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*Vassar College*

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**Jackson and Washington Parks:  
a History of Governance, Resistance and Citizenship in Urban Space**

Claire Luning

May 10, 2021

Senior Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the Bachelor of Arts in Urban Studies

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Adviser, Leonard Nevarez

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## Land Acknowledgement

The City of Chicago is located on the traditional unceded homelands of the Council of the Three Fires— the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi Nations— as well as the Miami, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Sac, Fox, Kickapoo, and Illinois Nations. The land on which Chicago lies has long been an Indigenous space to gather, trade, build networks, and maintain culture.

Acknowledging the violent history that has led to the current state of the City of Chicago is crucial, as well as the understanding that colonization is current and ongoing. In this thesis, I will discuss the fight for spaces of representation in the Chicago Parks, and it is important to recognize the simultaneous fight that Indigenous people have been engaged in since the colonization of their land. In relation to Chicago parks specifically, the Potawatomi Nation has sued the City of Chicago for land back from the entire Lakefront twice, in 1914 and 1926, losing both times.

The World's Columbian Exhibition, while influential in the formation of South Park, was created in celebration of the 400 year anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival to the Americas which initiated the colonization of native land. The Fair used native people and cultures for entertainment and reinforced and disseminated many harmful stereotypes.

One of the parks that I will discuss at length is named after former U.S. President Andrew Jackson who signed the devastating Indian Removal Act in 1830 which instigated the forced removal and genocide of Indigenous people from West of the Mississippi River. This thesis will focus on the planning and changes to the land created by planners and non-native Chicago residents, but it is critical to remember that these “developments” were, and are, taking place on already inhabited lands.

Today, one of the largest urban Indigenous communities in the United States resides in Chicago. Members of this community continue to contribute to the form and life of the city through their inhabitation, participation, and creation of vibrant urban space.

## Introduction

### Citizenship and the Value of Urban Parks

Incorporated as a city in 1837, Chicago has lived under the motto “Urbs in horto,” or “City in a Garden” for nearly two centuries. From the founding of the city to present-day, Chicago’s green spaces have been central to the city’s urban planning strategy and global draw; they have also served as testing grounds for movements in landscape architecture and as organizing space for social movements. Initially intended to form a connected green ribbon around and through Chicago, the parks have always been a significant element of the city’s shape. Today, the Chicago Park District is the steward of over 8,000 acres consisting of more than 570 parks, 31 beaches, 50 natural areas, and two conservatories.<sup>1</sup> Over time, the parks have served and hosted countless Chicagoans and visitors and been governed and planned by a number of different organizations and actors. Using Chicago as a case study, I will trace the governance of parks and participation by urban dwellers in order to understand the changing values and uses placed on urban public space from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present. I will focus specifically on Jackson Park and Washington Park, two large, pastoral parks on the South Side of Chicago. In doing so, I will examine themes of citizenship, urbanism, and nature in urban public space.

#### Citizenship and the Right to the City

Citizenship is difficult to define. In the broadest sense, it is membership and participation in a political community. One most commonly understood form of citizenship is an individual's legal membership to a nation-state in which a citizen agrees to be governed in exchange for

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<sup>1</sup> Chicago Park District. “About Us: History of Chicago’s Park.” Accessed April 24, 2021. <https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/about-us/history-chicagos-park>.

privileges like voting rights; however, only or even primarily recognizing citizens' agency on the national level undermines the validity of crucial sub-national political communities.<sup>2</sup> The nation-centric construction of citizenship dilutes the power of the individual through a complicated, nested, national political structure and undermines the ability of citizens to be involved in decisions that affect the structure and context of their daily lives. These limitations to the everyday and agency of people can be addressed through alternative notions of citizenship which can subvert the dominance of national citizenship as the primary mode of political belonging and provide a radical challenge to restrictive power structures.

The right to the city is a useful alternative framework for defining urban citizenship and emphasizing the agency of urban inhabitants to shape the space of the city. Originally proposed by Henri Lefebvre, the right to the city concept has been examined thoroughly outside of his native France since the translation of his work to English (Harvey, 2008; Merrifield, 2011; Mitchell 2003; Purcell 2003). The concept characterizes the city as a heterogeneous place where encounters of difference are assured; the city is produced through social interaction with other people and the space, during everyday experiences. As Marxist geographer David Harvey outlines, Lefebvre developed the the right to the city in response to a pattern he observed in which planners and the state use urbanization as a fix to capital surplus and to calm the threat of social unrest; one clear example of this in the U.S. is Robert Moses' reconstruction of New York City through massive infrastructure projects that radically transformed the physical urban spaces of the city.<sup>3</sup> Top-down projects like Moses' exclude residents' spatial understandings and needs, despite the impact of such projects to drastically change and shape the experiences and

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<sup>2</sup>Purcell, Mark. "Citizenship and the Right to the Global City: Reimagining the Capitalist World Order." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27, no. 3 (September 2003): 564–90. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.00467>, 566, 571.

<sup>3</sup>Harvey, David. "The Right to the City." *New Left Review*, no. 53 (2008): 23–53, 26.

possibilities of those that reside there. Similar scenarios have played out through modern history from the paternalistic initial planning of cities like Chicago in the mid-1800s to the current neoliberal commodification of urban space.

To re-center agency of people that exist in urban spaces which are often created and changed without regard or input by residents, the right to the city calls to attention urban dwellers' role in the production of urban space. To Lefebvre, the city was an "oeuvre," or a work to which all people who exist, participate, and live everyday life within contribute. In addition to the ways urban dwellers contribute individually to the production of urban space, Lefebvre saw the way different uses and ideas about urban space from the diverse group of urban dwellers interacted in a sort of struggle which produces space as well.<sup>4</sup> At the same time that everyday participation in the city creates the oeuvre, urban residents also create the conditions that they will continue to live in, forming the structures for spatial possibilities and limitations. This process of creating and living means that physical urban space and the social life of the city are "inescapably blended together in everyday life," as Lefebvre noted.<sup>5</sup> All of these factors—the physical space, the social space, the everyday lives of urban residents and their social liberties—are intrinsically intertwined in the spatial organization of the city and the ability of urban inhabitants to participate in them.

Urban enfranchisement through the right to the city is realized when urban dwellers have the full right to inhabit the city. In order to inhabit the city fully, and have what Lefebvre highlighted as "full and complete usage" of urban space in the course of residents' everyday lives, geographer Mark Purcell presents two main rights: the right to *appropriate* urban space—to work, live, play, represent, occupy—and the right to *participate* centrally in the production of

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<sup>4</sup>Mitchell, Don. *The Right to the City*. New York: Guilford Press, 2003, 17–18.

<sup>5</sup> Purcell, "Citizenship and the Right to the Global City," 577.



space— to make the decisions that shape it. To qualify for the right to shape and be shaped by the city, all one must do is be an urban dweller, those who conduct their daily lives in and through the city.<sup>6</sup> Using the right to the city framework, I define urban citizenship as membership in the urban community through urban dwelling by individuals who have the right to full use of urban space. Full use entails unrestricted appropriation and participation in the production of urban space in return for one's contributions to the city through conducting everyday life in urban space. I will use this definition of citizenship to examine the production and use of urban public space.

I will also use the concept of urban citizenship to explore how public spaces can be used as tools for social control and limiting urban citizenship. A common misconception is that the existence of public space automatically promotes urban citizenship because of their objective to serve the whole public. However, top-down production and governance of public spaces can alienate and disenfranchise urban citizens. First, by planning public spaces without the input of the urban dwellers, planners and officials stand in the way of participation. In creating specific uses of public space through regulations and surveillance, they stand in the way of free appropriation. The design and governance of public space can reveal which people and groups are intended to use them, and for what types of behavior. Urban dwellers that are not part of those groups or engage in those uses are “continually made to feel out of place at the same time as they are told if they want to prosper they must assimilate.”<sup>7</sup>

When governed and transformed through top-down processes, public spaces can be homogenizing and obscure or marginalize the diversity from which they were produced by urban dwellers. Urban geographer Eugene McCann writes about how public spaces in the city are often

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<sup>6</sup> Purcell, 577–78.

<sup>7</sup> McCann, Eugene J. “Race, Protest, and Public Space: Contextualizing Lefebvre in the U.S. City.” *Antipode* 31, no. 2 (1999): 163–84. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8330.00098>, 171.

planned, built, and surveilled to make the city ordered, unified, and “safe.” However, officials and planners’ understanding of unity is often synonymous with homogenous and inhibits and marginalizes the spatial, practical, and social diversity that is essential to the vibrancy of the oeuvre.<sup>8</sup> The concept of safety as it is often applied to public spaces is problematic as well when it is weaponized “to keep the frequency of uncomfortable encounters to a minimum and to maintain a rigid power relation... while at the same time maintaining a veneer of unity and homogeneity.”<sup>9</sup> McCann focuses his analysis on racial exclusion, but the groups of people that planners see as threats because of their difference can be expanded to those that do not fit the white, wealthy, American-born norm many spaces are designed to keep comfortable.

Finally, the top-down production of public space can obscure the history of struggle from which spaces are produced through the abstraction of physical space from social process. Abstraction often comes from the tendency of officials to see the value of the space based on exchange-value, how they can be culturally and economically productive, rather than use-value. Defining the value of space based on use acknowledges the agency of urban dwellers to appropriate and participate in urban spatial processes. In the process of abstraction, spaces already shaped by use must be rendered “ahistorical, devoid of any indications of the social struggles around its production, or traces of the concrete space it replaces.”<sup>10</sup> When public spaces are rendered ahistorical, the everyday participation or struggles by urban residents that produced and maintained those spaces are erased. If spaces are governed as separate from social processes, they limit the potential of future social processes as well. As struggles over participation in space often come from those that are not prioritized or represented already, producing spaces as ahistorical erases the legacy of the struggle of the oppressed in particular.

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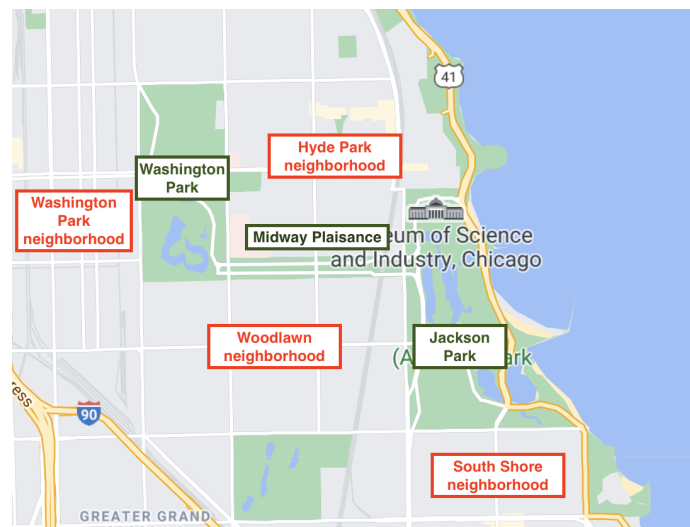
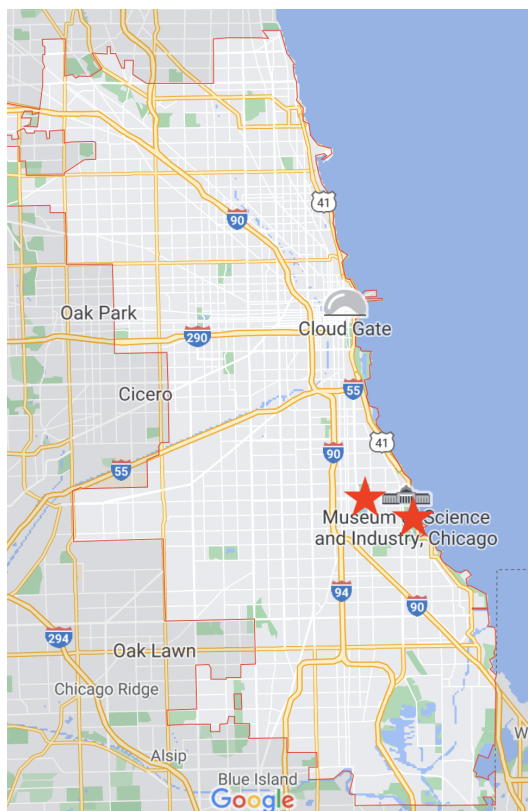
<sup>8</sup> McCann, 178.

