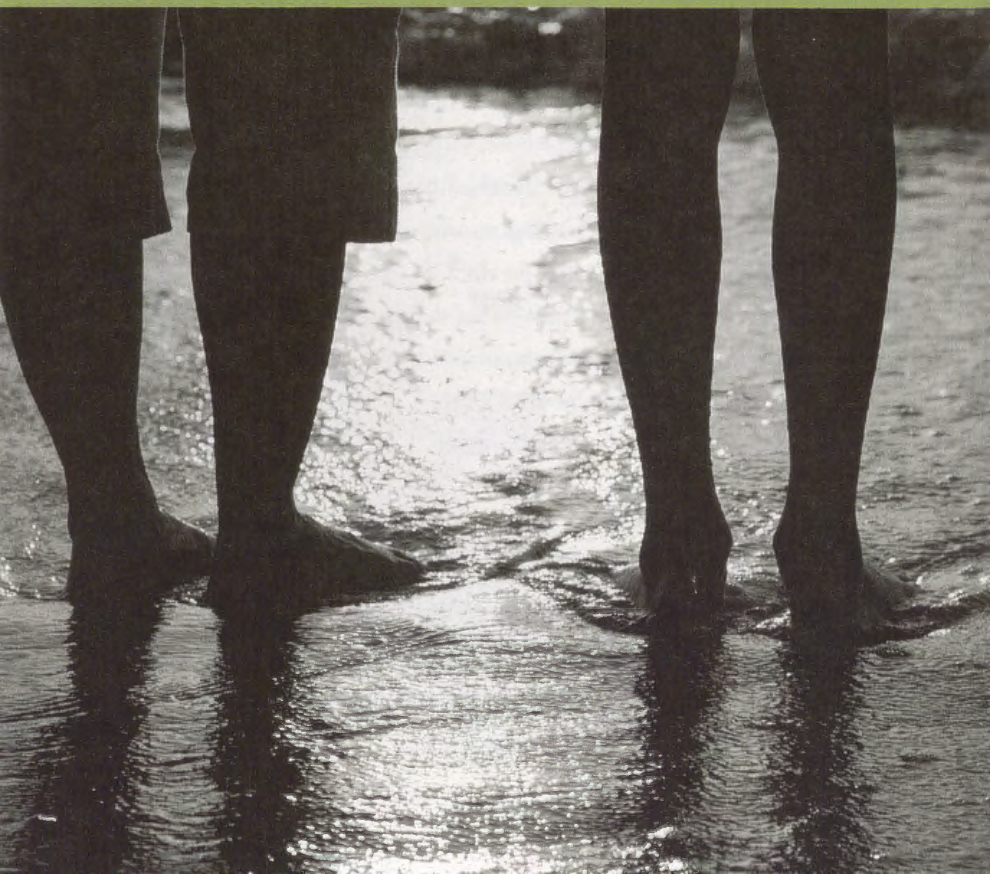


“Wade in
the Water”



The NAACP Youth
Council, the Sit-In
Movement, and
the Rainbow Beach
Wade-Ins in Chicago,
1960–1961

BY NICHOLAS A. JURAVICH

Seeking relief from the city's summer heat, Chicago police officer Harold Carr took his family to the lake on Saturday, July 30, 1960. As they sat on the sand at Rainbow Beach, a gang of toughs approached, throwing rocks and jeering at them. "Why do you come down here?" they asked. "Can't you feel that you're not wanted?" A nearby police sergeant watched indifferently as Carr summoned him to disperse the youths, forcing Carr to rush to his car to retrieve his service revolver while the growing mob followed his wife and children off the beach chanting epithets. Outnumbered, Carr and his family chose to leave, but not before Carr's wife shouted back, "You jumped the wrong party. You may as well get it in your minds that we're going to use this beach just like you. It's a public facility."¹

Carr's experience was not unique. Though Rainbow Beach, located between 75th and 79th Streets on Lake Michigan, was the city's second-largest and second-most used beach, it was historically segregated, not in

1. "Harasses Cop, Party At Beach," *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 1, 1960, 3.

written law, but by the behavior of whites and law enforcement. According to Hyde Park resident Norman Hill, "this was known generally" in the black community, and though for many of the city's African Americans Rainbow Beach was the closest beach to their homes, it was considered off limits. In 1960, this *de facto* segregation "sparked the interest of the NAACP Youth Council," a group of which Hill's girlfriend, Velma Murphy, was the executive secretary.² Hill remembers that after the incident involving Carr and his family, "the feeling [of the Youth Council] was that Rainbow Beach was a public beach, and that anyone could be there. The fact that blacks were being driven off the beach was unacceptable, and could not be tolerated." Led by Murphy, the group prepared a response, dubbed a "wade-in demonstration."³

The first wade-in began on August 29, 1960, at 11 a.m., when Velma Murphy, Norman Hill, and twenty-eight other people entered Rainbow Park and Beach and occupied a modest portion of the waterfront. At twenty-seven, Norman Hill was the oldest person in the group, which was primarily composed of NAACP Youth Council members in their late teens and early twenties, as well as a few white students from the University of Chicago that Hill had recruited to integrate the protest. The Youth Council had notified the leadership of the Chicago NAACP, but had received little support or publicity for their protest. The NAACP's older leaders either believed the city was not ready for the type of challenge the waders intended or were concerned it would compromise their own standing in the city's political arena. More radical black leaders, associates of Norman Hill in the Chicago Negro-American Labor Council, offered encouragement but were busy with campaigns of their

2. Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill, interview, February 26, 2006.

3. Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill, interview, February 26, 2006.

own. Thus the group was led by the twenty-one-year-old Murphy and included no one older than thirty.

Though they were few in number on a beach that routinely attracted up to 100,000 people over the course of a hot summer day, the waders were unmistakably out of place in the segregated park.⁴ For two hours, tensions mounted “as whites became aware of the mixed audience around them.”⁵ Though the Youth Council had informed the local police precinct of their plans to protest, no extra officers were assigned to the beach, and Velma Murphy noticed that “there were no police in sight.”⁶ Angry whites began to mass together near the waders, and by one o’clock, when the waders notified the police on duty that they were preparing to leave, a large mob had gathered. As the waders left the park, “stones began to rain down on them” and the crowd charged towards them. The white police officers present “did nothing to stop the surging mob.”⁷ Howard Irvin, a Youth Council member, was struck in the shoulder and suffered a severe bruise, and Velma Murphy was hit on the head with a brick. The wound required seventeen stitches and caused temporary paralysis, and today, Murphy reports, “there’s residue that’s been there for all these years. I still have a limp.”⁸ Norman Hill carried Murphy out of the park while officers watched the white gang hurl rocks, bottles, and

4. Chicago Park District Online, Rainbow Beach Entry. www.chicagopark-district.com.

5. “White Mob Injures Two at Rainbow Beach,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 29, 1960, 3.

6. Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill, interview, February 26, 2006.

7. “White Mob Injures Two at Rainbow Beach,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 29, 1960, 3.

8. Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill, interview, February 26, 2006.

epithets. Nonetheless, the waders vowed to one another to return the following week, ready to endure stones and slurs again to establish their right to swim at the public beach of their choosing.

Conducted without the support or presence of Chicago's most powerful black leaders and without the awareness of most of the city's population, white or black, this first wade-in was the start of a campaign that captured the attention of the entire city by the end of 1961. Though only one weekend of beachgoing remained after the first protest in 1960, the wade-ins began afresh the next year, led again by the Youth Council with determination that could no longer be ignored by the African-American community. The *Chicago Defender*, the city's leading African-American newspaper, supported the protesters by publicizing the wade-ins, lauding participants, and contextualizing the protest as a component of transnational civil rights activism. Nearly every major civil rights organization in the city, including the initially reticent Chicago Branch of the NAACP, got behind the campaign, and by the end of the summer of 1961 blacks were swimming at Rainbow Beach unmolested. The wade-in movement had exposed *de facto* segregation in public spaces in Chicago, forced the city's police to begin protecting those who would challenge this segregation, and ushered in a new era of direct action civil rights protest in the city.

The history of racism and black resistance in Chicago is well-documented, particularly that of the civil rights era, but within that history the Rainbow Beach Wade-Ins appear only as a footnote.⁹ In his book *Making the Second Ghetto*, Arnold Hirsch gives the 1961 campaign three

9. For discussions of black protest in Chicago, see, among others, Alan B. Anderson and George W. Pickering, *Confronting the Color Line: The Broken Promise of the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986); James R. Ralph, *Northern Protest: Martin Luther King Jr., Chicago, and the*

lines, writing: "changing residential patterns merged with the growing civil rights movement to produce a 'wade-in' at Rainbow Beach."¹⁰ The *Encyclopedia of Chicago* entry for "Rainbow Beach" reports the wade-in, but its entries on "contested spaces" and "civil rights movements" do not. Alan B. Anderson and George W. Pickering's study *Confronting the Colour Line* asserts that "the movement in Chicago was most active from 1957 to 1967" and proposes to study the "interplay of local and national civil rights activities," but their examination of protest in Chicago begins with the kickoff of the NAACP's three-year campaign to desegregate Chicago Public Schools in the fall of 1961.¹¹ Despite its status as a successful protest that made city-wide news for two summers, the wade-in campaign has been largely passed over by historians of Chicago's civil rights movement.

This study of the wade-ins reveals that they were a unique and crucial moment in the development of the civil rights movement in Chicago, simultaneously a bridge to the city's history of black protest and a break with it. Direct action was not new to Chicago, having been used before by black activists in the desegregation of employment, unions, and commercial venues. However, the wade-ins marked the first successful use of this sort of protest to challenge segregation in the city's public spaces in a fashion that had implications for the entire city, and for city government. They were the first such protest in Chicago to be

Civil Rights Movement (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); and Jon Rice, "The World of the Illinois Panthers" in Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodward, eds. *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

10. Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1983), 65.

11. Anderson and Pickering, *Confronting the Color Line*, 1, 81.

modeled directly on the nascent "sit-in movement" that was spreading rapidly across the nation, linking local protest and its participants to a national movement. Led by a breakaway NAACP Youth Council, the wade-ins were a youth campaign that baptized a new generation of activists, responding directly to new threats in public spaces that had resulted from rapid demographic shifts in city neighborhoods and which specifically affected young middle-class African Americans. However, they also served to galvanize the city's older and more established leaders, who eventually joined them on the beach, and to demonstrate the value and power of direct action tactics that were to be replicated by these leaders in the school desegregation campaign and elsewhere.

The wade-ins were a response to the specific challenges of racism that young African Americans faced, but large-scale shifts in the social geography of Chicago are not enough to explain them, as these conditions existed for over a decade before the protest took place. The thirty who took to Rainbow Beach had every reason to challenge segregation in Chicago, but that does not explain why in August 1960 they were ready to do so. Velma Murphy cites three factors that in this year served to ignite the resolve of the young activists in the NAACP Youth Council: the Sit-In Movement, which began in February 1960 in Greensboro and engulfed the American South; independence movements in Africa; and the participation of young people in the March Against Conventions Movement, which included a major protest at the Republican National Convention in Chicago in July 1960. These events, reported comprehensively by the *Defender*, showed young black Chicagoans that protestors their age could make a tremendous impact, that equality was being fought for all over the world, and that they could take part in this fight.

These factors reacted with the experiences of young black Chicagoans and their community's history of resistance to produce a tipping point,

a moment at which despite the odds of violence against them, thirty young women and men resolved to challenge Chicago's *de facto* segregation. As Murphy remembers, "we heard that there were people standing up for their rights, and then we heard about what was going on in Chicago, and we knew we had to be a part of that, to do something about it."¹² Inspired by their local history, their peers around the country, and black resistance around the world, the waders overcame fear, hatred, and violence to eradicate one beach's policy of segregation, force major changes on municipal policing, and energize the civil rights movement in Chicago.

"You Could Fight Back"—The Origins of Segregation and Resistance in Chicago

When the Rainbow Beach wade-ins began, Velma Murphy was living with her parents in a house at 9124 South Parnell Avenue in Gresham, a newly integrated neighborhood on Chicago's South Side where of 59,484 residents in 1960, only ninety-one were African American.¹³ Most of the thirty individuals who took part in the first wade-in lived in similar middle-class neighborhoods to which African Americans were recent and unwelcome arrivals. Murphy and her peers were a part of the renegotiation of Chicago's racial boundaries in the postwar period, and they understood the ways in which segregation was changing and how it had been constantly challenged in

12. Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill, interview, February 26, 2006.