<sup>9</sup> McCann, 179.

<sup>10</sup> McCann, 169.

## Chicago: a Case Study

With the city's dramatic rise, demographic changes, and global significance, Chicago provides a constructive case study for understanding examining urban citizenship and the right to the city in public space, particularly given how integral parks have been to the city's identity throughout its existence. Tracing how public space has functioned and who has been welcome in it through time can reveal a great deal about the value of public space and the ways urban citizenship has been seen by officials and fought for by urban dwellers. I will focus my study on the public spaces of the historic Jackson and Washington Parks.



To left: Figure 1. Map of City of Chicago boundaries marked in red with locations of Jackson and Washington Parks marked by red stars (Google Maps — park markers mine).

To right: Figure 2. Map of neighborhoods surrounding parks labeled in red and parks labeled in green (Google Maps — labels mine).

The parks are located on the South Side of Chicago surrounded by the Washington Park neighborhood, Hyde Park, Woodlawn, and South Shore neighborhoods (shown in Figures 1 &

2).<sup>11</sup> Jackson Park currently totals 551.52 acres approximately 1.5 miles long by one mile wide. Washington Park is 345.67 acres and is just over one mile long by half a mile wide.<sup>12</sup> Jackson and Washington Parks are connected by a one mile long green strip of park space called the Midway Plaisance, commonly referred to as “the Midway.” Though there have been many changes to Jackson and Washington Parks through history, their total areas have remained more or less the same since their creation in the 1870s. The demographics of the surrounding neighborhoods have shifted over time, however, Hyde Park to the north of Jackson Park and east of Washington Park has stayed predominantly white, while the Washington Park neighborhood, Woodlawn, and South Shore have experienced shifts in racial demographics to become predominantly inhabited by Black residents today. The main governing and decision-making bodies for the parks are the City of Chicago, the Chicago Park District (CPD; formerly the South Park Commission), and resident and neighborhood organizations. The University of Chicago has also been a notable actor in the area. Throughout this case study, I will expand upon the tensions, inclusions, and exclusions that the changes and formations of current demographics have meant for the people of the surrounding neighborhoods, as well as the urban citizenship that has been withheld, granted, and fought for in the park space.

Over time there have been changes in the ways planners, the city, and residents have defined Jackson and Washington Parks’ space. Olmsted and Vaux’s original plan for the parks conceived of them as a single entity called South Park. However, due to the uneven development of the parks and the World’s Columbian Exposition sited at Jackson Park and the Midway, the

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<sup>11</sup> Note: to avoid confusion, to refer to the neighborhood rather than the park I will use “Washington Park Neighborhood.”

<sup>12</sup>Chicago Park District. “Jackson (Andrew) Park.” Accessed April 24, 2021.

<https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/parks-facilities/jackson-park>.

Chicago Park District. “Washington (George) Park.” Accessed April 24, 2021.

<https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/parks-facilities/washington-george-park>.

parks became commonly understood as separate. Although Olmsted attempted to reunite them in his redesign following the 1893 World's Columbian Exhibition, growing racial boundaries between the Hyde Park and Washington Park neighborhoods solidified informal understanding of the parks as distinct from each other. In 1932 when the South Parks Commission was integrated into the Chicago Park District, the parks were formally referred to as part of the "South Parks" which included all of the parks on the South Side. Yet, in the mid-to-late 20th century, the parks were often referred to without regard to the other, especially as park policy focused on activities in the parks rather than the spaces themselves. Thus, the parks were rendered more of a setting than a continuous space. Finally, since 1999, the City of Chicago has referred to Jackson and Washington Parks as the "South Lakefront Parks" in their planning literature. For the purpose of this case study, I will refer to Jackson and Washington Parks as they were labeled during each chapter's focus era or by their individual names.

I have broken this case study into four primary, sometimes overlapping, eras of park governance and participation. This periodization is inspired by Galen Cranz's *The Politics of Park Design* in which Cranz breaks down the history of park design in the United States into four eras: the Pleasure Ground (1850-1900), the Reform Park (1900-1930), the Recreational Facility (1930-1965), and the Open-Space System (1965- the book's publishing in 1982).<sup>13</sup> Cranz' periodization is useful in tracing the style and purpose of the design of new parks. In tracing the changes in Jackson and Washington Parks, created in the 1870s, her first chapter is the most helpful; yet the attitudes of planners and officials in other eras have proved helpful in understanding the context for their governance of the existing parks. My periodization of the governance and participation of Jackson and Washington Parks will follow: creation

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<sup>13</sup>Cranz, Galen. *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982.

(1870s-1920s), racialization (1910s-1940s), disinvestment (1950s-1980s), and neoliberalization (1990s- current). The following chapters will expand on these eras, question the value top-down actors and urban dwellers have placed on the parks, and analyze how citizenship has been nurtured, suppressed, and fought for through history.

## Chapter One

### Creating South Park: a Landscape of Beauty and Control

In 1871, the landscape architecture firm Olmsted, Vaux, and Co. won a commission for their plan for “South Park” which would consist of Jackson Park, Washington Park, and the Midway Plaisance. The plan was accepted as the first project by the South Parks Commission, which had been established two years prior along with the Lincoln and West Parks Commissions which governed the parks systems on the North and West Sides of the city.<sup>14</sup> Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted, in particular, were already world-renowned landscape architects, most notably for designing Central Park in New York City. The firm brought their ideals of natural grandeur, unity, continuity, and passive leisure to Chicago and set the precedent for the city’s understanding of the role of nature and the function of parks for years to come.

The planning and implementation of South Park took over 30 years to complete. The initial plan was ambitious and included major alterations to the landscape, such as digging a channel from Lake Michigan to Jackson Park and constructing canals on the Midway to connect Jackson Park to Washington Park.<sup>15</sup> However, soon after the plan was delivered, Great Chicago Fire ravaged the city, plunging it and all urban projects into financial crisis. The crisis forced the Commission to abandon plans for the Midway canal and hire H.W.S. Cleveland to complete Washington Park, which he did following Olmsted’s plan closely.<sup>16</sup> Jackson Park remained unfinished until the park was selected as the site for the 1893 World’s Columbian Exhibition. Jackson Park was developed for the Fair under the guidance of Olmsted who installed lagoons

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<sup>14</sup> Chicago Park District, “About Us: History of Chicago’s Park.”

<sup>15</sup>Olmsted, Vaux, and Company. “Report Accompanying Plan for Laying Out the South Park.” Chicago, 1871. HathiTrust, 16.

<sup>16</sup>Fisher, Colin. *Urban Green: Nature, Recreation, and the Working Class in Industrial Chicago*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015, 14.

and redesigned the park for public usage in 1895 following the Fair’s closing.<sup>17</sup> After the post-Fair redesign, South Park remained largely the same until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century other than the addition of some active spaces during the Reform Era soon after the turn of the century.

South Park proved to be a wildly popular resource for Chicagoans and visitors to the city. Along with Lincoln Park on the North Side and Garfield Park on the West Side, South Park made up the major components of Chicago’s system of connected green spaces and boulevards that were so integral to the City Beautiful framework. Within the park, visitors were given a space to escape the city and engage in selectively passive leisure. In this chapter, I will argue that while the creation of South Park produced one of the first public spaces accessible by the poor in Chicago, it also solidified the strategy of using public space to enforce middle-class, white social norms through top-down planning and surveillance.

### The Urban Problem and (Dis)order

After Chicago was incorporated as a city in 1837, it grew rapidly and dramatically. People arrived in Chicago from elsewhere in the U.S. and abroad. They were drawn by industrial employment opportunities and the ability to travel by new railway connections, or forced out due to pressures where they originated. By 1870, there were 144,557 foreign-born residents of Chicago. Despite making up a significant portion of the city’s population, they were not included in the total population by the census. The

Year	Population of Chicago	% change in population
1840	4,470	
1850	29,963	570%
1860	112,172	274%
1870	298,977	167%
1880	503,185	68%
1890	1,099,850	118%
1900	1,698,575	54%

Figure 3. Chicago Population change 1870-1900 (data from U.S. Census, table mine).

<sup>17</sup>“Fair Site No Longer: Title to Jackson Park Passes Back to Commissioners.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*. December 30, 1893. Proquest; Schuyler and Kaliss, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: XI the Last Great Projects 1890-1895*, 9:19.



foreign-born population of Chicago in the early years was largely of European origin, consisting of many Irish, Germans, and Poles. The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the arrival of Italians, Czechs, Bosnians, and Swedes.<sup>18</sup> In 1860 Chicago ranked in the top ten most populous cities in the country for the first time (at 9<sup>th</sup>). By 1890, Chicago ranked second after New York City and held that place for a century.<sup>19</sup>

The physical and mental conditions of a city that had undergone such quick development were a source of concern for reformers as the urban condition became understood as unordered, overcrowded, and unhealthy for residents. Georg Simmel, German sociologist, conveyed some of these anxieties in his essay “The Metropolis and Mental Life.” He characterized the urban mental condition as overwhelmed to the point of emotional paralysis in order to cope with constantly changing, “violent stimuli” of sensory experience in the city.<sup>20</sup> As chaotic and unordered as Simmel saw the urban stimuli, he also found the city’s industrialism to force urban dwellers into a hyper-organized urban structure. This industrial rigidity de-individualized and disconnected residents from “irrational, instinctive, sovereign human traits and impulses which originally seek to determine the form of life from within.”<sup>21</sup> Urbanization through unordered but extremely structured industrialism led to the loss of human subjectivity and values. To address the urban problem, reformers proposed an un-urban solution that would order but de-structure the city.

The City Beautiful Movement provided a geographic solution to the urban mentality’s sociological problem by providing a framework that could infuse the city with un-urban space.

The movement, commonly dated from the 1860s to the 1910s, was led by upper-middle class

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<sup>18</sup>Drake, St. Clair, and Horace R. Clayton. *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945, 8.

<sup>19</sup> Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census. “Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910.” Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910.  
<https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1913/dec/vol-2-population.html>.

<sup>20</sup>Simmel, Georg. “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” 1903, 11–12.

<sup>21</sup> Simmel, 13.

reformers concerned with the conditions of social deprivation and potential unrest of the poor rooted in urban expansion. This fit well with the principles of the Parisian Beaux Arts movement of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century which argued that beauty through order, dignity, and harmony in architecture could “influence social behavior in the sense that a beautiful city would educate its inhabitants to civic virtue.”<sup>22</sup> The environmental determinism of the movement was guided by the logic that if the unordered and unattractive industrial environment was the source of urban problems, intensive planning and the introduction of beautiful landscapes could be the solution. To achieve this, City Beautiful proponents created comprehensive plans that included large classical civic centers; grand boulevards ordering the streets; and parks. Through nature, Olmsted believed, such planning could “make a provision through the use of which influences will be established counteractive to influences which, under ordinary conditions of life in a large town, act harmfully to the health and prosperity of its people.”<sup>23</sup>

The movement presented nature as a way to uplift urban residents and reveals the intrinsically classed dimensions to the city-nature binary that arose from the anti-urbanism during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The groups closest to the urban-industrial problem were the poor factory workers who also lived in the most dense neighborhoods. These most affected urban residents would have been most affected by the dehumanization and moral decay of the urban mentality. Thus, the immigrants of the city, already marginalized by their place as an other, were seen as a moral threat to American society.

The urban wealthy were seen as spared from the detriments of the city in part because they already had access to nature. The increased mobility enabled by the growing railroads

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<sup>22</sup>Silva, Carlos Nunes. “City Beautiful Movement.” In *Encyclopedia of the City*, 69–70. United Kingdom: Routledge, 2005, 69.

<sup>23</sup> Fredrick Law Olmsted to South Park Commission, April 18, 1894. Schuyler and Kaliss, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: XI the Last Great Projects 1890-1895*, 9:766.

allowed those that could afford a ticket and time to escape the city and access nature.<sup>24</sup> The connection of the wealthy to nature further cemented the idea that the poor were connected to urban disorder and nature was un-urban and good. To middle-class reformers, nature had the potential not only to counter the effects of the city, but as a high-class space, could help to imbue poor immigrant workers with American values and assimilate them into higher class society, at least socially.

The position of reformers as a powerful class, and the subjects of the reform as the un-ordered, urban poor, meant that reforms to enact the City Beautiful nature scheme would be imposed top-down. The space of the city, along with those most directly associated with it, needed to be ordered and controlled.

### Creating and Ordering the Pleasure Grounds

South Park as a physical space was meant to address the social disorder created by the city, so its natural landscapes were built in direct opposition to the urban landscape. Olmsted and Vaux's goals in their 1971 "Plan for Laying out the South Park" (pictured in Figure 4) were to inspire tranquility and unity in urban dwellers through the psychological experience of taking in the natural landscape. The parks were divided into two types of space: *plaisances*, or "pleasure grounds," which were populated by trees and shrubbery, and "open grounds" consisting of sprawling lawns. Tranquility was embedded in the design of the *plaisances* with features opposite of the streets of the city. Circular and winding paths contrasted with the angular grid of the city streets, rolling meadows, winding lagoons, and the continuity of the landscape made views look infinite in contrast to the chopped and finite view from city blocks. Buildings were few, spaced out, and designed to blend into the landscape in contrast to the city's dense clutter.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Fisher, *Urban Green*, 8.

<sup>25</sup> Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design*, 35–36; 46; 49.

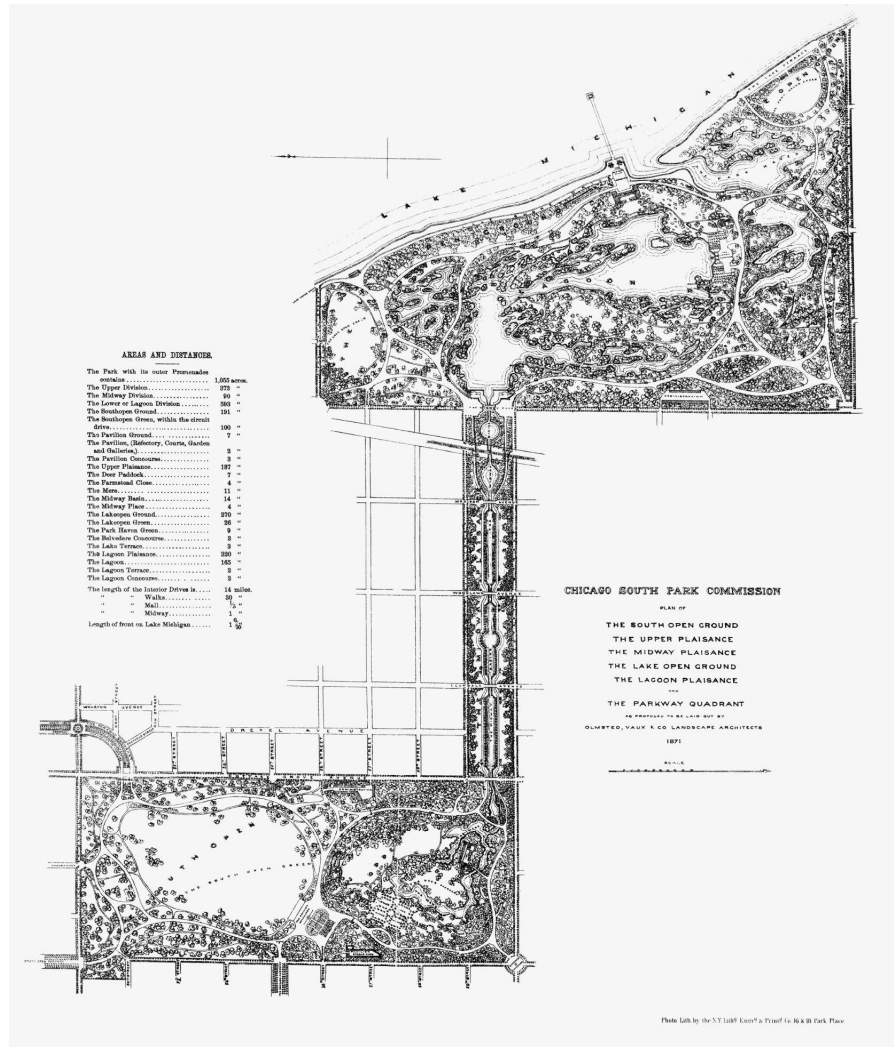


Figure 4. Plan for the South Park by Olmsted, 1871 (Chicago Park District).

To counter the hyper-activity and structure of the city, South Park as a social space was meant specifically for passive, unstructured activities that would inspire visitors to reflect. “With a view to more quiet and leisurely movement,” as Olmsted planned, the space was particularly conducive to family picnics and leisurely walking on paths passing somewhat indirectly through a grove with frequent interludes of shrubbery, fountains and arbors to invite rest and

contemplation.”<sup>26</sup> Comfort stations, including benches and drinking fountains, were placed around the park so that visitors could maximize the amount of time spent there.<sup>27</sup>

While South Park was meant to reduce structure in visitors' lives, Olmsted and the South Park Commission exercised a great deal of order over the landscape in crafting tranquility in space. Olmsted did not see the value in the natural, flat, prairie landscape on which the parks were built and found fault in the “bleak and humid situation in Chicago” which would limit him in the types of foreign foliage he could introduce.<sup>28</sup> To overcome these defects in the site, the planners created artificial depressions and lagoons that were closer in style to the English Victorian designs for pastoral parks than the Midwestern prairie.<sup>29</sup> Although the parks may have seemed more natural than the city, they were created by imposing order on the natural landscape.

Creating tranquil and unified parks also imposed social order onto the space. The South Park Commission regulated activity by excluding active recreation from the plaisance areas. To ensure that the plaisances remained undisturbed, Olmsted included open grounds that would confine active park uses. The open grounds provided “an arena for athletic sports, such as base ball, foot ball, cricket and running games.”<sup>30</sup> The open grounds also made spaces for spectacles, such as the one planned for Southopen Grounds in current day Washington Park that had galleries “overlooking the Concourse and the Green,” and was intended to serve the purpose of a grand stand on occasion of parades, match games and exhibitions,” and even to watch fireworks at night.<sup>31</sup> These uses are counter to the philosophy of the pleasure grounds and were seen as

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<sup>26</sup> Olmsted, Vaux, and Company., “Laying Out the South Park,” 21.

<sup>27</sup> Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design*, 8–10.

<sup>28</sup> Olmsted, Vaux, and Company., “Laying Out the South Park,” 30; 9.

<sup>29</sup> Fisher, *Urban Green*, 9; 14.

<sup>30</sup> Olmsted, Vaux, and Company., “Laying Out the South Park,” 16–17.

<sup>31</sup> Olmsted, Vaux, and Company., 22.

reproducing the unordered and turbulent structures of the city; in order to preserve the pleasures as tranquil, the open grounds were meant to keep these activities contained.

To preserve the pleasures while keeping the landscape unified and continuous, the planners designed the two types of spaces to be physically separate, but artistically united. The boundaries of the open grounds were covered with trees, shrubbery, and paths so that “the line between one class of ground and the other was sharply defined so that it cannot be passed unconsciously even under excitement” which allowed “much greater freedom from restraint practicable on greensward play grounds.”<sup>32</sup> The plan implies that the open grounds users lacked the ability to exercise self-control in their recreation, and therefore had to be regulated by ordered spatial boundaries. Olmsted emphasized spatially ordered social control, saying that the separation “reduces and strictly defines the area within which it is necessary to require visitors to conform themselves to regulations of a special character, and desirable that they should be under special police observation.”<sup>33</sup> The behaviors associated with the disorder of the city, thought to be practiced primarily by the poor and immigrants, were spatially marginalized and physically segregated to the active open grounds, away from the socially and mentally elevated pleasure space.

The open grounds were designed for maximal surveillance, allowing those users to be formally policed. While the pleasures had many concealed areas that the planners feared would be used for immoral activities, the entirety of the open grounds was visible from anywhere in the space. Olmsted warned that parks that failed to maintain the divide were unable to keep unruly users out of the pleasures and that “decent people have soon been driven from them, and they have become nurseries of crime and immorality.”<sup>34</sup> The night posed the biggest risk to promoting

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 17; 23.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>34</sup> Olmsted, Vaux, and Company., 17.

immorality in the concealed spaces, so after dark the pleasures were closed, however with artificial lighting and additional law enforcement, the open grounds were easily surveilled and kept open.<sup>35</sup> Presumably, night users were workers that were busy during the day, or else did not have the middle-class domestic home life to occupy them at night.

In addition to the police, middle-class residents of the surrounding neighborhoods surveilled the space socially to keep the poor and immigrant visitors in line, but also in hope that they might be positively influenced into more respectable practices. The placement of South Park six miles outside of the city center, where the poor, immigrants, and small Black populations resided, made the space more easily accessible to the residents of the wealthy residents of nearby neighborhoods and across the city that could afford to use the railroads.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, Olmsted chose the location strategically hoping both that the parks might “establish a special reputation for the [Hyde Park] neighborhood and give assurance of permanence to its character as a superior residence quarter,” and dialogically that the assured high-class of the neighborhood could keep the class standards of the park stable with wealthy users social influence over lower-class visitors.<sup>37</sup> As Kevin Loughran argues, such a relationship between the private neighborhood space and the public park space would allow American middle-class ideals of domesticity to reach the city’s poor, immigrant residents through the infusion of those ideals into the public park.<sup>38</sup>

A major component of a city-wide park system, South Park was meant to stabilize and elevate Chicago as a whole. Olmsted held the stakes high for South Park as “one member of a general system of provisions upon which as a whole the health of the city, its attractiveness as a

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>36</sup> Loughran, “Urban Parks and Urban Problems,” 2330.

<sup>37</sup> Olmsted, Vaux, and Company., “Laying Out the South Park,” 5.