13. Appendix 1: "Community Areas," *The Encyclopedia of Chicago*. James R. Grossman, Ann Durkin Keating, and Janice L. Reiff, eds., Michael Conzen, cartographic ed. Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Chicago. This segregation, perpetuated not in city or state law but through a combination of private real estate covenants, social customs enforced through violence, and the complacency of law enforcement, had generated a history of institutions and action that underpinned the protests of the 1960s. To understand how young leaders challenged segregation in Chicago at Rainbow Beach, we must first examine the history of African-American resistance to racism that inspired, informed, and supported these leaders.

Racial segregation in Chicago calcified as African Americans reached Chicago *en masse* from the South during the Great Migration, when the city's black population doubled to 100,000 in five years from 1915–1920.¹⁴ Migrants made their homes in the “Black Belt,” a strip of real estate on Chicago's South Side that was the only place white real estate agents in Chicago would sell or rent to African Americans (see Figure 1, page 52–53). Drawn north in part by the war economy, they sought work in local industry. White Chicagoans who lived and worked in proximity to these new arrivals began to perceive them as threats to the local social order. Patterns of discrimination policed by local violence and threat quickly produced what amounted to *de facto* segregation for black Chicagoans. These building tensions came to a head in 1919.¹⁵

The Black Belt had no frontage on Lake Michigan, which forced blacks to travel to previously all-white public beaches to escape the city's sweltering summers. White Chicagoans shared streetcars and sidewalks with African Americans, but at the beach, with its sexualized and egalitarian atmosphere in which people literally “mixed” in a body of water,

14. James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 4.

15. For a complete discussion of the 1919 riots, see William M. Tuttle, *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996).

they drew a line. Negative stereotypes about black cleanliness ran rampant, especially as tenements became more crowded during the Great Migration. The intermingling of young people from different races was also a cause for concern, as beaches were typical sites for teenage trysts, which some whites feared could lead to miscegenation. "Midwest Metropolis" Drake and Cayton wrote in 1945, "most definitely does not approve of intermarriage . . . to many white persons this is the core of the entire race problem."¹⁶ Morality and segregation were hotly policed on the city's beaches precisely because that was where these conventions felt most vulnerable. For other whites, the issue was status, a basic fear that sharing public space with African Americans put them on the same rung as blacks at the bottom of the social ladder.

Consequent patterns of segregation developed, and in 1919 the 25th Street Beach was open to blacks and the 29th Street Beach was considered whites-only. In July, three teenagers clambered aboard a homemade raft at 25th Street and unknowingly began to drift south until they were playing and laughing off the 29th Street Beach. While they swam, a crowd of whites began throwing rocks, and one struck seventeen-year-old Eugene Williams in the head, causing him to drown. The mayhem that followed erupted into a riot that spilled into city neighborhoods and raged for six days, leaving thirty-eight persons dead, 537 wounded, and thousands homeless due to arson.¹⁷

That such a riot began because a black youth was killed for crossing a racial boundary and sharing lake water with whites is indicative of the fierceness with which Chicagoans policed segregation, and of the explosive

16. St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 129–130.

17. Robert G. Spinney, *City of Big Shoulders: A History of Chicago* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000), 172.

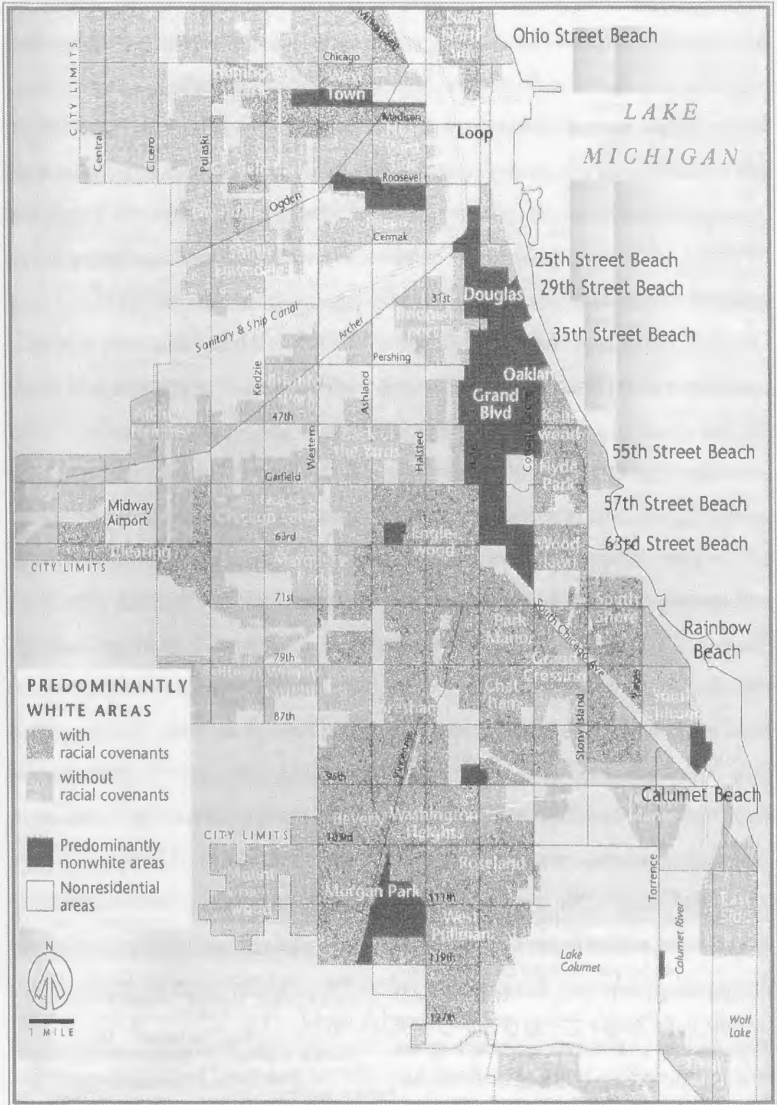


Figure 1. Chicago Neighborhoods and Beaches, 1947

This map shows the extent of the “Black Belt” in 1947, as well as the neighborhoods to the south and east which maintained racially restrictive covenants until the 1948 Shelley Decision. By 1960, every neighborhood north of 87th Street that had maintained covenants was integrated or predominantly African-American. Woodlawn, Grand Crossing, Englewood, and Park Manor were more than eighty-five percent African American, having been all-white 1948.¹ The neighborhoods just west of the Black Belt, Bridgeport and Back of the Yards, did not maintain covenants, but were never integrated, as they were undesirable to middle-class blacks moving out due both to their working-class status and their histories of violence. The location of the beaches has been added to demonstrate how the integration of neighborhoods to the south and east led to conflicts over these spaces, as they became the closest beaches to a sizeable portion of the African-American population.²

1. Appendix 1: “Community Areas” *The Encyclopedia of Chicago*. Grossman et al., eds.

2. Original Map: “Racial Restrictive Covenants on Chicago’s South Side in 1947,” based on a map by Robert Weaver, in James R. Grossman, Ann Durkin Keating, and Janice L. Reiff, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Chicago* (University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 205. Beach sites added by author.

potential of Chicago's racial tensions. The event became a formative moment for both black and white communities, as well as a powerful symbol of the ferocity of racism in Chicago. In coming together to defend themselves, whites and blacks dug the first trenches in the racial battles that were to checker the landscape in the twentieth century. Timuel Black remembers his father telling him that "during the conflict, black World War I veterans opened the armory at 35th Street and defended their community by force, while liberally minded white and black folks tried to come to an understanding."¹⁸ In the aftermath, white neighborhoods coalesced to maintain racial boundaries while black leaders sought to organize their community to respond to segregation. The institutions and networks they built would one day lend support to the waders as they set out to end beach segregation. Marching directly into violence that recalled 1919, the waders were able to highlight the continuing presence of segregation with a clarity that was not lost on Chicagoans, black or white.

In the geographic isolation of the Black Belt, African Americans had already begun to build and operate institutions to serve one another, creating a tightly knit community that was "economically poor but spiritually and socially rich."¹⁹ Despite segregationist practices in job hiring, blacks fared better in Chicago's manufacturing economy than they had as tenant farmers in the South, and by 1919 a black middle class was emerging. From their ranks was drawn a "professional black leadership" that ran the newly formed local branches of the NAACP and Urban League.²⁰ During the 1919 riot, these organizations focused their efforts on main-

18. Timuel Black, "Chicago Lives," February 21, 2006.

19. John Stroger, quoted in Spinney, *City of Big Shoulders*, 208.

20. Christopher R. Reed, *The Chicago NAACP and the Rise of Professional Black Leadership, 1910-1966* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

taining order and reducing altercations, a policy that solidified their status as voices of black moderation and allied them with the city's white progressives and philanthropists, who provided much of their funding. Patterns of giving to the Urban League were a testament to the fact that it was supported by rich whites and working class blacks alike — in 1919, eighty-three percent of the Urban League's budget was donated by white philanthropists, but three-fourths of donations were made in small amounts by African Americans.²¹

In the interwar period, the NAACP and the Urban League, along with smaller local organizations and churches, successfully lobbied the city to increase spending in the area on housing, roads and parks.²² The carefully progressive stance these organizations took allowed them to work with the city's white liberals and make measured gains for African Americans while not turning the "race question" into an all-out war. Drake and Cayton wrote in 1945 that "an ethnic minority has to learn how to maneuver, how to play balance of power politics, and to appeal to the conscience of the majority . . . to learn how much the traffic will bear and not to exceed this maximum."²³ What developed in the Black Belt was a well-oiled political machine that could represent blacks to the city and win specific battles as long as it chose them sparingly. Timuel Black argues that this first generation, while not always able to challenge segregation wholesale, "broke many of the barriers for the generation of my children" and laid a foundation of networks and traditions to be accessed by future activists.²⁴

Resistance and community were also built through the work of the

21. Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 143.

22. Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 744.

23. Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 731.

24. Timuel Black, interview, December 10, 2005.

city's vibrant black press, which was led by the *Chicago Defender*, "by far the most important agency for forming and reflecting public opinion in Black Metropolis."²⁵ St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton wrote in 1945 that the paper "lives and thrives on its reputation as an aggressive fighter for Negro rights . . . it has the dual function of reporting news and stimulating race solidarity."²⁶ The *Defender*, founded in 1910, worked to demonstrate to African Americans that "segregation and violence were systematic and unremitting"²⁷ and assailed the white power structure that perpetrated and allowed them. The paper covered international as well as national news, rejecting colonialism and celebrating the struggles of non-white people the world over. Such reporting helped black Chicagoans to understand the racism they faced as part of a worldwide phenomenon, and to see themselves as participants in a transnational movement for equality. The local knowledge that *Defender* revenues were primarily from circulation, not advertising, served to further establish the paper as a legitimate mouthpiece beholden to the black community.²⁸

These new organizations did their best to challenge socially enforced segregation, which was becoming social habit for both races. On beaches, fences, or other landmarks were used to demarcate white and Negro sections, with some beaches still considered all-white or all-black. In 1929, a coalition of African-American leaders gathered to protest the segregation of beaches, and the *Chicago Tribune* ran their complaint on its front page, writing "Colored Leaders Ask Equal Rights at City Beaches; Seek

25. Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 399.

26. Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 411.

27. Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 78.

28. Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 78.