<sup>38</sup> Loughran, “Urban Parks and Urban Problems,” 2333.

residence and its property will in all future time be largely dependent.”<sup>39</sup> By interweaving nature into the whole city, Olmsted and the various Park Commissions could elevate the city as a whole rather than just the park spaces themselves. Furthermore, the Commission hoped the park system would propel Chicago into distinction as a world-class city. As the city amassed huge wealth through the industrial center and became the capital of the “Great West,” the planners and commissioners strove for national cultural distinction as well, leading them to the production of parks as cultural institutions and attractions.<sup>40</sup> The potential that the planners saw for the city was clear in their 1871 plan

The undertaking involved in this series is, indeed, a bold one and can be justified only by the conviction that a city of great importance to the world at large—a city which should have a metropolitan character and influence, and to which great numbers of men should be drawn, not only on account of its commercial, but of its scientific, artistic, scholarly, domestic and social advantages—is here to be built upon ground plans now forming and foundations now laying. It is undeniable that it would be a most serious drawback to such a city not to be provided with parks . . . the sooner all that is done that is possible to be done for overcoming this disadvantage of the city is set about, the better.<sup>41</sup>

The goals of South Park were diverse: to alleviate urban dwellers’ social symptoms of the problems of industrial urbanization, to allow the city and middle-class to gain social control over the threat of the poor, immigrant other, and propel Chicago onto the national and world stage.

Although far less influential to South Park than the Pleasure Ground, the Reform Park Era from 1900 to 1930 did bring new active elements to the existing parks. Important to the philosophy of reform park advocates was the fear that changing labor laws would leave the working class with too much free time to spend in saloons and conducting other low-class activities. In order to meet this threat, smaller reform parks were designed with activities and

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<sup>39</sup> Olmsted, Vaux, and Company., “Laying Out the South Park,” 6.

<sup>40</sup> Loughran, “Urban Parks and Urban Problems,” 2327.

<sup>41</sup> Olmsted, Vaux, and Company., “Laying Out the South Park,” 8.



space conducive for orderly use.<sup>42</sup> Even City Beautiful advocates, like Olmsted's sons who designed 14 small neighborhood parks for the city, acknowledged that urban problems would require more than aesthetics to address; they accordingly pivoted their focus from beauty to function.<sup>43</sup> In South Park, sports fields, playgrounds, and fieldhouses were added along with a golf course in Jackson Park and a swimming pool in Washington Park.<sup>44</sup> However new elements were woven into the parks, pleasure ground ideals were still strong; playgrounds were separated from the rest of the peaceful parks through placement of trees and fences around the perimeter and the fieldhouses were designed for aesthetic unity with other park features.<sup>45</sup> In reality, the most dramatic effect of the reform parks on the existing pastoral parks was that they supplied working-class immigrants with small parks in their neighborhoods, removing the necessity to travel in order to access recreational space. At the same time as South Park became more accepting of diverse and active uses, the population that would have benefitted from those changes longer required them on the same level.

### Urban Citizenship in Early South Park

The Pleasure Ground era of the Midway, Jackson and Washington Parks was characterized by paternalistic top-down transformation of the city. In Chicago's earliest years, the urban population contained a huge diversity, yet much of the class and ethnic differences were viewed as a threat to the already delicate urban order. There was a high level of marginalization of difference through the ideals of unity, order, and safety. The imposition of middle-class values conveyed the negative attitude toward difference held by the governing class and planners. These

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<sup>42</sup> Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design*, 62.

<sup>43</sup> Silva, "City Beautiful Movement," 70; Bachrach, *City in a Garden*, 22.

<sup>44</sup> Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design*, 70; "Public Golf Course in Jackson Park"; McCammack, Brian. *Landscapes of Hope: Nature and the Great Migration in Chicago*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017, 114.

<sup>45</sup> Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design*, 86.

attitudes were counterproductive to the elevation of urban heterogeneity in the task of creating urban spaces to which all urban dwellers could belong.

The right to full use of urban space was severely restricted in the initial form of the Washington and Jackson Parks. No urban dwellers were part of the planning process of the park, and the primary actors in the planning were architects with little tie to the city beyond the project. Prevented from participation in the initial planning of the parks, urban dwellers were also limited in their participation in the continuing production of the space through the ordered, separated, and specifically prescribed uses of the pleasures and open grounds which inhibited users' ability to unconstrained use of the space. The surveillance and regulation of the pleasures and the open grounds in South Park imposed social strong controls over the parks and limited users to a narrow set of appropriations that fit into the prescribed images of tranquility and unity of the space.

The planning and governance practices that were used in the founding of South Park were highly influential in every successive era. Olmsted and Vaux set the standard upon which urban spaces would be valued for years to come. By emphasizing, not simply including, the parks in the formation of Chicago's identity, the planners established a powerful precedent for the importance of public spaces in the city. However, in ordering the spaces as they did, they also incorporated spatial social control as an inextricable element of planning public spaces.

## Chapter Two

### Racialization: Black Citizenship in Washington Park

The first half of the 20th century was a period of dramatic demographic change in Chicago. Just as World War I slowed the flow of European immigration, factories expanded to meet the higher needs of the war industries and the city faced a major labor shortage. Drawn by employment opportunities and the possibility of increased safety in the North, especially as advertised in the *Chicago Defender's* push for “the Great Northern Drive,” Black southerners migrated to Chicago in huge numbers during the Great Migration starting in the 1910s. Between 1916 and 1920, more than 50,000 Black southerners migrated to the city; the population more than doubled from 1910 to 1920 and then

again in 1930 (Figure 5). The Black migrants settled in an area already densely populated by previous waves of Black migrants in what would come to be known as the “Black Belt.” By 1944 and

Year	Total	Native-white	Foreign-born White and Other Races	Negro
1900	1,698,575	1,081,720	586,705	30,150
1910	2,185,283	1,357,840	783,340	44,103
1920	2,701,705	1,783,687	808,560	109,458
1930	3,376,438	2,275,674	866,861	233,903
1934	3,258,528	2,351,683	670,540	236,305
1940	3,396,808	2,441,859	677,218	277,731
1944	3,600,000	2,642,000	621,000	337,000

Figure 5. Population change in Chicago 1900-1944 (Drake and Clayton, 1945, p. 8).

the U.S. entrance into World War II, nearly 10% of Chicago’s population and 90% of Black Chicagoans resided in an area that was by then a strip of seven by one and a half square miles.<sup>46</sup>

The population growth caused not only the spatial expansion of the borders of the Black Belt, but the increased visibility of Black people in Chicago as a political and social community, and was seen as a threat and met with violence by white residents. Increases in tensions and outright violence often erupted where white and Black Chicagoans met in public spaces.

Although not on the contested border of the Black Belt until after 1920, Washington Park would become one of the spaces where Black people were both met with violence and asserted their

<sup>46</sup>Drake and Clayton, *Black Metropolis*, 8;12.

right to exist in the city through resistance, political organizing, and joyfully inhabiting it through recreation and community.

Various scholars have discussed the Black Belt spaces as unique. One work, *Black Metropolis* published first in 1945 by sociologists St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Clayton, traced how Chicago's Black Belt formed, persists, and the attitudes toward the space from residents inside and out. Drake and Clayton described the Black Metropolis as an area which may resemble the rest of Chicago, but "beneath the surface are patterns of life and thought, attitudes and customs, which make Black Metropolis a unique and distinctive city within a city."<sup>47</sup> More recently, sociologists Marcus Anthony Hunter and Zandria F. Robinson explored Black placemaking in *Chocolate Cities*. They define and explore the concept of chocolate cities as physical spaces where Black people are and that are socially produced through Black culture and agency; Hunter and Robinson highlight chocolate cities as spaces in which Black actors reject the passive or reactionary role in city-making that has often been assigned to them.

Through these sources, as well as newspaper accounts of events and attitudes from the era's leading influential national Black newspaper, *The Chicago Defender*, I will first examine the production and restriction of Black physical and social space in Chicago during the beginning of the Great Migration to WWII. Then, through an examination Washington Park, which transitioned from white space, to contested space, to part of the Black Metropolis during the period, I will assess the subversion of Black Chicagoans' rights to urban citizenship by the city and white residents, as well as the how Black urban dwellers resisted and asserted their right to inhabit and produce public space.

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<sup>47</sup>Drake and Clayton, 12.

## Racial Violence and Spatial Contestation

Drake and Clayton observed that space within the original boundaries of the Black Belt reached capacity around 1914, before the migration even began in earnest.<sup>48</sup> To meet the demands of the increasing migration, the boundaries of Black residential space began to expand south and east into historically white and affluent neighborhoods (see expansion by decade in Figure 6). As Black residents moved into new areas, white people often responded by moving further away, such as into Hyde Park.<sup>49</sup>

In other instances, racial tension at the borders between white neighborhoods and the expanding Black Belt erupted into violent attacks by white mobs and individuals. Many attacks were conducted by gangs of white youth organized officially as “athletic clubs” from the Irish neighborhoods to the west of the Black Belt which the *Defender* described as a “modern Ku-Klux-Klan.”<sup>50</sup> Before public spaces were the primary sites of racial violence, gangs mainly made their attacks on Black people and property on the borders of the transitioning neighborhoods including by bombing “Negro homes and those of real-estate men, white and colored, who sold or rented

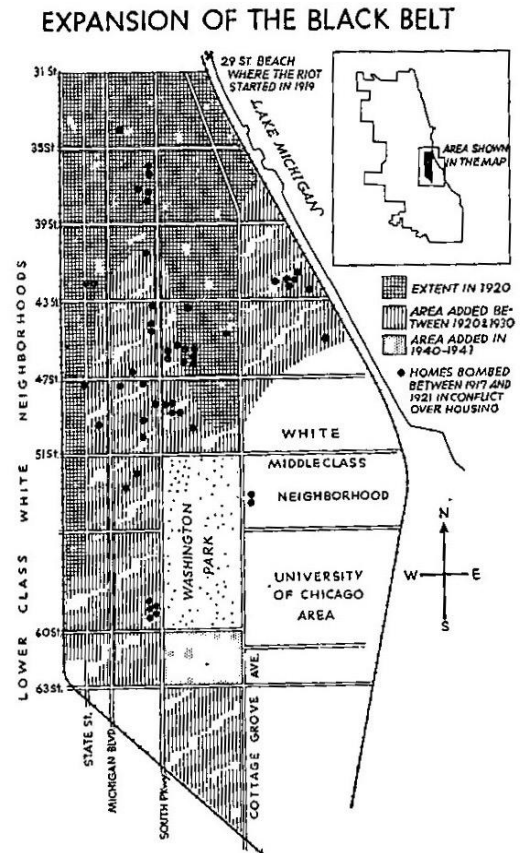


Figure 6. Map of the expansion of the Black Belt, bombings, and surrounding spaces 1920-1941 (Drake and Clayton, 1945, p. 63).

<sup>48</sup>Drake and Clayton, 61.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 63.

<sup>50</sup>“Ruffianism in the Parks.” *The Chicago Defender (Big Weekend Edition) (1905-1966)*. July 12, 1919, sec. Editorial Page.; “Race Girls Brutally Assaulted by Whites in Washington Park.” *The Chicago Defender*. June 8, 1918.

property to the newcomers.”<sup>51</sup> The home of Chicago’s first Black alderman and future congressman, Oscar De Priest, was bombed and prominent Black banker and real-estate manager, Jesse Binga, saw his home on the Southwest corner of Washington Park bombed seven times as of 1921.<sup>52</sup> Between July 1, 1918 and March 1, 1921, 58 bombs were thrown (Figure 6).<sup>53</sup>

As physical violence proved unsuccessful in slowing the expansion of Black residential space, the bombings subsided and white attacks came in the form of neighborhood improvement organizations that employed economic violence to regulate private space. Hyde Park’s Improvement Club emerged in 1909 with 350 members. The club bought Black-owned houses on majority white blocks and rejected the business of “real estate agents who sell or rent property in districts previously peopled exclusively by white people, to negroes.”<sup>54</sup> In one meeting, the club expressed alarm about the “deprivation of property that would follow the invasion of Hyde Park by negroes.”<sup>55</sup> Not only did white residents see Black Chicagoans as a threat to the economic value of their neighborhood, but framed them as invaders rather than urban residents.

As white physical and economic violence failed to limit the expansion of Black residential space, white residents expanded the site of spatial contestation to Chicago’s public spaces, of which, informally segregated public beaches were particularly charged. In an early incident at Jackson Park Beach in 1915, Macon Higgins, a Black boy, was attacked by a “life

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<sup>51</sup> Drake and Clayton, *Black Metropolis*, 64.

<sup>52</sup> McCammack, *Landscapes of Hope*, 35; “Bomb Rips Front Porch From Jesse Binga’s Dwelling: Dynamite Home of Jesse Binga Seventh Time Banker Says He Will Let House Stand as Monument to Law and Disorder.” *The Chicago Defender*. September 3, 1921.

<sup>53</sup> Drake and Clayton, *Black Metropolis*, 64.

<sup>54</sup> “Negroes Agitate Hyde Park: Club Will Blacklist Agents Who Rent Realty to Them. No Business for Them. Improvement Protection Organization Adopts Resolution.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*. August 21, 1909. ProQuest; Taylor, Dorceta. *Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, and Residential Mobility*. New York: New York University Press, 2014, 205.

<sup>55</sup> “Fight Home for Negroes: Hyde Park Association Adopts Resolution Against ‘Invasion.’” *Chicago Daily Tribune*. March 16, 1912.

saver” who along with “a number of others ducked [Higgins] until he was nearly drowned.” The assailants claimed that Higgins “would pollute the water.”<sup>56</sup> Three years later an investigation was conducted after “numerous complaints” had been made to the aldermen’s offices “regarding conditions on the Lake Michigan beach between 29th and 33rd streets with regard to the disposition on the part of a gang of white ruffians to prevent Race people from bathing in the lake.” The investigation revealed that lifeguards often prohibited people of color from entering the water in certain places and that they “encouraged lawlessness on the part of white ruffians.”<sup>57</sup> In Higgins' case and others, lifeguards, the assigned the protectors of public space, were actively involved in violence and hindering Black Chicagoans’ access to public spaces. But institutionally, this was not addressed.

One year after the investigation, a Black boy was killed at a public beach for floating into white territory and violence erupted in the Chicago Race Riot of 1919. On July 27th, 1919, hordes of working-class, white Chicagoans flocked to 29th Street Beach to escape the extreme summer heat that day. The beach had been claimed as a “white,” so when four Black boys on a raft drifted south from the neighboring Black beach and crossed an invisible color line, a white man threw rocks and bricks at them, hitting 14-year-old Eugene Williams on the head, causing him to sink below the surface of the water, and killing him. A police officer took the surviving boys to identify the rock thrower and “an altercation ensued,” triggering four days of white Chicagoans attacking Black Chicagoans at home, work, and on the street.<sup>58</sup> As Drake and Clayton described, “Pitched battles were fought in the Black Belt streets. Negroes were snatched from streetcars and beaten; gangs of hoodlums roamed the Negro neighborhood, shooting at

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<sup>56</sup>“Color Line Drawn at Bathing Beach: Trouble at Jackson Park.” *The Chicago Defender*. August 28, 1915.

<sup>57</sup>“Aldermen Have Protection Placed to Preserve Order at Beaches.” *The Chicago Defender*. August 3, 1918, sec. All Around the Town.

<sup>58</sup> Fisher, *Urban Green*, 98–99.

random. Instead of the occasional bombings of two years before, this was a pogrom. But the Negroes fought back.”<sup>59</sup> Only after the violence reached the economically valuable downtown were the state militia deployed, which, accompanied by a rainstorm, ended the riot. After five days of white violence and Black resistance, 38 people were dead, 537 injured, 1,000 homeless, and \$250,000 of property destroyed.<sup>60</sup> The 1919 riot was one of the largest demonstrations of white violence as a means of maintaining public space for the white public only. It showcased how underprepared and/or unwilling the city officials and citizens were to protect Black Chicagoans and their right to exist in the city.

After the riot, the city couldn’t ignore the danger white violence posed to Black existence in Chicago, yet they still upheld rhetoric of informal segregation, now to protect Black Chicagoans in public space. After a Girl Scout troop of twenty-three Black girls was stoned off Jackson Park Beach in 1929, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that although “there is no question to the legal right of colored citizens to bathe at any public beach in Chicago,” racial violence had been incited in part by the fact that “to a very large section of the white population the presence of the Negro, however well behaved, among white bathers is an irritation.” The paper then suggested that “the Negroes could make a definite contribution to good race relationships by remaining away from the beaches where their presence is resented,” and that if adequate facilities were made available on the predominantly Black beach farther north, “their voluntary waiver of the right to bathe at Jackson Park Beach would seem, then, to be a small price to pay for peace between the races.”<sup>61</sup> Whether for the shallow cover of Black safety from dangerous white violence, or for the more direct reason of white discomfort at seeing Black

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<sup>59</sup> Drake and Clayton, *Black Metropolis*, 66.

<sup>60</sup> Drake and Clayton, 65; Fisher, *Urban Green*, 98.

<sup>61</sup> “Racial Conflict at the Beaches.”



people in public, the right to public space was loosely guaranteed equally across race but unequally across racialized space.

Increasingly part of the Black Belt's Black Metropolis, Washington Park was another public space that became contested territory and a site of racial violence. The white youth responsible for attacks on Black homes also violently asserted exclusion in the park. In 1918, a group of Black girls witnessed 50 white boys attacking a couple, beating the man and throwing the woman into the lagoon. As the girls tried to escape, one was struck in the head by an object. The *Defender* reported that the young girls were "fearfully tormented and almost outraged right under the big shining arc lights of the boathouse, with a burly park policeman looking on with greedy eyes burning with the lust of passion."<sup>62</sup> Similar to the lifeguards, Washington Park's measures for protecting visitors were not only ineffectively applied to the protection of Black Chicagoans, but were actually part of the system that led to their harm in those spaces.

Different from usual gang activity, the attacks on Black Chicagoans in Washington Park included violence against families, children, and the elderly. As reports of "ruffianism in the park" escalated, the *Defender* noted that the white gangs "do not confine their insults to persons of their own age but attack old and young alike. No citizen of color, even when accompanied by women members of his family, is safe."<sup>63</sup> The *Defender* reminded readers that the "subjugation and brutal assaults" were happening against Black children who were simply "frequenters of the recreation spot on Sunday evenings" and that "at all hazards the parks should be made a safe retreat for all."<sup>64</sup> These comments recall the original purpose of Washington Park as a space for urban dwellers to escape the violent stimuli of the city and engage in tranquil, middle-class, domestic leisure, all of which the paper recorded Black visitors as attempting to do. The

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<sup>62</sup> "Race Girls Brutally Assaulted by Whites in Washington Park."

<sup>63</sup> "Ruffianism in the Parks."

<sup>64</sup> "Race Girls Brutally Assaulted by Whites in Washington Park"; "Ruffianism in the Parks."

prevention of Black visitors of the parks from engaging in those originally intended activities shows just how removed from the realm of urban citizenship Black Chicagoans were.

### Black Resistance, Celebration, and Claims to Urban Citizenship

In May of 1914, before the intense period of violence began, the *Chicago Defender* published a poetic article that framed urban parks as a space for Black residents to uplift their spirits and provide relief from the hostile city. The article is reminiscent of the attitudes that inspired the parks' founding and touches on the dehumanizing effect of urban commercial and industrial life while presenting nature as a solution. The article described the urban resident,

his whole heart and soul bids him to steal out to where the voices of nature can sing to him, where he can throw off the annoyances and trifling ills and rejoice in the glow and freedom of a new life. Where he can realize that after all he is an insignificant atom in this great universe. It is spring and to those who are not financially able to answer to the call of the wild, the parks afford at least a breathing place, a place to dream.<sup>65</sup>

The presence of renewing, almost spiritual, natural space situated within the dense, anonymous, city would have been an important draw to people coming from such dissimilar rural areas. Presenting the parks as accessible places to breathe and dream offered a respite for Black urban dwellers and new migrants from the limitations of the city on its residents, and even limitations of racist society, even just for a time.

Unfortunately, as we have seen, in the years following the article, the parks did not prove to be the refuge for Black Chicagoans that the *Defender* hoped. Despite this, in placing claims to Washington Park by continuing to use it in their daily lives and through political organizing,

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<sup>65</sup>“Spring.” *The Chicago Defender*. May 16, 1914, sec. Editorial Page.

Black Chicagoans produced a space that was solidly theirs and, in doing so, strengthened their own claims to urban citizenship as a whole in an unwelcoming and racist city.

Black Chicagoans' continued use of Washington Park as part of their everyday lives, despite the physical danger white violence posed to them, was an active act of resistance and a strong claim to urban citizenship. Throughout the years of racial violence in the park and in the city, Black residents stayed. Despite the multiple bombings on his house, Jesse Binga declared "I will keep my property as it now stands as a monument to Chicago law and order... I have just as much right... to enjoy my house at Washington Park as anyone else to go there and play tennis or baseball or enjoy other advantages of the district. It is a personal privilege."<sup>66</sup> Just before the Riot of 1919, white gangs posted signs throughout Washington Park that said "we will get you July 4," however it was reported that many people picnicked anyway, bringing weapons in their baskets alongside their lunch.<sup>67</sup> Drake and Clayton noted that during the Riot of 1919, that "the Negroes fought back."<sup>68</sup> In 1922, after a gang attacked Black resident Ira Hightower in Washington Park, the *Defender* warned that Black people "are not going to stay out. They are going in larger numbers and then there will be a sad story to tell."<sup>69</sup>

The refusal of Black urban dwellers to give up their claims to space demonstrates active participation in making the city. An integral part of the making of "chocolate cities," articulates Hunter and Robinson, is to counter the "pervasive and dangerous idea that Black citizens, especially in urban America, are only and always already reactive. Black residents were rarely ever leading actors in city making but instead its hapless, helpless victim." Acknowledging Black people as agents of placemaking re-centers them in chocolate cities, as well as in the

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<sup>66</sup> "Bomb Rips Front Porch From Jesse Binga's Dwelling."

<sup>67</sup> Fisher, *Urban Green*, 97; McCammack, *Landscapes of Hope*, 31.

<sup>68</sup> Drake and Clayton, *Black Metropolis*, 66.

<sup>69</sup> "Washington Park Gang Beats Another Victim."

production of urban space.<sup>70</sup> Black urban dwellers' resistance to violent attacks through continuing to conduct everyday life, using the park, and living in homes actively made claims to the space and undermined the mission of those who sought to isolate them from the city and citizenship as passive victims.

Black Chicagoans not only used Washington Park, but engaged in the social production of the space by melding southern culture with the northern landscape. Leisure activities like baseball and fishing were among the most popular in the South and were more accessible for Black migrants in northern parks. While most leisure areas were formally segregated and privatized in the South, Washington Park had two dozen free baseball diamonds and a lagoon where visitors could fish and rent boats by the hour.<sup>71</sup> By carrying southern culture with them “through cultural practices and products” to northern space, Black Chicagoans produced a chocolate city.<sup>72</sup> Practicing Black southern customs in the park space of Chicago produced new intersections of culture, and space to which the Black producers of it could more fully belong.