Police Protection for Negro Bathers.”²⁹ In arguing for equal rights, black leaders warned that conditions of segregation had precipitated the 1919 race riot, and that if such divisions were allowed to continue, the beaches would remain powder kegs for racial violence. Without allies in the white community who would take on this volatile issue, however, segregation persisted. Desirous of safety in their recreation, most African Americans reluctantly complied. Other protests were made throughout the 1930s and 1940s, but the fact that “most Negroes did not wish to risk drowning at the hands of an unfriendly gang” coupled with the strength of segregation’s defenders allowed much of the beach system to remain segregated well into the 1950s.³⁰

Maintenance of social segregation was facilitated in particular by a white police force that was complicit and even active in segregating the beaches. City and state law never codified segregation, but it was common practice and the agents of “the law,” the police, frequently interpreted their role in preserving order to include preserving segregation. These policies prevailed both because police themselves were predominantly white and pro-segregation, drawn from the ranks of working-class Irish whites in Bridgeport adjacent to the Black Belt, and because the general white voting public supported the continued enforcement of segregation.³¹ When young white communists tried to challenge this situation on the beaches, crossing the invisible line to a “negro” piece of sand in 1935, they were summarily arrested. The *Defender* ran the story and quoted the police, who claimed they were

29. Quoted in Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 104.

30. Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 106.

31. Mike Royko, *Boss: Richard J. Daley of Chicago* (New York: Penguin, 1976), 140.

“trying to prevent a race riot,” by arresting the whites who dared to sit with blacks.³² One year later, a policeman refused to arrest individuals who had chased away a group of black and Mexican children, claiming he had orders to “put all colored off the beach” (the police department later denied giving this order). In this way police served as agents of segregation, lending it considerable staying power if not a codified legal status, until the wade-ins threatened to expose their complacency to the nation in 1960 and 1961.

“We Too Deserve What Other People Deserve” — The Impact of World War II

The onset of the Second World War reshaped both segregation and protest in Chicago, establishing the conditions in which the leaders of the wade-ins were raised. Racial geography was rearranged by a massive expansion of the black population, while experiences in the war movement at home and overseas fueled African Americans’ desire for full and equal citizenship. On the home front, direct-action civil disobedience protest made its way from the labor movement into the African-American political mainstream. As Velma Murphy remembers, all of these factors played a serious role in the formation of youth consciousness about discrimination and segregation in 1960.

Black labor leaders in the interwar period had pursued unionization with direct action in the form of strikes and pickets for equal wages and black union membership. Chief among them was A. Philip Randolph, who was well known for “persistent, eloquent demands for racial fair-

32. Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 105.

ness" within the union movement.³³ During World War II Randolph extended these tactics to Washington. His threat of a mass march to protest discrimination in the armed forces and government service led to the creation of the Fair Employment Practices Committee, which was signed into existence in Executive Order 8802 by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1941. After the war, Randolph founded the League for Nonviolent Civil Disobedience Against Military Segregation in Chicago,³⁴ whose campaign led Harry Truman to sign an executive order outlawing segregation in the armed forces in 1948.³⁵ The success of Randolph's direct action tactics, which leaders of the NAACP and Urban League had previously avoided as too radical, could not be ignored.

Willoughby Abner was a friend of Randolph's and a major advocate of direct non-violent action as a tool for challenging racism, a man historian Christopher Reed calls "the city's foremost agent of protest advocacy" who was "outspoken and unintimidated in the struggle for racial justice."³⁶ Abner was elected into the Chicago Chapter of the NAACP's branch leadership in 1954, and Reed refers to the Abner years as "the apex of militant activism" in the organization's history.³⁷ For the first time in its long tenure, the Chicago NAACP led direct-action protests. They marched in May of 1957 at City Hall to protest the

33. Timuel D. Black, *Bridges of Memory: Chicago's First Wave of Great Migration* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 302.

34. "Randolph, Asa Philip" *Britannica Student Encyclopedia 2006* (online edition) <http://search.eb.com/article-9313139>.

35. Black, *Bridges of Memory*, 302.

36. NAACP Branch Files, quoted in Reed, *The Chicago NAACP and the Rise of Professional Black Leadership*, 162.

37. Reed, *The Chicago NAACP and the Rise of Professional Black Leadership*, 160–162.

segregation of Chicago's schools, and again in Trumbull Park to protest the segregation of a newly built housing project. Abner's policy infuriated whites and city leaders, but it effectively grabbed headlines and reinvigorated the NAACP's image in the black community as an organization that was prepared to fight for the rights of its constituents. Political deal-making undid Abner's bid for a second term, but his three years at the helm helped to reintroduce Chicago blacks to direct action, an ideal that was central to the youth movement that came to life in the 1960s.

Direct action also began taking place at commercial venues during the war. Timuel Black remembers a black student at Roosevelt University "began to sit-in in the barbershops downtown. He was one of the first sit-in guys that I knew. Then of course as a result of him sitting in the barbershops, other blacks began going to the barbershops and sitting in."³⁸ In 1942, James Farmer, a graduate student at the University of Chicago, founded a group to discuss Mohandas Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolent resistance and its potential application in Chicago. This group became the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), and their first protest in 1942 integrated a coffee shop in Kenwood, north of the University. The group continued to protest at commercial venues and won major victories at places such as the White City Roller Rink in 1946 before becoming dormant in 1951 when Farmer relocated to New York City.³⁹

Participation in the war effort at home and abroad was a formative experience for African Americans, who saw their service as an undeniable expression of their American citizenship. Major black newspapers

38. Timuel Black, interview, December 10, 2005.

39. Preston H. Smith II, "Congress on Racial Equality," *The Encyclopedia of Chicago, 198–199*.

including the Pittsburgh *Courier* and the *Defender* began a campaign “for the complete integration of Negroes into all war-related activities.”⁴⁰ These papers were careful to articulate their demands for liberty in terms of winning the war and in contrast to the totalitarian governments that were the enemies, espousing the “Double V” policy for victory over inequality and racism at home and abroad. In Europe, Timuel Black told British soldiers who enquired about Jim Crow, “it’s none of your business. We’re going to settle this when we get home. Our family feud doesn’t belong outside our country.”⁴¹ Black’s assertion demonstrates both a recognition of segregation and an optimism that the Second World War would provide a major opportunity to challenge segregation at home in the postwar period.

Migration during and after the war tripled Chicago’s black population from 277,731 in 1940 to 812,637 in 1960.⁴² This expansion made battles over the segregation of housing a major problem in Chicago in the fifteen years between the end of the war and the wade-ins. Real estate agents continued to use restrictive covenants to keep the Black Belt from expanding geographically, but in 1948, Chicago NAACP lawyer John Hansberry took the Los Angeles case of *Shelley vs. Kraemer* to the Supreme Court, where the result was an historic decision that declared restrictive covenants based on race unconstitutional. After this ruling, real estate agents began to sell property outside the Black Belt to African Americans, leaving individual communities to police their racial borders. Arnold R. Hirsch writes that “during the 1940s and 1950s, the Black Belt’s boundaries, drawn during the Great Migration, were “shattered”

40. Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 401.

41. Timuel D. Black, “Chicago Lives,” February 21, 2006.

42. Spinney, *City of Big Shoulders*, 200.

and “racial barriers that had been successfully defended for a generation were overrun.”⁴³

White neighborhoods and communities did not welcome the arrival of African Americans because, as Timuel Black — who himself moved out of the Black Belt to Kenwood — put it, “living around Negroes was low status, regardless of how much money they had.”⁴⁴ The residents of these neighborhoods saw blacks as a serious threat to the status and cohesion of their communities. Real estate agents preyed on these fears through a process known as “redlining” in which they bought from whites at a discount and sold to blacks at inflated prices. Redlining made realtors a fortune while fuelling fear, creating rapid population turnover in neighborhoods adjacent to the Black Belt, and further exacerbating racial tension by devaluing white property.

Hirsch details two decades of “hidden violence” against blacks as individual families moving into previously all-white neighborhoods were assaulted by angry mobs. The city’s Commission on Human Relations took strict steps to assure that major newspaper coverage of this violence was “very limited” and included “total omission of photographs.”⁴⁵ The general isolation of black families moving in coupled with the ability of the enormous Chicago police department to quell rioting without asking for aid from the state or National Guard continuously kept Chicago’s violence under wraps. Nonetheless, during the 1950s, “an average of three-and-a-half city blocks per week shifted from white-majority ownership to black majority ownership.”⁴⁶

43. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 4–5, 17.

44. Timuel D. Black, interview, December 10, 2005.

45. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 60.

46. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 205.

As children, wade-in participants including Velma Murphy and Howard Irvin experienced firsthand the trauma and racism of the move from Black Belt into the surrounding middle-class neighborhoods.⁴⁷ These future activists learned from their parents that the very act of moving into a house in an all-white neighborhood was social disobedience, direct action against racism. As Timuel Black put it, those who moved were asserting that “we too deserve what other people deserve. We too have served our country. We too have acquired the necessary education and accumulation of other material things and we’re going to demand that we be respected.”⁴⁸ Black believes this experience prepared young activists. “The younger people mostly came out of families of my generation [who had the means to leave the Black Belt]. They had listened to mom and dad and grandpa and all those talk about struggle. They wanted to get anointed so they could brag when they went back home.”⁴⁹

Life in newly integrated neighborhoods provided daily challenges for this younger generation. Hirsch writes that “with the growing black population consolidating its position in recently acquired territory, new disputes arose over the perquisites of neighborhood control . . . although these incidents occurred less often than did the housing riots of the 1940s, they involved interpersonal confrontations and necessarily included attacks on people rather than property.”⁵⁰ Black Chicago had expanded, but patterns of public segregation had not yet caught up, and young middle-class blacks found themselves fighting to walk down the street or sit in the park.

47. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 67.

48. Timuel Black, interview, December 10, 2005.

49. Timuel Black, interview, December 10, 2005.

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

As they came of age, educated in the city's best public high schools thanks to their parents' moves, these young people sought to address the daily segregation they faced, joining groups like the NAACP Youth Council. Capable and sophisticated, they were "frustrated with a civic and political leadership that failed to lead them in attaining a place in the American mainstream commensurate with their talents and expectations," as James Q. Wilson wrote. The gradualist approach of the past was no longer a satisfying option for achieving equality. When national and local events offered new tactics and new opportunities for action in 1960, young black activists were prepared and eager to seize them and put them to use against the segregation they had grown up fighting.

"It Was In The Air" —

The Factors That Precipitated Protest in 1960

The developments of the war and postwar periods—the empowerment of service, end of restrictive covenants, dispersion of middle-class blacks into new neighborhoods, and popularization of direct action protest—were, by the end of the 1950s, converging to make Chicago's segregation both practically untenable and morally unacceptable. A spontaneous event at Calumet Park in 1957 evidenced the fraying of traditional patterns of segregation and the rise of new tensions. On July 28, one hundred black picnickers from different parts of the South Side made their way to the beach where a small section was reserved for blacks. Though the park had long been considered so hostile that "mothers sent their children to the 63rd Street Beach for a safe swim," five miles away, the local black population had grown enough that a small black section of the park had been demarcated. On this day, however, the reserved section was too small to accommodate

those who had arrived.⁵¹ Without any other options, the picnickers broke with fear and custom and occupied a section of city parkland previously reserved for whites. Their spontaneous group challenge to local segregation infuriated white beachgoers, and a mob of over six thousand attacked the picnickers and began to riot. Forty-seven individuals were injured and seventy cars were stoned as the day wore on, but despite being overwhelmingly outnumbered, infuriated local blacks returned the next day ready to fight for a portion of their neighborhood beach. Arnold Hirsch reports, "more than five hundred police were needed to calm the areas after two days of disturbances . . . police squadrons had to form a 'flying wedge' to break through the crowd and rescue blacks besieged in the park."⁵² Rioting raged through the neighborhoods of the Southeast Side until reinforcements were sent in on the second day.

That the incident took place at all demonstrated the degree to which postwar experiences and shifting conditions had changed race relations in the city. Demographic changes had brought so many African-American patrons to the beach that they could not fit, and changes in the collective psyche of these patrons inspired them both to come to the notorious beach and, once there, to spontaneously cross long-standing racial boundaries. This crossing, which would have been in so many ways unlikely and unthinkable a decade earlier, had become practically impossible to avoid without a complete retreat, and that, too, was no longer an option.

The rioting raised the specter of 1919 and drew far more attention than housing riots.⁵³ Local newspapers denounced the attacks, and *U.S.*

51. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 65.

52. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 65–66.

53. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 66.

News and World Report ran a lengthy article that attributed the violence to “the pressure cooker of housing.”⁵⁴ The incident was a national embarrassment for the city and the newly elected Daley administration, and it afforded Chicago’s blacks a chance to spotlight the racism of the city. Chicago NAACP president Willoughby Abner believed that the incident offered African Americans a chance to “dramatize their perseverance in using public facilities wherever and whenever they desired.”⁵⁵ With national attention focused on Chicago, Abner understood that the Daley administration would be forced to use police to defend black bathers or face further embarrassment and condemnation. Either way, a protest at Calumet Park would have implications for the entire city and would help to expose Chicago’s segregation, leading Abner to call for a return to the beach.

However, Abner’s leadership, and thus the protest, was undermined by more conservative black leaders with ties to the city administration. Congressman William Dawson, perhaps the most powerful black man in Chicago, worked in co-operation with the city’s Democratic Machine to control the black vote, and was peeved by Abner’s “whole loaf” rhetoric and his aggressive attacks on city leaders in pamphlets preceding the 1955 city elections.⁵⁶ In October 1957, Theodore Jones, a businessman and confidant of Dawson’s, challenged Abner for the NAACP presidency and ousted him with the support of Dawson and others. The plan to return to Calumet Park was postponed for a year while Abner campaigned unsuccessfully for re-election and then shelved altogether.⁵⁷ In the eyes of many of Chicago’s old-guard black leaders, the city was not

54. Reed, *The Chicago NAACP and the Rise of Professional Black Leadership*, 174.

55. Reed, *The Chicago NAACP and the Rise of Professional Black Leadership*, 193.

56. Reed, *The Chicago NAACP and the Rise of Professional Black Leadership*, 184.

57. Reed, *The Chicago NAACP and the Rise of Professional Black Leadership*, 193.

ready for a full-scale assault on the segregation of public facilities.

However, the potential impact of a demonstration at a public park would not go long unexplored. A rising younger generation, readied for activism by the daily struggles against *de facto* segregation they endured, was rapidly coming of age. Fueled by a burgeoning youth protest movement and schooled in nonviolent direct action by Abner's allies in the labor movement, these young leaders were dissatisfied with the old approach. A series of events in 1960 combined to provide a final impetus to action, leading them to take up his discarded plan anew at Rainbow Beach.

On February 1, 1960, four freshmen from North Carolina State A&T University in Greensboro irrevocably changed the face of the civil rights movement when they occupied seats at the segregated lunch counter in Woolworth's. Their sit-in became a massive protest in the following days, drawing hundreds of supporters who occupied the lunch counter and store as well as crowds of thousands who rained violence and hatred upon them. The students returned to the lunch counter for days, shutting down the store while national media picked up the story. Police arrested protest leaders, but others took their places, promising to end the protest only when they were served like any other patrons. The nation was captivated by the power of the students' civil disobedience, and similar protests sprung up all over the South as young people realized they could challenge the inequity of segregation and win.

News of these protests reached Chicago's young African Americans daily via radio, television, and the city's newspapers, particularly the *Defender*, which went hardly a day in 1960 without reporting on a new sit-in. Into the summer, the paper wrote about sit-ins with a triumphant ferocity, noting their spread in headlines such as "500 Youth Clash in S.C. Race Violence," "Stage 'Kneel-In at 6 Churches,'" "Michigan Group Launches 'Stand-In,'" and "Kneel-Ins Successful at New Orleans Churches," showing

the spread of the movement to all sorts of venues around the country.⁵⁸ In the editorial "Sit-Ins Gain More Ground," the paper declared "the sit in movement is gaining ground rather consistently even in areas where resistance some weeks ago was most acute and unyielding . . . From Feb 1, when the sit-ins began, to August 4, much has taken place to give the youthful demonstrators the assurance that their efforts have not been in vain."⁵⁹ Velma Murphy Hill remembers the impact the sit-ins had on her and fellow Youth Council members: "We had heard about sit-ins, and it was an embryonic movement starting in this country . . . it was young people who really energized the movement."⁶⁰ The sit-ins offered encouragement that young activists could make a major impact and, even more, they offered an effective tactic with which to challenge segregation.

Youth Council members found inspirations to action the world over. The *Defender* reported heavily on international struggles against oppression in the late 1950s and early 1960s, running stories not only from Chicago and North Carolina, but from Kenya, Congo, Angola, and Ghana. The *Defender* called for the release of Jomo Kenyatta and the boycott of apartheid South Africa as well as the release of jailed Southern activists. It ran an article entitled "Chicago Citizens Get a Message From Congo" in which newly elected African president Patrice Lumumba was quoted as saying, "my government is fully cognizant of how much our doing a good job in the Republic of Congo means not only to us but to the millions of Americans of African descent."⁶¹ Its editorial page frequently

58. *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 27, August 9, August 24, September 13, 1960.

59. *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 4, 1960, 12.

60. Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill, interview, February 26, 2006.

61. "Chicago Citizens Get a Message From Congo," *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 1, 1960, 1.

featured one editorial concerning Chicago and one concerning an African nation's battle for independence against a colonial oppressor. The *Defender* situated the struggles of black Chicagoans in a national and international framework of black battles against white oppression around the globe, unifying the plight of Chicagoans wanting to share a beach with that of Mississippi blacks facing lynching or Angolans doing battle with Portuguese soldiers in Luanda.⁶² Velma Murphy remembers that "we just knew that there were black people in Africa and they were getting independence," and that she and her peers felt unity with black people trying to determine their own fates. This unity gave the city a powerful connection to an international struggle of good and evil, of human civil rights against the forces of tyranny, and fired the appetite of young Chicagoans to be part of the exciting, changing world.

Though they would eventually challenge part of the older black establishment, young activists were educated by local black leaders, particular those in the labor movement, whose articulation of non-violent direct action played an important role in developing their strategies. Norman Hill was twenty-five and a student at the University of Chicago's School of Social Service Administration when he heard Bayard Rustin speak about direct action in the summer of 1958. Originally from the East Coast, Hill recalls that he was "not really an activist during college" but he was "very impressed by his activist approach to civil rights." He says "it wasn't until I met Bayard Rustin that I became an activist." Hill impressed Rustin, who invited him to New York City where he met A. Phillip Randolph. Upon returning to Chicago, Hill became active in

62. *Chicago Daily Defender*, "Kenya Ready For Freedom," July 29, 1960; "Kennedy, Mboya Huddle on Africa"; "1st Natives Killed in S. Rhodesia Race Strife," July 27, 1960; "Kasavubu Orders Premier Lumumba Jailed," September 13, 1960. There are many more examples; these are a few.

the Young People's Socialist Network, which had sponsored the conference that brought Rustin. Through this group and its parent, the Illinois Socialist Party, Hill made connections in Chicago's black labor leadership, among them Willoughby Abner and Timuel Black. When Rustin returned to Chicago in early 1959 to announce a youth march on Washington for integrated schools headed by himself and Randolph, Hill asked what he could do. The answer was simply "organize Chicago."⁶³

Hill took up this challenge, even though he had "never done anything like this before," and enlisted help by "utilizing the contacts and support" from older activists in the black community. He proudly recalls that Chicago sent eight busloads of young people to Washington, which introduced more young activists to the philosophies of Rustin and Randolph.⁶⁴ Timuel Black, one of the contacts Hill went to, remembers that "the networks already existed and it was just a matter of calling to say 'let's go.' It wasn't difficult." These networks provided crucial support to Hill and other young activists, who were "supported and coached by the generation of their parents in terms of what to do, how far to go, when you let yourself get arrested," according to Black.⁶⁵ As young activists became more involved with the movement, they found increasing material and intellectual resources at their disposal, encouraging them to further action.

In late 1959, Hill was helping to organize the Chicago Chapter of the Negro American Labor Council, founded by A. Philip Randolph, along with Willoughby Abner and Timuel Black. Their goal was "pressing for

63. Norman Hill, interview, March 5, 2006.

64. Norman Hill, interview, March 5, 2006.

65. Timuel Black, interview, December 10, 2005.

the greater presence of blacks in the Chicago Labor Movement.”⁶⁶ In the summer of 1960, Randolph used this organization to coordinate the March Against Conventions movement nationally from New York, which he spearheaded to force both parties to adopt a civil rights platform. Hill was put in charge of organizing Chicago’s youth, which led him to Velma Murphy and the NAACP Youth Council.

Though only twenty-seven, Hill was older than most of the Youth Council, and Murphy remembers that Hill “played a role in kind of educating me and all of us about A. Philip Randolph and what happened historically . . . he would come and speak to us about the march, and what was going on in the civil rights movement, and in other places, so he was very important to us as NAACP youth activists.”⁶⁷ Through this connection, Murphy and her young group developed a historical and philosophical framework in which to view their times. She recalls: “It was clear that something was happening in the rest of the country, but there were these principles of direct action that were so important to me at that time which I had never heard articulated in that way.”⁶⁸ Norman Hill provided their group with this ideology, which he had learned to articulate through his own experiences in the black labor movement. This explicit connection to a history and philosophy of direct action combined with the presence of the sit-in movement propagated by young people galvanized Chicago’s young black middle class, and in the summer of 1960, they looked to make a meaningful impact in their own city.

The March Against Conventions provided the Southside NAACP

66. Norman Hill, interview, March 5, 2006.

67. Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill, interview, February 26, 2006.

68. Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill, interview, February 26, 2006.

Youth Council with their first major campaign. The first protest took place on the opening day of the convention, July 25, 1960. Over four thousand individuals of all races marched, mostly citizens of the city but including famous leaders such as the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., National NAACP Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins, and A. Philip Randolph. The protest was headlined in the *Defender*, which noted that despite the crowd's size, "they were accorded little attention by Republican leaders."⁶⁹ However, inside the convention hall, the *Defender* reported that then Vice-President Richard Nixon rejected the proposed civil rights plank as "unsatisfactory" and New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller "pledged a floor fight, if necessary, to get approval for a strong civil rights stand."⁷⁰ The next day, the marchers returned after a mass rally at Liberty Baptist Church that drew several Republican dignitaries including Governor Rockefeller, who spoke alongside King and Randolph. The *Defender* ran a two-page pictorial that showed "crowds overflowing into the street" and called the event a "mass rally for rights."⁷¹

For Chicago's activist youth, the event was a formative experience that affirmed the power of direct action and made them participants in the movement. Black leaders met with Republican delegates and the press and were featured in panels at the convention, while party heavyweights like Rockefeller attended events on the South Side.⁷² The presence of a similar protest at the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles demonstrated the national force of the civil rights movement,

69. "4,000 March on GOP Confab," *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 26, 1960, 1-2

70. *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 26, 1960, 2.

71. "Thousands Attend Mass Rally for Rights," *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 27, 1960, 14-15.

72. *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 28-29, 1960.

and when the conventions were over, both parties had explicitly acknowledged civil rights in their platforms for the first time in their history.⁷³ If the sit-in movement had suggested their own potential to the young black middle class in Chicago, taking part in a successful demonstration at the RNC invaluablely bolstered their confidence and enthusiasm and fired their wills for an assault on practical civil rights issues in their own city.

The takeoff of the sit-in movement and the March Against Conventions in Chicago provided catalytic energy to young activists like Velma Murphy Hill. Already tuned into what they conceived of as a world-wide, black-led struggle for equality, and connected through local organizations, family, and personal experience to a history of resistance in Chicago, they were now convinced that young people could challenge segregation and win, and that they could organize and take part in such challenges. She remembers how these factors came together in the summer of 1960 to demand action from young Chicagoans:

It had to do with the fact that young people were the burgeoning civil rights order . . . I think demonstrating at the Republican National Convention was a factor. I think the fact that there was a lot going on in Africa, new nations being formed, there was sort of a revolution there. I think that the whole civil rights movement, and its impetus, came from young people. Also, A. Phillip Randolph is an important figure in the history of black people, and I think that his feeling about direct non-violent action was something that was very resonant for us . . . we heard

73. 1960 was the first time the Republican Party adopted a civil rights platform. The Democrats first did so in 1948. This information courtesy of George Chauncey.

that there were people standing up for their rights, and then we heard about what was going on in Chicago, and we knew we had to be a part of that, to do something about it. It was in the air.⁷⁴

Determined to bring the fight against segregation to Chicago, Murphy and her fellow organizers began looking for a potential protest site.