Celebrating the new, spatially-specific culture was another practice that asserted Black claim over Washington Park and the city as a whole. The Bud Billiken parade and picnic which took place in Washington Park, established in 1929, were spectacles that asserted the right of Black residents to inhabit the park space and, furthermore, create a joyful space in which to celebrate their presence in the hostile city. Bud Billiken was a character created by Robert Abbott, editor of the *Chicago Defender*, as part of the paper's childrens' section dedicated to instilling “racial pride in young readers.”<sup>73</sup> The parade and picnic named for the character put the celebration of children and race into physical space. The event in 1933 drew 50,000 people, for

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<sup>70</sup>Hunter, Marcus Anthony, and Zandria F. Robinson. *Chocolate Cities: The Black Map of American Life*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018, xi.

<sup>71</sup> Fisher, *Urban Green*, 28–29.

<sup>72</sup> Hunter and Robinson, *Chocolate Cities*, 46–47.

<sup>73</sup> Fisher, *Urban Green*, 110–11.

which the South Park Commissioners closed all the drives through the park “and bade them have the time of their lives.” Ice cream, candy, and lemonade were given free to children. Plentiful activities held in the park included exhibitions of “Indian Village” and “Africans from ‘Darkest Africa’ in the fair” as well as performances by Cab Calloway, Adelaide Hill, and Johnny Long his red-hot Troubadours.<sup>74</sup> The spectacle, celebration, and communal exploration of Black culture in the events and atmosphere of the day were a powerful and clear assertion of the Black right to space and culture.

The celebration was a tool for the development of the community itself by acknowledging the vastly different places and cultures from which Black Chicagoans had come, and bringing the diversity together in the space of Washington Park to celebrate it. Colin Fisher argues in his book *Urban Green* that through the parade and picnic, the heterogeneous group of African Americans were able to do the “cultural work of imagining themselves as a people with common roots.”<sup>75</sup> More than their assertion to white Chicago that Black residents had claim to the city and its public space, Bud Billiken offers a powerful example of resistance through building community and collective identity based in common space, grown in green space, and bonded in a new culture. On these multiple levels the *Defender’s* conclusion on the 1933 event resonates: “That was Bud’s record on his fourth and greatest annual picnic. No wonder an observer declared: ‘it saved the Race.’”<sup>76</sup>

The parks became explicitly political as a setting for organizing and protest. In 1931, two years into the Great Depression, over half of employable Black women and two-fifths of employable Black men were unemployed and, despite making up only 7% of the city’s

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<sup>74</sup>“50,000 Hail the Chicago Defender Billikens: Children Cheered by Mass 50,000 Line Streets to View Chicago Defender Bud Billiken Club World’s Fair Parade.” *The Chicago Defender*. August 26, 1933.

<sup>75</sup>Fisher, *Urban Green*, 111.

<sup>76</sup>“50,000 Hail the Chicago Defender Billikens.”

population, Black Chicagoans made up 25% of the city's relief cases and 40% of evictions.<sup>77</sup> Fed up with the conditions of the Depression and neglect from governmental institutions, thousands of Black residents joined together with Black and white communist organizers and Unemployed Councils in demonstrations over labor and housing rights.<sup>78</sup> As the largest public space on the South Side, Washington Park provided a venue for discussion and organizational efforts to confront the problems the working-class Black community faced.

The physical space and location of Washington Park were conducive to the exchange of ideas. In addition to the physical capacity to host large groups of people, the park bordered some of the Black neighborhoods that were hardest hit by the Depression as well as Hyde Park where communist organizers from the University of Chicago resided.<sup>79</sup> One mobilizing practice that took place in the park was soap-box orations: speakers gave speeches to people that came for the express purpose of listening, as well as those that simply happened to be in the park at the time. Of this practice, Drake and Clayton noted that “during the Depression, stormy crowds met to listen to leaders of the unemployed.”<sup>80</sup> The *Chicago Daily Tribune* observed that the “reds” held daily meetings “in Washington park, nearly always attended by 1,000 or more persons.”<sup>81</sup> The open space allowed for multiple speakers at a time and provided an informal environment in which audience members could ask questions of the speaker and have discussion amongst themselves<sup>82</sup> Because of its location and physical expanse, Washington Park provided an ideal space for the exchange of ideas and discussions of problems and served as a boundary upon

<sup>77</sup>McCammack, *Landscapes of Hope*, 109.

<sup>78</sup> Drake and Clayton, *Black Metropolis*, 85–87.

<sup>79</sup>“Calls Chicago Battlefront of Red Agitators: Foe of Radicals Attacks Lack of Prosecution.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*. August 8, 1931. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* noted that “Fourteen professors of the University of Chicago are members and do far more than their share of egging on this movement against peace and quiet of this country.”

<sup>80</sup>Drake and Clayton, *Black Metropolis*, 380.

<sup>81</sup>“Reds Riot; 3 Slain By Police.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*. August 4, 1931.

<sup>82</sup>McCammack, *Landscapes of Hope*, 123.

which an interracial movement, including white communists and Black-working class residents, could be formed.

Washington Park became a starting point from which political action would expand into the city, both ideologically and geographically. The first major protest of the Depression associated with the park was in 1930. Opposition emerged to a streetcar extension project under construction on the border of the park which refused to hire Black laborers, despite being situated in the middle of the Black Belt. A protest group formed in the park, marched to the construction site, and disrupted the construction. In order to restart, the project agreed to hire local workers and the protest, using the park as an organizing space and starting point, proved effective and gave radical organizing validity in the working-class community.<sup>83</sup> Soon, the Unemployment Council, and other communist organizing leaders, began eviction protests. When an eviction was being done, a group would convene, often in Washington Park, walk to the eviction site, and put all the furniture back into the home of the evictee. These protests gained popularity, averaging one protest per day in the city from 1930-1934, and radical organizing gained credibility in the Black working-class neighborhoods.<sup>84</sup>

One eviction protest in 1931 ended in the police killing three protesters and significant media attention. The *Daily Tribune* reported that as police were evicting 72-year old Diana Gross, “the marchers, who had set out from Washington park along 51st street... flowed in a close mass up to the Warrick home. They had been joined by crowds of the curious and the throng numbered perhaps 5,000 at this time,” and described the large crowd as “communists, mainly colored.” This description of the event outlines the process of an eviction protest and how successfully such a large group, likely from the neighborhood itself, was mobilized. It also

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<sup>83</sup>McCammack, 17.

<sup>84</sup>McCammack, 19.

highlights the role of the park in protest, as a starting point and a place where radical sentiments continued to be stoked. Following the riot, police kept “a close watch.. on the gathering place of the Reds in Washington park. The mayor’s secretary, State Representative Henry Sonnenschein, sent a stenographer to the park to take down all remarks made by orators there.”<sup>85</sup>

The most striking part of the eviction protest was how it influenced the whole city. Following the protest, Chicago immediately suspended all eviction proceedings indefinitely and the city and state began to make plans for relief; as Drake and Clayton observed, by “demonstrating its discontent, Black Metropolis had set in motion a chain of actions that was to benefit the city.”<sup>86</sup> Using Washington Park as a site for political action, Black residents were able to assert claims to space, political citizenship, and the city, which would expand beyond the park and the imaginary borders of the Black Belt.

#### Urban Citizenship in Black Washington Park

Space in Washington Park had many uses to the diverse communities within the Black Metropolis in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time it was a seemingly apolitical space for recreation and leisure, it provided the setting for cultural and racial celebration and radical organizing. In the context of racial violence and the attempted suppression of Black agency in Chicago, all of these uses were expressions of the power of Black urban residents to inhabit Washington Park, public space, and the city as a whole.

Through informal segregation and the violent policing of private and public spaces by white mobs and individuals, Black urban dwellers were restricted in their ability to participate and appropriate urban space. Contrasting with the social surveillance that pressured park visitors to use the space in specific, socially-acceptable ways in the pleasure grounds era, Black park

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<sup>85</sup>“Reds Riot.”

<sup>86</sup>Drake and Clayton, *Black Metropolis*, 84.



users in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century were harassed into not using the park at all. Rather than being considered urban citizens, Black Chicagoans were seen as invaders. Although not weaponized for assimilation, the strategies of spatial and social homogenization were expressed through this exclusion of the othered Black population. The events of this period demonstrate how urban citizenship and the right to space had become a right only for white inhabitants of Chicago.

However, Black Chicagoans did not accept the denial of their right to urban space and right to inhabit the city with passivity. By continuing to use Washington Park in their practices of everyday life, celebrating their new urban identities and culture, and politically organizing, they demonstrated active resistance and produced Black space within the hostile environment of the city. Continuing to engage in social struggle despite dominant forces that sought to exclude them, Black Chicagoans made Washington Park a space not only where they could conduct their lives, but also from where they could express and represent themselves in radical claims for urban citizenship, apart from the formal and informal racist urban structures that limited them.

Through these acts of resistance and spatial claims, Black urban dwellers exemplified Black power on multiple scales. Hunter and Robinson write that

Chocolate cities have served as the ‘weapons of the weak,’ sites on which strategies of resistance and Black power have taken shape and taken hold. Majority-Black projects, blocks, schools, encampments, plantation fields, farms, churches, neighborhoods, and homes have been key to forming and sharpening the small axe that is Black power. Many of these sites that serve as the built environment of chocolate cities have an important role in the Black Freedom struggle.

Actions on sites like Washington Park have served as the built environment, as action often begins from “everyday small acts, small axes, and small places.”<sup>87</sup> From the everyday small acts

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<sup>87</sup> Hunter and Robinson, *Chocolate Cities*, 124.

like picnicking and playing baseball in the park, to larger demonstrations like eviction protests, Black Chicagoans actively asserted power and their right to the full use of the city and participation in the shaping of urban space.

## Chapter Three

### Disinvestment: the Decline of the Urban Citizen

After World War II, the U.S. federal government created new programs for urban renewal and public housing which drastically changed the physical and social geography of cities across the country. One of the major ways that Chicago was affected was through slum clearance in Black neighborhoods and creation of massive public housing high-rises in their place. At the same time, federal mortgage policies from the Home Owners Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Authority encouraged the flight of white urban residents to the suburbs through programs of expanded loans outside of the city. In an attempt to retain these residents in the city, urban policy focused on building up the city center and neighborhoods that white, middle-class residents found most attractive by concentrating resources there.<sup>88</sup> Together, these forces cemented what Arnold R. Hirsch called “the Second Ghetto:” where Chicago’s Black population was isolated from the rest of the city with dismal housing prospects and meager public resources.

One of the ways cities sought to retain middle-class residents was to concentrate urban resources in specific public places and downtowns to make them appear more culturally and aesthetically vibrant. As people left the city, many parks in historically white, wealthy areas lost their bases of usership and funding. Cranz labeled the era of park design that came out of this effort to retain visitorship, the “Open-Space System.” Planners reimagined parks as places where visitors had the freedom to occupy and use the space as they desired. There was also a major push for programming to increase cultural value to the city, such as teaching high-class sports like tennis and putting on Shakespeare plays and classical music concerts.<sup>89</sup> However, as these strategies were meant to draw the population most likely to leave the city, the increase in

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<sup>88</sup>Hirsch, Arnold R. *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960*. University of Chicago Press, 1983, 10.

<sup>89</sup>Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design*, 137–40.

programming and upgrades were concentrated in areas that those people were more likely to use; areas less likely to be used by white, middle-class residents were not prioritized and deteriorated. Park and urban policy more generally during this era revealed who the city valued as urban citizens, and how the value derived from parks continued to shift away from use-value for urban dwellers to exchange-value for the city as a whole.

In this chapter, I will trace the patterns of neglect and disinvestment of urban space outside of the city center during the period from WWII to the 1980s. Though Jackson and Washington Parks were subject to different kinds of disinvestment— Washington Park through violent neglect and Jackson Park through decentering urban dwellers as primary park users—their treatment during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century shows the how the city engaged in a process of deprioritization of urban space for Black residents in particular, but also a broader deprioritization of urban citizenship in general.

### Disinvestment, Policing, and Deterioration in Washington Park

The Chicago Park District responded to suburbanization by trying to create attractive spaces for upper and middle-class white residents through concentrating public resources in parks and neighborhoods largely used by white residents and neglecting those in poor, non-white spaces. In 1946, CPD pledged to build dozens of small parks over the course of ten years. The new construction would provide recreation space and deliver social services to nearby residents. However, few parks were placed in Black neighborhoods, and zero were implemented in the expanding Puerto Rican and Mexican communities. In addition to the lack of new recreation space, the park district also demonstrated unequal commitment to the communities with existing park space such as the unequal allocation of plant matter, indicating which areas the city found worthy of beautification; between 1945 to 1951, CPD spent \$26 per acre on plant material in

Washington Park in comparison to \$137 in Grant Park downtown and \$443 in Lincoln Park on the white North Side of the city.<sup>90</sup>

The city did not simply ignore non-white spaces; their understanding of the value and, more significantly, dangers of those spaces diverged from how white spaces were viewed. In the 1940s, a new wave of Black migrants arrived in the Black Belt, causing the space to expand at the boundaries as it had earlier in the century and reminding city leaders of how violence and riots had unfolded on public beaches and in parks during the Great Migration. The already existing association of public space and racial violence in areas where Black and white people met was strengthened in 1943 following a four-day, racially motivated riot in Detroit's Belle Isle Park.<sup>91</sup> In response to fear of rioting, the City of Chicago formed the Mayor's Committee on Race Relations, later called the Commission on Human Relations, "to forestall outbreaks of the dimension of the Detroit riots" by identifying "trouble spots in advance" of when they gained momentum. The Committee consisted of a network of government agencies of which Chicago Park District was one of the most essential.<sup>92</sup> The prominence of the Park District in the Committee's project to prevent racial violence, along with the absence of attention to the recreational potential of the South Side parks, indicates that parks in which visitors were not primarily white were seen as spaces of potential violence rather than of everyday use.

Framing Black-frequented parks as spaces of violence led the City to approach investment in them through increased policing and surveillance rather than maintaining or increasing the usability of the space by urban dwellers. In addition to the Park District the other major agency involved in the Commission was the Chicago Police Department.<sup>93</sup> In specific

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<sup>90</sup> Loughran, "Race and the Construction of City and Nature," 1955–57.

<sup>91</sup> Loughran, 1957.

<sup>92</sup> Chicago Commission on Human Relations. "Annual Report/1962." Chicago, IL, April 30, 1963, 3.

<sup>93</sup> Chicago Commission on Human Relations, 3–5.

moments of racial tension, police mobilized through South Side parks. In the wake of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., two battalions of federal troops made camp in Jackson Park to put down uprisings on the South Side.<sup>94</sup> In the everyday, too, police not only surveilled Black parks, but even diverted Black visitors away from parks in predominantly white areas. On one occasion in a predominantly white-used park, an officer told a Black visitor to “go back to Washington Park,” which also indicates how completely Washington Park was viewed as a Black space.<sup>95</sup> The simultaneous investment in policing parks prominently visited by Black Chicagoans and in beautification and enhancement of the physical space in parks used by mostly white, middle-class visitors reveals the period’s conception of white public parks as spaces of leisure and assets to the city, but Black parks as spaces of liability.

As Washington Park was increasingly neglected by the city, the physical space deteriorated and became perceived not only as a potential site of violence, but also as a site of social disorder. Dr. Smith, a frequent jogger in the park, observed that in addition to the danger presented by debris and mud holes in the footpaths, there was excessive weed growth and brush “where muggers might lurk waiting on an unaware prey.” He also described the washrooms as dirty and smelly and the *Defender* added that there were numerous muggings, accidents and a gang-style murder” as well as “bands of roving dogs” in the park.<sup>96</sup>

The conditions of Washington Park in the 1970s and 80s, as described by visitors, resemble the problems of the city South Park was created to avoid. Dr. Smith expressed the decline as he criticized the Park District for the “deplorable condition of the once elegantly kept Washington Park, citing its unkempt physical appearance as unfit and dangerous to both health

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<sup>94</sup>“Troops Find New Homes in Jackson Park: Swap Texas Grounds for Chicago Grass.” *Chicago Tribune*. April 8, 1968, sec. 1.

<sup>95</sup> Loughran, “Race and the Construction of City and Nature,” 1957.

<sup>96</sup>Watson, Ted. “Rip Shoddy Conditions in Washington Park.” *Chicago Defender*. July 17, 1975.

and life.”<sup>97</sup> In a space that was designed to preserve the health and lives of urban residents against which the conditions of the city posed a threat, those very conditions became the defining characteristics of the park. Whereas in previous eras the parks had been seen as a haven of nature within the city, during the period of decline, they were “fully incorporated into an imaginary of the urban, particularly as such ideas extended to racialized tropes of crime and disorder.”<sup>98</sup>

Washington Park was no longer a space of attractive nature, and in fact, had become a disordered space that was no more valuable than the rest of the disinvested city.

City officials rejected responsibility for Washington Park and caused the decline of the space to accelerate. In a photo-essay, Amelie Landry, a local college student and photographer, revealed deteriorating park conditions and attempted to locate officials under whose responsibility Washington Park fell. She found that local aldermen either claimed that the park was “not covered in my ward,” or deflected responsibility “for police and maintenance operations of the park” to the Park District. Yet, they also all refused to confront the Park District. Although Washington Park was an important resource and space for many of their constituents, park users’ government representatives were unwilling to advocate for it. When Landry spoke to a Park District representative, he said “I don’t know anything about the debris in Washington Park... This is the first complaint we have ever had on Washington Park.”<sup>99</sup> The aldermen’s refusal to become involved and the Park District’s claims of ignorance reflect the city’s understanding of Washington Park as not even valuable enough as a public space for them to address.

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<sup>97</sup> Watson.

<sup>98</sup>Loughran, “Race and the Construction of City and Nature,” 1958.

<sup>99</sup>Landry, Amelie. “Washington Park Wear Stuns Sensitive Student.” *Chicago Defender*. June 22, 1974.

The neglect of Washington Park was not only a threat to residents' ability to use the space, but to the legacy of cultural and resistance that went into creating the spaces and the ongoing fight by Black dwellers for urban citizenship. The text that accompanied Landry's photo-essay recalled the heritage that was built into the physical park space and the development of Black Chicago through cultural events like Bud Billikens, political demonstrations, and the everyday lived experience of the community in Washington Park from prominent Black writers running there to neighborhood kids swimming in the pool. The article names these as "part of the park's heritage, easily undone in carelessness and irresponsibility" in the structural neglect that the park faced. Quite powerfully, the article reflected that Washington Park "represents both tradition and contradiction; it bears witness to family holiday bar-b-ques and senseless brutality."<sup>100</sup> For the park to be neglected and forgotten by the city, after all the community endured to stake their claim to it, was cruel and continued violence.

In spite and because of the lack of institutional support, residents took an active role in attempting to recover Washington Park, through continued use of the park and their strategies to expose the inequitable conditions and distribution of resources in the park system. These exposés including Landry's photo-essay and other articles published in the *Chicago Defender* made it clear who was at fault. As Landry wrote along with her photos, "If the park dies it will never be from lack of use, more for want of care."<sup>101</sup> The *Defender*, too, located the fault in the system rather than the users: "The fault does not lie with the people who use Washington Park. The problem is neglect— neglect by the Park District, which has responsibility for keeping the park in good order, and neglect by elected city officials, who have the responsibility of seeing to it

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<sup>100</sup>Whitfield, Joyce, and Amelie Landry. "Washington Park-- a Battered, Broken Beauty." *Chicago Defender*. June 19, 1974.

<sup>101</sup>Whitfield and Landry.



that the Park District does its job.”<sup>102</sup> Landry also made the connection between the neglect of physical space and the devaluation of the people themselves, saying Washington Park’s “constant human flood demands care in equal measure; a conception lost somewhere in bureaucracy, prejudice, or habit.”<sup>103</sup> Calling out the parts of the system that failed to care for Washington Park and the people who inhabited it was an assertion that the space still had value, actively resisting the disregard of the space itself and urban dwellers by those in power.

### Jackson Park and Urban Projects

While Washington Park is an example of the city’s racial discrimination through neglect and unequal allocation of resources, Jackson Park is an example of the city’s prioritizing parks for other uses than as a resource for the urban dwellers. Jackson Park benefited greatly from the white privilege of its proximity and partnership with the Hyde Park neighborhood which shielded it from the devastation Washington Park faced. However, Jackson Park’s presence outside of the central business district meant that its value as a resource to local users was not the priority for the city when determining the most value-maximizing use for the space. Two examples of how this process was expressed in the landscape of Jackson Park include the installation of a missile site and the proposals for a highway through the park.

In 1954, the Park District and the U.S. Army signed a lease that gave the army use of 10 acres of Jackson Park land for a guided missile installation. The installation was meant to guard “Chicago’s ‘critical’ eastern approach for [Soviet] enemy aircraft” during the national panic of the Cold War. In exchange for the property, the army agreed to pay the Park District \$100,000 to

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<sup>102</sup>Landry, “Washington Park Wear Stuns Sensitive Student.”

<sup>103</sup>Whitfield and Landry, “Washington Park-- a Battered, Broken Beauty.”

fill in 25 acres of the Jackson Park lagoon, offsetting the land the army would occupy.<sup>104</sup> At the end of the lease, the army would remove the missiles and fund the removal of facilities.<sup>105</sup>

Accepting missiles into the park was a dramatic change in how the city maintained park space especially from Olmsted's original vision. The missiles were modern representations of the high industry, conflict, and hyper-activity that was supposed to be countered by the park's nature, tranquility, and passivity in the original plan. The missile site in Jackson Park was accompanied by sites in Burnham Park, on the Lakefront near the Loop, and Belmont Harbor on the North Side. The placement of missiles in parks that had previously enjoyed more protection like those downtown and on the North Side demonstrates how pronounced the was. The placement of missile sites in parks across the city expressed the emerging conception of parks as sites for urban projects unrelated to the use, leisure, and recreation of urban dwellers. It shows a departure from the understanding of parks and nature as sanctuaries from the city. Instead, parks were reconceptualized as additional urban space to be taken advantage of by the city.

The same era of federal policies that pushed for white home-ownership in the suburbs saw an increased federal allocation of funds toward infrastructure such as roads and highways.<sup>106</sup> Often built through poor neighborhoods and communities of color, these projects destroyed urban space to allow for predominantly white suburban residents to bypass the city while still accessing its resources downtown.<sup>107</sup> Jackson Park was plagued by proposals and projects for extensions of roads throughout the period. Although Jackson Park was not predominantly used

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<sup>104</sup>“Guided Missile Site in Jackson Park Is Leased to Army.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*. May 26, 1954.; Wiedrich, Robert. “Park Lake Front Property Chosen for Missile Sites.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*. March 11, 1954.

<sup>105</sup>“Group Demands Date for Removal of Missile Site.” *Chicago Tribune*. March 28, 1971. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/169048982/abstract/FDE181F4F2144370PQ/1>.