The First Wade-In — “We’re Going to Use this Beach”

They didn’t have to look far. As in summers before, the combination of children out of school, hot days, and the lack of air-conditioning had choked public parks and beaches with patrons and re-invigorated the battles over public space that were taking place in the wake of the Black Belt’s expansion. During the RNC, a race riot erupted at the swimming pool in Bessamer Park in South Chicago when fifty white youths attacked twenty black swimmers, drawing a crowd of three thousand that police dispersed without making any arrests. The *Defender* wrote that “cops fail to arrest attackers” while local police made the usual excuses about being “more interested in dispersing the crowd” than making arrests.⁷⁵ Despite the presence of civil rights-minded delegates, local Chicagoans maintained their prejudices and continued, with the help of a complicit police force, to segregate public space.

Rainbow Beach in particular witnessed a number of incidents. In June, Alice Palmer, a future Illinois state senator, and her husband

74. Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill, interview, February 26, 2006.

75. “Race Riot at Swim Pool Attracts 3,000,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 28, 1960, 2.

Edward L. "Buzz" Palmer, had moved into South Shore, the upper-middle-class neighborhood adjacent to the beach, and tried to go swimming there. Timuel Black remembers that they "didn't know that the beach in the terms of the community was off limits to Negroes at that time, which was all through and up to 1960. So they were attacked."⁷⁶ On the last day of July, Harold Carr and his family were attacked and driven off the beach, despite his own status as a policeman. The officers present ignored Carr, more concerned with enforcing segregation than the safety of a fellow officer. While similar attacks took place elsewhere, these assaults in particular made news in the black community, focusing the Youth Council on Rainbow Beach.

Many of the members of the Southside NAACP Youth Council lived in the neighborhoods that were closest to Rainbow Beach and Calumet Beach, where Abner had hoped to lead a protest three years before.⁷⁷ They remembered the rioting at Calumet, and all of them knew about or had experienced the segregation practiced on beaches and in parks. Meanwhile, the reports of successful sit-in style demonstrations continued to appear in the pages of the *Defender*.⁷⁸ Interracial committees were formed to halt mob violence after the Bessamer Park riot,⁷⁹ and the *Defender* ran an opinion piece titled "Police can curb racial violence" imploring police to help "achieve complete integration without violent

76. Timuel Black, interview, December 10, 2005.

77. Murphy lived in Gresham and Howard Irvin lived in Woodlawn at 6502 S. Champlain Ave. *Chicago Daily Defender*, "Mob Injures Two at Rainbow Beach," August 29, 1960, 3. In order to have moved to previously middle-class white neighborhoods, their parents would have to have been middle class themselves.

78. *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 9, 1960, August 24, 1960 (headlines quoted previously).

79. *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 2, 1960, 1.

racial conflict," but riots continued, and blacks were driven off Rainbow Beach time and again.⁸⁰ The Southside NAACP Youth Council, fresh from the success of the conventions, met in August and decided to respond as their brothers and sisters across the country were doing—with a direct action sit-in-style demonstration at Rainbow Beach.

Using networks developed through Norman Hill and their convention experience, the Youth Council shopped the idea of the "wade-in" to the older, more established civil rights organizations in the city, and got little in the way of positive response. Carl A. Fuqua, the executive secretary of the Chicago Chapter of the NAACP, was "not at all enthusiastic about the wade-ins," as Velma Murphy remembers. Under her leadership, she recalls, the Youth Council was "being badgered by the adult NAACP, which was controlled by the Daley machine. They did not want us to go to Rainbow Beach and protest. They really did not, and they were serious about it."⁸¹ Norman Hill remembers that "Mayor Daley did not want Chicago to have an image of violence over race" and that this was communicated to Dawson and the machine-controlled black moderate leaders to keep them from leading the sort of protests that might incite whites to riot.⁸² If the wade-ins were going to happen, they would have to take place without the support of the older generation of race leaders in Chicago.

Rainbow Beach and the South Shore neighborhood presented unique opportunities and challenges for protestors. The beach itself had already proven to be dangerous, contested territory, and beach violence was emblematic of Chicago's racial hostilities of 1919. Beachgoers came

80. *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 22, 1960, 7.

81. Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill, interview, February 26, 2006.

82. Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill, interview, February 26, 2006.

from all over the South and Southwest Sides, representative of many classes, and policed its “white” status ferociously. By staging their action at Rainbow Beach, protestors would guarantee themselves a large, heterogeneous audience and would draw on a powerful condensing symbol of discrimination in Chicago.

South Shore, on the other hand, was populated by upper-middle-class professionals claiming to be integration-friendly, and lacked a history of rioting or racial violence. Timuel Black remembers that black beachgoers were “not attacked by people from South Shore because they were too hoity-toity to do that,” and that “The people in South Shore didn’t want the Negroes there, but they were not going to physically oppose them. They were going to use the police or somebody else to do that.”⁸³ South Shore residents did their best to assert their distance from what they viewed as “working-class atavism,” and were loathe to be depicted as foes of integration.⁸⁴

Despite this image, the neighborhood of 73,000 had witnessed a decade of its own changes that led its residents to oppose the planned protest. Whites had moved in from the neighborhoods adjacent to the Black Belt, bringing with them the experiences of riot and redlining as well as a deep-seated desire to maintain distance from African Americans.⁸⁵ African Americans themselves began to move into the western portion of the neighborhood in 1954, and by 1960 they comprised ten percent of South Shore’s population.⁸⁶ Though their presence nominally integrated

83. Timuel Black, interview, December 10, 2005.

84. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 62.

85. Dominic A. Pacyga and Ellen Skerrett, *Chicago: City of Neighborhoods* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1986), 388.

86. Appendix 1: “Community Areas,” *The Encyclopedia of Chicago*.

the community, blacks shopped, attended church, and went to school in almost completely separate facilities from their white neighbors to the east.⁸⁷ Norman Hill remembers that, "In 1960 and 1961, the immediate area adjacent to Rainbow Beach . . . was almost entirely all-white. Blacks would have to pass through this neighborhood that was white in order to get to Rainbow Beach."⁸⁸ The protest would thus make visible the presence of black community members and demonstrate their right to move through, and perhaps further into, South Shore.

South Shore's citizenry were torn between the desire to maintain a tranquil, integration-friendly community and the fear that an increasing black presence in their neighborhood, highlighted by the wade-ins, would encourage realtors to "make a quick dollar at the community's expense" through redlining.⁸⁹ Seeking a middle way, they formed the South Shore Commission in 1954, which advocated and tried to implement a policy of "managed integration," which was described in 1965 by the Commission as "essential to achieving a stable integrated residential community."⁹⁰ They asked that "all real estate transactions within the community will be fifty percent white and fifty percent Negro, with centralized screening services for the commission to provide desirable tenants to the South Shore."⁹¹

87. Harvey Molotch, "Racial Integration in a Transition Community," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 34, No. 6 (December 1969), 878–893. p. 881.

88. Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill, interview, February 26, 2006.

89. "Housing Report," in folder "Basic Policies," Box 5, Papers of the South Shore Commission, Chicago Historical Society.

90. "Public Relations" in folder "Basic Policies," Box 5, Papers of the South Shore Commission, CHS.

91. "Public Relations" in folder "Basic Policies," Box 5, Papers of the South Shore Commission, CHS.



Figure 2. Map of the South Shore Community

Cartography by Nicholas M. Dahmann, University of Chicago, 2006

Recognizing the problems some would have with this, they added that such a policy was “an artificial means to attain an end. It is meant as a short-term mechanism, an interim device until the city as a whole can affect open housing. It is meant to operate only as long as needed.”⁹²

The Commission’s vision was embraced by South Shore. In the years preceding the wade-ins, more than twelve thousand residents, businesses, and churches donated money to become members.⁹³ Donations ranged from two dollars for residents to larger gifts from banks and churches,

92. “Public Relations” earlier draft, handwritten.

93. Boxes 29–25, Books of Membership Card Carbon Copies, South Shore Commission, CHS.

and the membership cards often contained unsolicited addenda such as “for 75th Street and Phelps Ave” or “For the Oxford Holmes Apartment Building,” suggesting that residents believed they were specifically accounted for.⁹⁴ The Commission sponsored a Day Camp for children at Rainbow Beach and a yearly theater party, which, though it consisted only of showing a recently popular movie at South Shore’s Hamilton Theater, published an advertisement book and program that contained 126 pages, only eleven of which were program and two of which were a map of the area. The rest of the book was taken up by local advertisements, and its preface read: “Your presence tonight is significant. It is evidence that you know how much the SSC means to this community, how much good it continues to do, the excellent example it sets for all Chicagoland.”⁹⁵

The South Shore Commission, with its aggressive plan for managed integration, gave all residents of South Shore something to be proud of, a liberal vision that residents believed set them apart from the stereotyped rock-throwing bigotry of neighborhoods like South Chicago and put them in a position to be city-wide leaders while protecting their neighborhood and community from integration’s adverse effects. However, when the wade-ins arrived on their doorstep, the neighborhood and Commission found themselves struggling to respond effectively. Black remembers that even among liberal supporters of the civil rights movement in South Shore, fear of the damage a protest in their neighborhood would do ran high. He recalls that in 1960 after the wade-in was announced, “many of my liberal white friends who lived in South Shore

94. Boxes 29–25, Books of Membership Card Carbon Copies, South Shore Commission, CHS.

95. Program, Annual Theater Party, Box 4, South Shore Commission, CHS.

were calling me saying, "We don't want any trouble! Don't have that demonstration!" The middle-class whites of South Shore did not want the struggle to play out in their neighborhood.

Velma Murphy, Norman Hill, and the NAACP Youth Council were undeterred by the lack of support, the threat of violence, and the knowledge that even potential allies in South Shore did not want them there. The planning of the wade-in continued. Hill enlisted his old allies from the Young People's Socialist League who had formed a new group in Hyde Park, the Chicago Youth Committee for Civil Rights, "to help integrate the wade-ins" and the public and police were notified on Tuesday, August 23, 1960 that the Youth Council planned to lead a wade-in that Sunday.⁹⁶ Led by a true youth movement, a new effort to integrate public space in Chicago was about to begin.

The thirty individuals who gathered at 79th Street and the lakefront on Sunday, August 28, 1960, to protest *de facto* segregation in Chicago and exercise their civil rights had to overcome their fears of a near-certain altercation in a situation in which they would be severely outnumbered.⁹⁷ At the Republican Convention they had been part of a group thousands strong, marching primarily in their own neighborhood and outside a convention hall on national television. On Rainbow Beach, they would be thirty young people facing down the potential ire of thousands of unrestrained and desperate whites, without the promise of any recourse beyond the knowledge that they had the right to go to a public beach. Staying away, however, was no longer an option. As sit-in pioneers in Greensboro and across the country had demonstrated, a few individuals,

96. Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill, interview, February 26, 2006 and *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 29, 1960.

97. Norman Hill, interview, March 5, 2006.

<p>WEATHER Cloudy Showers Likely High-34 Low 88's Low Lower 80's</p>	<h1 style="margin: 0;">DAILY DEFENDER</h1> <p style="font-size: small; margin: 0;">America's Most Exciting Daily</p>	<p>★ FINAL ★</p>
VOL. V—No. 117	CHICAGO, ILLINOIS—MONDAY, AUGUST 29, 1960	CALUMET 5-2400 — PRICE 7c
<h1 style="margin: 0;">MOB INJURES TWO AT RAINBOW BEACH</h1> <p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 0;">(See Page 2)</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">High Speed, Tree - 3 Dead</h2> <p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 0;">(See Page 3)</p>		
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;">   </div>		
<h3 style="margin: 0;">Victims Of Rainbow Beach Mob</h3>		
<p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 0;">MISS VELMA MURPHY, 21, left, and Howard Irvin, 25, right, were injured at Rainbow Beach, Sunday morning, by a rock-throwing white mob shortly after they, along with 25 other members of the Southside NAACP Youth Council, attempted to swim in the area.</p>		
<p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 0;">Both were hurt when struck by stones thrown by members of the jeering white gathering, as the 30 young adults were being escorted from the beach by policemen, according to reports. The pair was treated at Jackson Park hospital and released.</p>		
<h2 style="margin: 0;">50 Hurt As Dixie Mobs Clash In Race Hate</h2> <p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 0;">(See Page 3)</p>		

Figure 3. Front Page of the *Chicago Daily Defender* on Monday, August 29, 1960, the day after the first Rainbow Beach Wade-Ins took place.

if their resolve was strong enough, if they could survive violence and endure spit and slurs, if they returned time and again until they could not be ignored, could make history and change their world. If the NAACP Youth Council wanted to be a part of the conflagration that was the civil rights movement in 1960, the time had come to jump in the fire.

For two hours, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., the waders sat tensely, challenging whites to enforce the segregation they always had or to accept the presence of black beachgoers. The policemen on the beach made no effort to disperse the gathering mobs of angry whites, though the threat of violence was clear. The waders survived two hours on the beach, but the inevitable occurred when they rose to leave: angry whites unleashed a storm of rocks, bricks, bottles, spit, and epithets. The exact makeup of the crowd is unclear, but the *Chicago Tribune* later reported that a local white youth, eighteen-year-old James A. Southard of 7636 South Phillips Avenue, was arrested for carrying a homemade gasoline bomb to "scare the coloured people" and later sentenced to four months in jail.⁹⁸ His co-conspirator, who built the bomb, hailed from South Chicago and received a one-month sentence. Their collaborative effort suggests that local youth were joining with and learning from their South Chicago brethren just how to enforce segregation. Their arrest demonstrates that while police may have been unwilling to arrest whites, they drew the line at bomb-throwing. The *Defender* reported that police held crowds at bay, preventing a fistfight or worse, even as they failed to take measures to prevent the volley of projectiles.⁹⁹ Tasked with keeping the peace, the police had failed, but they had at least shown that certain white behavior

98. "Bomb Carrier At Beach Gets 4-Month Term," *Chicago Tribune*, September 2, 1960, 2.

99. "Mob Injures Two at Rainbow Beach," *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 29, 1960, 1.

could not be tolerated. Following a decade of house bombings on the South Side, it was a small, if hard-won, step forward.¹⁰⁰

The next day, both the *Chicago Tribune* and *Chicago Sun-Times* buried the story in their back news pages — to them, this was just another riot in a typical long, hot summer. However, the *Defender* put the story on the front page with pictures of Murphy and Irvin after their treatment at Jackson Park Hospital. Murphy's half-shaven head with its ugly wound screamed out to the *Defender's* readership of the risk the waders had taken and the hate they had endured. If the whole city did not know about the wade-ins yet, the black community could not ignore the injuries to two of their own.

Despite the violence they encountered, the NAACP Youth Council prepared a wade-in for the following week, while Murphy and Irvin nursed their injuries and news of the protest spread in the black community. Though their fears had been realized, the Youth Council intended to persevere, and having endured the worst, they were ready for anything. The serious public assault they endured galvanized a much larger segment of the black community, who were impressed by the audacious ambition of the youngsters and outraged by the treatment of their children. Murphy remembers that “after I got hit in the head, it became newsworthy, and lots of people got interested in going to the wade-ins.”¹⁰¹ The *Defender* urged the black community to focus on the incident in a cartoon published in its Tuesday, August 30, edition that featured a crow (representative of Jim Crow) hiding behind a boat holding a rock labeled “beach violence” on a beach labeled Rainbow Beach. The entire image appears in a gun sight, with the surrounding area filled

100. For a discussion of house bombings, see Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*.

101. *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 29, 1960, 3.

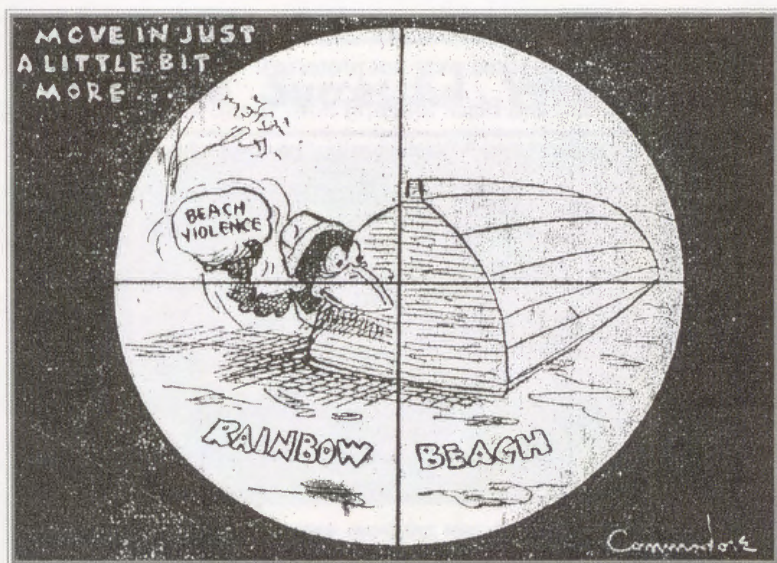


Figure 4. *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 30, 1960

in with black. The caption urged the community to focus on the incident and “Move in Just a Little Bit More.”

Timuel Black remembers that after the first wade-in, older community members got involved, wielding their influence in the city government to protect their children and assert solidarity. “When we saw our young people being attacked,” Black recalls, “those of my generation, we decided we had to protect them,” and they utilized connections they had built through years of organizing.¹⁰² Black himself, who was working with Norman Hill in the Chicago Chapter of the Negro American Labor Council, picked up the phone and called police superintendent O. W. Wilson when he heard the wade-ins would continue. Black had worked with Wilson during earlier protests and marches, and he

102. Timuel D. Black, interview, December 10, 2005.

“explained to him that these people who were attackers were being protected while the attacked were not protected.”¹⁰³ Wilson promised to correct the problem, and Black told him how. “I told him to put colored police officers on that beach” Black recalls, “because white police weren’t going to arrest white rioters.”¹⁰⁴ Norman Hill remembers as well that when the second wade-in was publicized, Chicago’s television stations prepared to attend, and that knowledge of this prompted Wilson and Daley to issue the order that the protestors must be protected. Hill recalls “there was television coverage of the 1960 wade-ins, and one of the things we felt was that Mayor Daley did not want Chicago to have an image of violence over race, and that’s what led the police to move in and protect the blacks who were using the beach.”

On Sunday, September 4, 1960, the last day beaches were officially open in Chicago, the second wade-in was held.¹⁰⁵ More than one hundred and fifty people, an integrated crowd, turned out to support the young waders. Those present included the NAACP Youth Council, Hyde Park’s Chicago Youth Committee for Civil Rights, members of the Congress on Racial Equality, and older leaders such as Timuel Black, who recalls that after the reports of what happened at the first wade-in, “it was just a matter of saying we’re going to be out at Rainbow Beach” that rallied many new faces to the cause. As before, the party occupied a small section of the beach and water while tensions mounted among nearby whites, but this time, the police kept the crowd at bay, and when they left at 1:30 p.m., no violence was reported. The following week, the *Defender* ran a two-page pictorial of the event and an article that was

103. Timuel D. Black, interview, December 10, 2005.

104. Timuel D. Black, interview, December 10, 2005.

105. Beaches closed on Labor Day, Monday, September 5, 1960.

Stage Successful Wade-In



INTEGRATING swimming previous race-rioting area of ly because of the heavy in-
 team of N.A.A.C.P. and Rainbow beach. No trouble filtration of policemen as-
 C.O.R.E. students takes part broke out as expected, main- signed to patrol the area. (De-
 in the beach activities at the fender Staff Photo).



Figure 5. Photographs of the Second Rainbow Beach Wade-In,
Chicago Daily Defender, Tuesday, September 6, 1960

headlined, "Police Prevent Trouble at Tense Rainbow Beach."¹⁰⁶ Though the wade-ins were over for the summer of 1960, a victory had been won. Police had kept the peace and protected the right of blacks to attend public beaches in Chicago, rather than enforce segregation. The question for the coming year was whether such a precedent would hold.

The crowds who had opposed integration at the first wade-ins planned to continue their efforts. They had stoned protestors at the first wade-in, and though restrained by police at the second event, some whites vowed revenge. Joe Burke, a nineteen-year-old resident of South Chicago,¹⁰⁷ told a *Chicago Defender* reporter "They won't always have this kind of protection . . . The same thing will happen here as in Jacksonville [where a major race riot exploded during peaceful demonstrations in August 1960]. The whites outnumber them here."¹⁰⁸ Burke's threats carried a distinct tone of hatred and a "swagger," as the *Defender* reported, but also a measure of desperation. Burke complained to the reporter: "This is the only beach left for whites, so why do they have to come out here? They can catch a bus and in ten minutes be at 55th, 57th, or 63rd Streets [traditionally "black" beaches in Hyde Park and Woodlawn]."¹⁰⁹ Burke had grown up in South Chicago, and he intended to enforce segregation the same way whites always had in his neighborhood at Rainbow Beach. However, such action could only succeed as long as police did not protect protesters.

106. "Police Prevent Trouble at Tense Rainbow Beach," *Chicago Daily Defender*, September 6, 1960, 4.

107. Burke lived at 8436 Muskegon Avenue, according to the *Defender*.

108. "Police Prevent Trouble at Tense Rainbow Beach," *Chicago Daily Defender*, September 6, 1960, 4.

109. "Police Prevent Trouble at Tense Rainbow Beach," *Chicago Daily Defender*, September 6, 1960, 4.

The Summer of 1961 – “Sit-Ins for Chicago”

While the wade-ins were over for the summer, the *Defender* continued to report new sit-in victories into 1961, and Southern civil rights leaders announced bold new drives to break Jim Crow and register voters during the following summer. Chicago's black leaders prepared to provide as much aid as they could. A resurgent chapter of CORE outlined a plan to send “Freedom Riders,” young people both black and white, to the South to participate in sit-ins and voting drives, the first “freedom summer.” As summer approached, the *Defender's* weekly edition proudly announced to its national constituents that “Chicagoans Empty Pockets in Support of Freedom Rider Forays Through South” and went on to report that city churches had recruited and trained riders as well as gathered more than six thousand dollars to fund the program.¹¹⁰ The paper's local religious calendar ran announcements recruiting riders, and it was a point of pride for black Chicagoans that their city produced the largest contingent. The white student community provided support as well, with University of Chicago students joining their South Side neighbors in Mississippi jails.¹¹¹ If the sit-in movement had caught fire in Chicago in 1960, it was a bona fide blaze by 1961. Young civil rights leaders were galvanizing their peers across the nation, and older leaders who had been reticent at first were now committed to helping the youth movement in any way they could.

110. “Chicagoans Empty Pockets in Support of Freedom Rider Forays Through South,” *Chicago Weekly Defender*, June 24–30, 1961, 3.

111. “Chicago Freedom Riders Jailed in South,” *Chicago Maroon*, June 23, 1961, 1.

The summer of 1961 began in much the same way previous summers had, with an attack on blacks in a public and presumably safe area on June 28. The site was Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Bridgeport, which offered shelter to ninety-two blacks left homeless by a fire in the Douglas Hotel, a tenement in the adjacent Black Belt. When the families arrived, a mob of teenagers and adults gathered to jeer and taunt the families, threatening violence and driving them from the church. The *Defender's* front page screamed "Hate Mob Drives Out Fire Victims" and reported that the police, rather than defend the right of the blacks to take refuge in the church, told aid workers that they "had better get these people out."¹¹² The *Chicago Sun-Times* opened its article on the incident with the questions: "Was Chicago taking a page from the South when ninety-two Negro fire victims were driven from the church that had offered them shelter?" and "Did the police do their job?" and blasted Bridgeport in an editorial the next day entitled "Religious Freedom Denied Here." The city, the *Sun-Times* noted,

. . . has just witnessed a disgraceful denial of a church's right to practice its religion because of racial intolerance in the Bridgeport neighborhood. Mayor Daley and Supt. of Police O.W. Wilson should be ashamed of the police of the Deering district for their failure to protect the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion . . . What happened at that church should never have happened in an enlightened community and deserves the same condemnation that has been directed as the South's Ku Kluxers.¹¹³

112. *Chicago Daily Defender*, June 28, 1961, 1, 3.