<sup>106</sup>Loughran, “Race and the Construction of City and Nature,” 1955.

<sup>107</sup>Pulido, Laura. “Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90, no. 1 (2000): 12–40, 9.

by the poor or people of color, the projects demonstrate the overarching devaluation of usable urban space in the eyes of the city in favor of the mobility of non-urban dwellers as the more important use of urban space.

In 1954, the Chicago Commissioner of Public Works reported on a plan that would connect the Calumet Skyway, a continuation of the major Indiana Turnpike, to Lake Shore Drive by creating a throughway through Jackson Park. The extension would break the traffic bottleneck that the park created and allow the city streets to “accommodate the traffic that will be brought to the Chicago city limits by the Indiana Turnpike” to “go in the direction of the central business district.”<sup>108</sup> The use of park space for wide, fast, efficient roads was essential to the urban planners and displayed the attitude that accommodating people traveling into the city was the priority.

Where the governmental agencies in charge of the Turnpike project saw the value in the increased auto-mobility, they did not see value in the space from the park itself. An article reported that “Jackson Park, with its meandering carriage trails, lacks an expressway for a rapid and safe thru traffic connection with Lake Shore dr.”<sup>109</sup> They framed the lack of large, efficient roadways through the park as a deficiency of the space and by contrasting the rapid auto-transit with carriages, as they claimed the paths were more suited for, implied that the state of the park was deficient in its lack of modernity. For four governmental agencies involved in the project—the city, Park District, state, and county— Jackson Park was not a resource in itself, but an outdated obstacle for extra-urban mobility.

In 1965, the city again proposed a highway through Jackson Park, this time accompanied by park improvements. The new plan was released by the Park District and sought to realign,

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<sup>108</sup>Foust, Hal. “Hope to Break Bottleneck on Turnpike Link: Engineers Eye Jackson Park Problem.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*. October 4, 1954, sec. Part 2.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

repave, and widen South Shore Drive (the equivalent of Lake Shore Drive south of the park).<sup>110</sup> In addition to the highway, the Park District was forming a long-term plan for the park that included improvements to the golf course, new paths, and new recreational and cultural facilities. Most important was the proposed lakefill of a new peninsula to replace land lost from the highway project.<sup>111</sup> Community groups opposed the plan claiming that the project was “irresponsible planning and destruction of desperately needed recreation space” and that the city was “already described as deficient in open space by federal government standards.”<sup>112</sup> Although the plan included investments in the space to be used by visitors, they did not represent a true commitment to the park as a resource for urban dwellers but instead were a way to appease residents in order to push the highway through. The continued protest by community members despite the landfill addition reveals the way the city continued disregarding urban dwellers when planning spaces that would shape their landscapes.

### Devaluing Urban Citizenship in the Parks

The period of park governance from WWII into the 1980s demonstrated high levels of top-down planning and top-down neglect. The element of neglect and the ways in which governance took shape made the period unique; rather than the suppression, manipulation, or exclusion of groups from urban citizenship of previous eras, the disinvestment period of park governance involved the disregard for urban dwellers as a whole. In Washington Park,

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<sup>110</sup>“Hyde Park Conference: Jackson Park Plan Opposed City Highway Proposal Fought.” *Chicago Tribune*. August 15, 1965.

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/180019318/abstract/95C83D3ED7E24DFBPO/1>.

<sup>111</sup>“Plan to Spend 156 Million on Jackson Park: New Peninsula Among Early Projects Proposed Expansion of Jackson Park.” *Chicago Tribune*. August 4, 1965, sec. 1C.

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/180026679/abstract/5A15094DAA484F25PQ/15>.

<sup>112</sup>“Committee Opposes Park Highway Plan.” *Chicago Tribune (1963-1996)*. August 29, 1965, sec. SOUTH CENTRAL.

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/180025150/abstract/29AE491F5AF54B8DPQ/4>.

devaluation of Black urban citizenship was conveyed through the refusal of the city and aldermen to invest in the park beyond increased policing. Later, this was demonstrated through the refusal of any government representative to take responsibility for the maintenance and declining conditions of the park. In Jackson Park, disregard was shown through top-down projects imposed on park land that did not benefit nor involve park users.

While the two parks faced different challenges during the period, both confronted the devaluation of the space that had previously been valued based on their status as escapes from urban space. As the parks were devalued and neglected, they became understood as urban land that was more unordered, in the case of Washington Park, or valueless, in the case of Jackson Park. The devaluation allowed the city to neglect Washington Park and utilize Jackson Park for urban projects unrelated to urban dwellers. As the spaces were neglected and disregarded, so too was the urban citizenship of the urban residents.

In 1983, the Chicago Park District (CPD) and the U.S. Department of Justice entered into a Consent Decree after a civil rights suit and a three-year Federal investigation of the Park District for racial discrimination. Through their investigation, the DOJ found that Black and Brown neighborhoods had fewer facilities and programming and were allocated less money for personnel and maintenance.<sup>113</sup> In this landmark case, CPD agreed to upgrade facilities, services, and maintenance and increase employee hours 32% in parks serving Chicago's Black and Brown populations. Additionally, to "counteract previous spending practices in white areas over the next six years," the Park District agreed to redistribute funds to spend a minimum of \$10 million on capital improvements, 65% of which would be dedicated to minority neighborhood facilities.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>"U.S. Sues Chicago Park District, Charging Racial Bias in Programs." *New York Times*. December 1, 1982, sec. A.

<sup>114</sup>Malcolm, Andrew H. "Accord Is Reached on Chicago Parks." *The New York Times*, May 11, 1983, sec. U.S.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1983/05/11/us/accord-is-reached-on-chicago-parks.html>.

Missing from this agreement was acceptance of responsibility by the Park District for harm and discrimination; Consent Decrees are agreements to change without admissions of guilt. After the suit was filed, the Park District attorney claimed that “demographics, population shifts and transitions in city neighborhoods may have created a situation” denied having committed “willful discrimination.”<sup>115</sup> The chairman of the non-profit organization, Friends of the Parks, agreed that “it was never outright discrimination... it was more benign neglect” and the Park District superintendent stated “the record clearly shows ... that the Chicago Park District has never been found guilty of discrimination.”<sup>116</sup> The improvements that the Park District agreed to make were significant in returning some of the spaces and resources to communities that needed them. However, the neglect was not benign, and significant damage had already been done to important community and recreational spaces across the West and South Sides. Without accepting responsibility, the Park District and the city also failed to acknowledge the struggle, pain, and suppression of citizenship rights that urban dwellers had endured over decades of disinvestment.

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<sup>115</sup> “U.S. Sues Chicago Park District.”

<sup>116</sup> Malcolm, “Accord Is Reached on Chicago Parks.”

## Chapter Four

### **Neoliberalization: the South Lakefront Parks and the Value of Public Space**

In the early 1990s, people that had fled the city in the previous era of suburbanization began to return and for the first time since the population began to decline in the 1950s, Chicago gained residents.<sup>117</sup> In formulating a strategy to return the economic and cultural value that had been lost, Chicago looked back to the first time the city rose to national and global prominence: the era of Olmsted, Vaux, and the City Beautiful Movement. The urban public spaces that had been neglected and devalued were reimagined as potential resources that could fuel the cultural and economic reinvention of the city, especially when catalyzed through modern partnerships of government and private investment.

Powerful new planning frameworks for Jackson and Washington Parks and the Midway Plaisance emerged from the new urban attitude that valued urban space as a tool for growth. The parks, excluding the Midway, were united for planning for the first time since Olmsted's involvement. Under the label South Lakefront Parks, they were joined as an ode to the original South Park plan and as part of the city's larger strategy to create a more marketable and unified cultural landscape across the city. The 1999 South Lakefront Framework Plan and the concurrent Midway Plaisance Master Plan guided the city's planning and governing bodies away from the disregard for park space that had characterized the disinvestment era to frame them as commodities to be leveraged for the benefit of the city's value and image. This conception of the parks was expanded upon in the 2018 Framework Plan and the planning process for the Obama Presidential Center in Jackson Park to include the participation of private enterprise in the planning and function of the public spaces. In this chapter, I will examine the attitudes toward

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<sup>117</sup>“U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Illinois.” Accessed April 26, 2021.  
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/chicagocityillinois,IL/PST045219>.

and value placed on the South Lakefront Parks and the Midway by the government, and private institutions, and the de-centering of urban dwellers during the most recent period of park governance and usage.

### Redeveloping the South Lakefront Parks

In 1999, and again in 2018, the Chicago Park District released ten-year framework plans for the redevelopment of Jackson and Washington Parks in the most comprehensive interventions for the parks since the World's Fair redesign. The 1999 plan was created by a team of consultants led by JJR, an international architecture and planning firm. The firm worked with residents, community supporters, and the Chicago Park District in ten public meetings, thirteen focus groups, steering committee meetings, and presentations to give the plan a participatory element. The purpose was to “define the changing needs of these parks, to provide a plan to enhance each of the parks’ commitments to serving the neighboring communities and to preserve the intended historic character” and to “preserve, enhance and manage our historic lakefront park resources as an integral part of our neighborhoods, our City and our region’s recreational, cultural, environmental and educational experience.”<sup>118</sup> Using historical, cultural, and environmental attractions to draw visitors to the city aligns with the larger patterns of spatial commodification taking place in Chicago and across the United States.

The Framework Plans situated redevelopment as a continuation of Olmsted’s vision by employing his aesthetic ideals, both to highlight the historic nature of the parks as attractions and to suggest that in redeveloping the parks in the original image, the city and planners could propel Chicago (back) into national and global prominence, just as Olmsted had in the late 1800s. One of the Park District’s explicit guiding principles dictates that planners “consider the park’s

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<sup>118</sup>Chicago Park District. “Jackson Park South Shore Center: South Lakefront Framework Plan, Phase 2.” Chicago, IL: Chicago Park District, 1999, 1.



historic significance as a key factor when evaluating changes to the park.”<sup>119</sup> The ways the planners looked to root the landscape in Olmsted’s vision included renewing the tree-lined edges of the open spaces, creating long vistas and attractive views, crafting a cohesive naturalistic planting design, and making spaces for leisure activities like family picnics; the planners also aimed to conceal the urban landscape through design that would “minimize the noise and visual impacts of roadways and parking lots and that will screen and soften architectural elements.”<sup>120</sup> The planners set out to make the South Lakefront Parks great parks by following Olmsted’s blueprint for aesthetic principles and positioning the space as a natural escape from the city.

To return to Olmsted’s aesthetics, the Park District quietly undid some of the previous eras’ spatial manifestations of disinvestment. The park roads that had been widened beyond Olmsted’s design to benefit non-urban residents’ mobility were recommended to be narrowed and reverted to park space.<sup>121</sup> In another case, a neglected adventure playground in Washington Park was deemed underutilized and recommended to be redeveloped with natural landscaping and a ropes course.<sup>122</sup> In both of these cases, the Framework Plans took issue with the spaces’ aesthetic incompatibility with the vision: the roads impaired “access and continuity of the landscape” and the playground was “inconsistent with the island’s natural character.”<sup>123</sup> Though these examples do not demonstrate the Park District explicitly recognizing the harm that had been done to the park spaces, they clearly demonstrate the reassessment of the value of urban land that took place since the previous parks era.

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<sup>119</sup> Chicago Park District, 3.

<sup>120</sup> Chicago Park District, 2; 3; 6; Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners. “South Lakefront Framework Plan.” Chicago, IL, 2018, 13.

<sup>121</sup> Chicago Park District, “Jackson Park Framework,” 9; Chicago Park District. “Washington Park: South