113. *Chicago Sun-Times*, June 28, 1961, 3; June 29, 1961, 35.

The event was further complicated by the fact that Mayor Richard J. Daley was a lifelong resident of Bridgeport. Although he condemned the incident, Daley passed it off as “a small group of teenagers” acting “disgracefully” while assuring the press that the “rights of all citizens were protected by police.”¹¹⁴ These remarks were not enough to satisfy even the white Chicago press, however, and the *Defender’s* headline proclaimed that “Daley Plays Down Violence”¹¹⁵ and reported in its national weekly that the NAACP chapter president, Rev. Carl A. Fuqua, “strongly denounced the action take by the police at the scene and demanded an investigation of the entire incident.”¹¹⁶

While the city of Chicago had successfully kept all but the 1951 Cicero housing riot out of local and national news, word of the Bridgeport riot made national news and prompted Senator Olin D. Johnston of South Carolina to demand that the Freedom Riders who had come south from Chicago to protest white racism should “clean up their own back yard.” “Should any Negro residents ever be burned out of their homes,” Senator Johnston promised, “the neighboring South Carolina white people would be more than happy to shelter them in their church and would not revert to mob violence and throw them out on the street.”¹¹⁷ The senator’s remarks indicated the degree to which the incident had become a national embarrassment for Chicago.

Johnston proved more accurate than he knew — black Chicagoans were preparing to take local action. After a successful end to the summer of 1960, reports were rolling in again of gang-enforced and police-abetted

114. *Chicago Daily Defender*, June 29, 1961, 4.

115. *Chicago Daily Defender*, June 29, 1961, 1.

116. *Chicago Weekly Defender*, July 1–7, 1961, 1, 5.

117. *Chicago Weekly Defender*, July 1–7, 1961, 1.

segregation, not just in Bridgeport but on beaches and in parks as well. However, Chicago's *de facto* segregation practices were proving far less effective at controlling public space than real estate, and while the city could claim innocence in the actions of private businessmen, it could not account for the lack of safety for blacks in "white" public spaces. Supporting and witnessing the success of the Freedom Riders to whom they had a very close connection had prepared even more of Chicago's African-American population to act, and the organizers of the 1960 wade-ins were ready to enlist them. Interpersonal violence could not be ignored, and even white-run papers knew it.¹¹⁸

The *Defender*, having been the source of much of black Chicago's knowledge of sit-ins, underwent its own conversion to the principles of direct action in the year between 1960 and 1961, and it took a leading role as the mouthpiece for a new movement for desegregation in Chicago. The *Defender's* role was critical in both propagating the idea of nonviolent action in Chicago and of disseminating information about it to the black community. Its fervent attention and editorializing on the issues at hand encouraged the public to join the waders on Rainbow Beach.

On June 29, 1961, the *Defender* ran an editorial in its daily edition entitled "Sit-Ins for Chicago" that marked its new commitment to non-violent action in the city. The editorial argued:

What is urgently needed are "Sit-Ins" at local establishments where discrimination has been systematically practiced and unchallenged. The Southland does not possess an exclusive pattern of discrimination. This revolting practice that disregards human dignity and rights is prevalent in one form or another

118. See the quotations from the *Sun-Times* above.

in many of the cities of the North . . . When Chicago's unjust treatment of its Negro residents — in housing and employment particularly — is added to America's racial dilemma, the picture is far from being an attractive one. Since the legislative process is inordinately slow to redress the twin evils of segregation and discrimination, some determined "sit-in" demonstrations may help to turn the tide of racialism in our midst. This means of dramatizing this city's racial sins may succeed in convincing even the Uncle Toms in high places that we intend to assert our rights and make Chicago an open, decent, unsegregated city in which responsible citizens of any race, color, or creed may dwell. We repeat, Chicago too needs sit-ins. Let's go!¹¹⁹

The analysis in this editorial is both local and international — it invokes the human rights language that was used by African nations fighting for their independence in the same breath that it references the well-known specifics of discrimination in Chicago. The editorial also throws down the gauntlet to the city's leaders, suggesting that if Chicago wants to be the city that Mayor Daley claimed it was after the Bridgeport incident, it must take action against racism. The final sentences demonstrate the presence of the resolve to face down violence and desire to exercise civil rights that the NAACP Youth Council harnessed one year prior among the writers and readership of the paper. The *Defender* proceeded to follow up its editorial by replacing its two front page slogans, "Support Our Advertisers" and "Read the World Today," with two new ones on Monday, July 3: "We Need Sit-Ins for Chicago" and "Freedom Now Eradicate Segregation Now." The NAACP Youth Council

119. "Sit-ins For Chicago," *Chicago Daily Defender*, June 29, 1961, 11.

had planned to continue the wade-ins at Rainbow Beach if the beach did not remain safe for blacks in the summer of 1961. Alone one year earlier, they now had a powerful ally in publicizing their campaign.

Though the NAACP protested the Bridgeport riot with press releases and harsh words, the organization never organized a protest in that neighborhood. The incident's significance was its role as a galvanizing force in the black community, particularly for the *Defender*, which authored its editorial in response. When news of an attack by a white mob on a black family at Rainbow Beach on Sunday, July 2, 1961, spread around the black community, then, they were ready for action, and the NAACP Youth Council was ready to lead them. Ignored by all the major papers including the *Defender* because it went unreported initially, this attack was cited in the University of Chicago's *Chicago Maroon* as the impetus for the 1961 wade-ins after the fact.¹²⁰ Ready to lead and with the *Defender* and civil-rights community primed for action, Velma Murphy's Southside NAACP Youth Council led the return to Rainbow Beach.

On July 7, 1961, a crowd of approximately ninety people gathered at 75th Street and Stony Island Avenue, at the west end of South Shore, and began to march east to the lake through the heart of South Shore's white shopping district. The police had been notified, and the predominantly African-American column was led and flanked by nearly two hundred police officers, while a crowd of over five thousand whites gathered to watch the procession. In the procession were many older leaders who had counseled against the wade-ins the year before, including Carl A. Fuqua, the executive secretary of Chicago's NAACP, who was listed among the leaders of the wade-in by the *Defender*. The waders spent two hours swimming, sunning themselves, strumming guitars, and singing

120. "Integration at Beach," *Chicago Maroon*, July 28, 1961, 2.

"The Freedom Equal Blues," while police held the increasingly agitated white crowd at bay with megaphones, riot lines, and ten arrests for disorderly conduct and unlawful assembly. On Sunday, July 9, the waders returned, met this time by an even larger crowd, and three hundred police and over fifty squad cars were required to keep the peace. Nine individuals were arrested for throwing bricks, bottles, and other projectiles at the waders, but no large-scale rioting was reported. Police were finally doing their job, protecting equal rights to public space in Chicago.¹²¹ While the major daily papers, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and the *Chicago Sun-Times* ran small articles buried deep in their news sections that told of an action where "no violence was reported," the *Defender* put the wade-ins on the front-page in both its Chicago daily and its national weekly, calling them a "smashing success."

Well-organized and well-attended, the wade-ins continued for the entire summer, and every week brought new headlines in their support.¹²² Calling the wade-ins an immediate success was not just optimism on the *Defender's* part. The Chicago police were forced to step up to the occasion, and, fearing another Bridgeport, they did just that. Though angry crowds as large as ten thousand gathered on the first weekend, police defended the waders from all but a few thrown rocks and bottles, and this action did not go unnoticed. The *Defender's* Monday edition ran a headline stating "Police Get Tough" and wrote that "On Saturday, Supt. Orlando W. Wilson issued a new police directive titled 'Civil Rights' in which he emphatically told policemen it was their duty to

121. "Rioting Fades, Police Get Tough, Arrest 10 At Beach," *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 10, 1961, 3.

122. "10 are seized at 'Freedom' trek to beach," *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, July 9, 1961, Part 1, 28.

protect the rights of everyone and that it would be considered a neglect of duty if they failed to do so.”¹²³ Apparently chastened by public response to the Bridgeport incident, Wilson went one step further in following days, announcing a “human relations” class for his top officers that the *Tribune* called a “Race Problems Class” and which drew praise from the director of the Chicago Urban League, Edwin C. Berry.¹²⁴

One day later, the *Defender* celebrated again, this time with a giant front page headline reading “Fine Beach Rioter \$200.” The story reported that a Miss Sally Yexley, forty-three, of South Shore told Judge Joseph J. Butler that “they [the waders] were taking my beach away” and was summarily found guilty of disorderly conduct for throwing stones and fined the maximum penalty. Judge Butler informed her that “the beach didn’t belong to her, but to all people, and that her actions gave ammunition to the Russian propaganda machine which used such information to discredit America in the eyes of newly emerging nations.” When Miss Yexley protested that she had “been using that beach for years” the Judge responded, “Well, you can continue to use it with all Americans.”¹²⁵ Not only did a white Chicago judge sentence a white woman who claimed to be defending her home turf for the first time, he explicitly acknowledged the extreme importance of maintaining equality in the city locally, nationally, and internationally. It was a resounding victory for the waders and the larger movement of which they were a

123. “Rioting Fades, Police Get Tough, Arrest 10 At Beach,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 10, 1961, 3.

124. “Sets Up Race Problems Class for Police Officers,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 11, 1961, 8.

125. “Blonde Rioter Draws \$200 Fine For Sand Kicking Act,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 13, 1961, 1, 3.

part. Resolved to continue for the summer, the coalition that put the second summer of wade-ins together appointed Norman Hill to be "Secretary of the Freedom Wade-Ins" to organize their efforts.¹²⁶

Residents of South Shore turned to their South Shore Commission to respond to the wade-ins. Membership cards collected in the summer of 1961 reveal that more members of the South Shore Commission were registered on July 10, the first day the Commission collected new memberships after the wade-ins in 1961, than on any other day that year.¹²⁷ The citizens of South Shore put their money, and their faith, in the South Shore Commission to find a response that would keep their neighborhood free of embarrassing protest and the redlining realtors they believed would follow. However, the commission had very little sway with either the waders or the rock-throwing rioters (some of whom, arrest records were showing, came from within South Shore) and it proved utterly unable to enforce its gradualist agenda on Rainbow Beach.

One week later, after equally well-attended and successful wade-ins, Chicago Police Deputy Superintendent James Conlisk released a statement in which he said, "The Negro does not want to take over Rainbow Beach. All he wants to do is feel free to peaceably visit any beach and that is his constitutional right . . . Ultimately, I think the Rainbow Beach demonstrations will have a good effect on the racial situation in Chicago." The *Defender* ran a front-page headline reading "Top Police Back Beach Wade-In" and wrote that "with his words, Dept. Supt. James B. Conlisk placed the 10,000-man Chicago Police department squarely in support of a month long effort to integrate the publicly-owned South

126. "Norman Hill," The African American Registry Online. www.aaregistry.com.

127. Membership Cards, Box 31, South Shore Commission, CHS.

Side beach.”¹²⁸ The wade-ins continued, bolstered by this powerful endorsement from the highest echelons of Chicago power.

While two weeks of triumph paint a picture of a city ready and willing to accept integration, it should by no means be understood that Chicago in 1961 was in such a position. The well-placed and well-timed action of the Freedom Waders had forced the Chicago Police to take a crucial stand in favor of civil rights, but racial violence perpetrated by ordinary citizens continued. On July 17, a black seventeen-year-old named Matthew Tolbert was walking with three friends when he was shot and killed by a white hoodlum from a car window in broad daylight, and two days later, racists bombed the home of an interracial couple on the South Side, destroying their bungalow at 9561 Sangamon Avenue in Gresham, Velma Murphy's neighborhood. On July 24, a group of white teens smashed the windshield of a car carrying three black postal workers home from work as they drove along Wentworth Avenue at the border of Bridgeport and the Black Belt.¹²⁹ The National Edition of the *Chicago Defender*, summarizing the week of July 22–28, opened with the headline “Chicago Situation Worsens.”¹³⁰

The white arrestees at the first three wade-ins of 1961 were a diverse group, comprised of twenty-two adults and five juveniles. Of the adults, nine were under twenty and eighteen under thirty, but ages ranged from eighteen to fifty-seven. Seven of those arrested lived in the South Shore neighborhood, but some came from as far as Gage Park, the Altgeld Gardens, and Cabrini Green, the last of which was over thirteen miles away. They came predominantly from working-class and middle-class

128. “Police Brass Backs Move to Mix All-White Beach,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 18, 1961, 1, 3.

129. *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 17, July 19, and July 24, 1961.

130. *Chicago Weekly Defender*, July 22–28, 1961, 1.

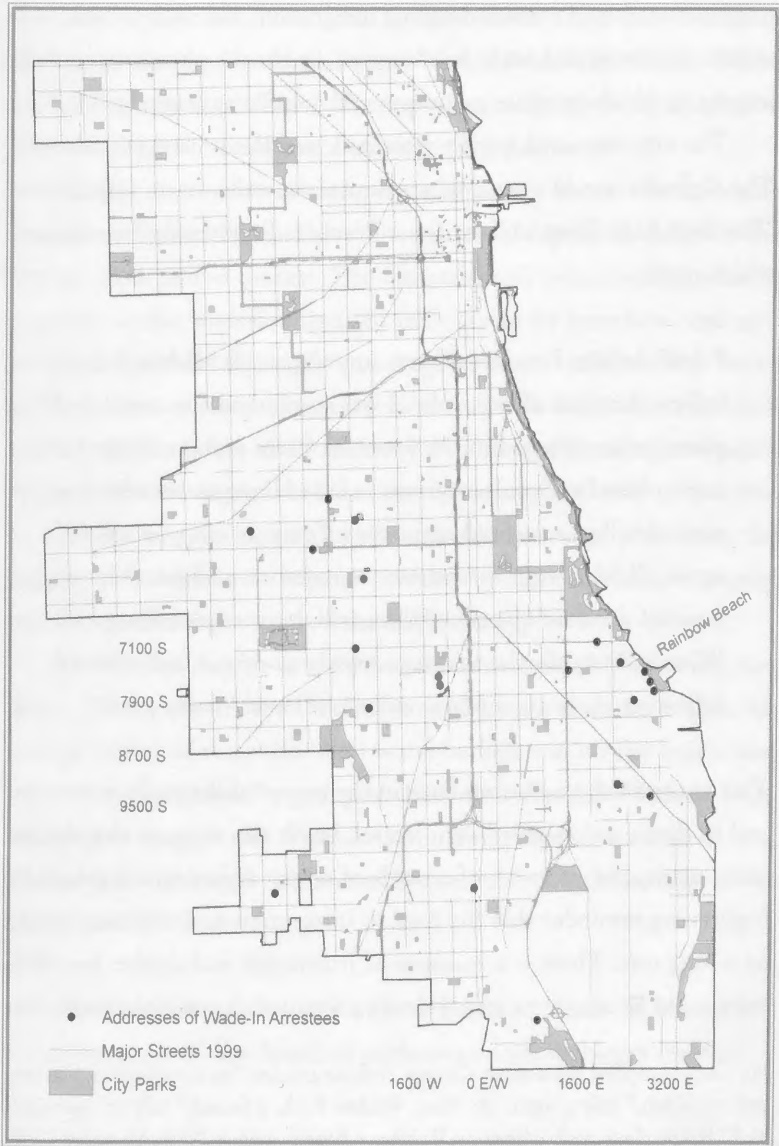


Figure 6. Addresses of White Beachgoers Arrested at the First Three Wade-Ins of 1961

neighborhoods that were undergoing integration, and their presence and actions demonstrated both the extent of the beach's popularity and the lengths to which its white patrons would go to keep it segregated.¹³¹

The city remained racially polarized, and the waders felt the heat. The *Defender* carried a personal account of the wade-ins on July 19 titled "Freedom Ride, Even to Race Tense Beach, Is Frightening Experience," which read:

I don't believe Freedom Riders, anywhere, are fearless. I don't believe they can afford to be. I was scared and I'm sure I had plenty of company. But the Freedom Rides and the Wade-Ins at Rainbow Beach will continue, at least I hope so, because they must. I will go again and again. And if you go, too, you will feel as we all felt, Negroes and whites together, and possibly ask yourself the same question: When will this confused thing end? When will any of us be able to go anywhere without fear or hatred following us, because of our color, our creed, or our race?¹³²

This testimonial emphasizes faith in the power of the sit-in movement and its direct action nonviolent tactics, but it also suggests that despite gains made, the presence of crowds of angry whites was a genuinely frightening reminder that the road to integration and tolerance would be a long one. There is a measure of frustration and doubt, for while fears could be overcome and violence prevented, it was not always clear

131. Data compiled from three *Chicago Tribune* articles: "10 are seized in 'freedom trek' to beach," July 9, 1961, 28; "Race Waders Back, 9 Seized," July 10, 1961, B12; and "Police clash with whites on Rainbow Beach, Nab 11," July 17, 1961, 3.

132. "Freedom Ride, Even to Race Tense Beach, Is Frightening Experience," *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 19, 1961, 4.

that the racism and hatred that created them could be eradicated. A *Defender* headline on August 1 read "Crude Racial Sign Greets 'Wade-Ins' as They Integrate Beach," juxtaposing the progress of integration with the persistent intolerance of white neighborhoods.¹³³

Within the white community, the South Shore Commission's attempt to defend South Shore through racial regulation failed in the face of direct action protest. The Commission's continued inaction in response to the wade-ins signaled inability to its members, and new memberships fell off steeply into August. Some residents like Yexley utilized overt racism and bigotry in attempts to intimidate the black waders, but they were in the minority. For most of South Shore's white residents, the message of the failed attempt to stop the wade-ins was that it was time to start looking to the suburbs, and nine years later, the neighborhood was over seventy percent African American, changing rapidly as white flight reached the lakefront.

On Sunday, August 6, 1961, the waders met with no resistance, not even a jeering crowd, for the first time since the wade-ins began. An average crowd of three thousand white bathers was on the beach, and they "virtually ignored" a group of thirty-four Freedom Waders.¹³⁴ On Monday, August 7, the *Defender* ran a comprehensive editorial that labeled 1961 "Chicago's Summer of Decision," in which the calm at the beach was described:

On a recent Sunday at Rainbow Beach, a Wade-In was in progress . . . A few hundred yards away, a young Negro couple

133. *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 1, 1961, 3.

134. "Rainbow Beach Quiet as Racial Row Breaks Out At Picnic Grounds," *Chicago Defender*, August 8, 1961, 2.

and their little girl stepped onto the beach. They were not "Freedom Waders." Their only mission was to spend an afternoon in the sun. The white persons close to the Negro family looked up in mild surprise. Most of them just shrugged and turned away. As the little girl played at the water's edge, the "Freedom Waders" seemed miles away.¹³⁵

There is an unmistakable tone of victory in this editorial, a sense of pride that not only was racial segregation challenged and beaten, but so were at least some social attitudes. The wade-ins did not return to the pages of the *Defender*, and by Monday, August 21, the paper had returned to printing its old front-page slogan, "Read the World Today," along with a new one, "Register So You Can Vote," dropping its more incendiary summer slogans. In this editorial, the *Defender* tallied the summer's gains and found a remarkable victory in the Rainbow Beach Wade-Ins.

Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill (the two were married in fall 1960) considered the wade-ins, in which their leadership role had been so pivotal, a victory because, as Norman Hill put it, "by 1961, the wade-ins did not involve a repeat of the violence . . . the police had started to protect blacks." Velma Murphy Hill concurs, recalling that, "the fact that they [the police] did protect us in 1961 was a victory." Because of this police presence, Timuel Black believes, "The resistance was reduced substantially and Rainbow Beach became a part of history."¹³⁶ Through the application of principles of direct action learned both from older leaders and their peers in the South, the Hills had led a youth movement that

135. "2 Incidents Spark Riots in Chicago's 'Summer of Decision,'" *Chicago Defender*, August 7, 1961, 4.

136. Timuel D. Black, interview, December 10, 2005.

captured the support of the African-American and progressive communities in Chicago. They had successfully challenged the tacit enforcement of segregation by police in the city and forced the Chicago Police Department to set a precedent of protecting blacks in the exercise of their civil rights for years to come. Though only one of many battles against segregation in housing, public schools, and many other arenas that were yet to come, the Rainbow Beach Wade-Ins were undoubtedly a victory for Chicago's blacks by the end of the summer of 1961.

Conclusion —

“We’ve Been Activists All These Years”

In remembering the Rainbow Beach Wade-Ins, Timuel Black recalls that “Rainbow Beach is symbolic of the quality and the type of young men and women who were involved.”¹³⁷ These young leaders were raised in Chicago during a period of racial change and racial tension which they experienced first-hand as they grew up in newly integrated neighborhoods. They were educated in high-caliber public schools, but their educations went beyond the classroom into their homes, where they learned the history of civil rights activism in Chicago and the power of its networks, and into organizations like the NAACP Youth Council where they absorbed the philosophies of direct action protest espoused by labor leaders. Educated by an older generation, these young people were ready to take action, but the impetus to do so came from the sit-ins in the South that demonstrated the power of small, nonviolent protests and their own participation in the major protest at the Republican National Convention. Backed by a history of protest and fueled by a

137. Timuel D. Black, interview, December 10, 2005.

desire to be part of a youth movement sweeping the nation, thirty young people overcame their fears of violently policed social segregation and staged a protest which captured the attention of the city of Chicago. Their thirty-person initial wade-in blossomed into a city-wide movement among the African-American population and other civil-rights activists who shared in their expression of freedom and conquest of fear, and it successfully forced the city's police to protect blacks' free exercise of civil rights.

By introducing mass direct action protest to the city's activists and forcing police to recognize the legitimacy of nonviolent direct action and protect those who used it, the young leaders of the wade-ins set the stage for major struggles that followed them. Using these tactics, large coalitions were formed in 1962 and 1963 to protest the *de facto* segregation of public schools and public housing. Leaders like Carl Fuqua, who led the school campaigns, were converted to direct action as a tactic for winning equality in Chicago. The schools campaign led to two walk-outs, in October of 1963 and February of 1964, in which over 100,000 students participated.¹³⁸ In these and other campaigns, young urban activists further honed their tactics and broadened individual city campaigns into the national movement for desegregation that brought about the major civil rights legislation of the mid-1960s. Velma Murphy Hill and Norman Hill left Chicago in 1961 to join CORE in New York City, and they report "we've been activists all these years."¹³⁹ For a generation of young activists, the Rainbow Beach Wade-Ins were the first victory in long careers of work for justice and equality, a defining moment when they challenged a tradition of obedience to social segregation and through their defiance made history.

138. Smith, "Congress on Racial Equality," *The Encyclopedia of Chicago*.

139. Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill, interview, February 26, 2006.

This movement has gone understudied both because of its extremely local scope (it never won a front-page headline in the *Tribune*) and the better-known history of larger protests that followed it. However, a close examination reveals that the wade-ins were a crucial incident in the civil rights movement in Chicago, a protest that introduced new tactics to the city in a particularly effective public-space context and challenged the police to protect citizens in a way they had not done before. To understand the history of black protest in Chicago in the 1960s, we must understand the sit-ins, which were a generative moment for this era.

Integration was not an unqualified success, for by 1970, South Shore was seventy percent African American, and by 1980, the figure was over ninety percent. Whites fled to the suburbs en masse, and though today South Shore is considered “integrated” by the few whites who remain in mansions along the lake, it is predominantly an African-American middle-class neighborhood with a beach where the patrons are of almost entirely one race. As Norman and Velma Murphy Hill note, “the area is almost all black.”¹⁴⁰ Timuel Black believes that the continued integration of white neighborhoods problematically separated classes within the black community and spread middle-class leadership too widely to be successfully maintained as generations passed. In moving out, Black believes, “my generation broke many of the barriers for the generation of my children and children in that generation. But we left behind a huge number of less fortunate.”¹⁴¹ Today, many neighborhoods in Chicago remain segregated by race and class or both, posing challenges that must be met by a new generation of activists if the vision of an equal

140. Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill, interview, February 26, 2006.

141. Timuel Black, interview, December 10, 2005.

society is to be realized. In building a new movement, Chicago's next generation of young activists must find their own causes and reasons to organize, but they will have the legacy of the Rainbow Beach Wade-Ins to educate and inspire them. ■

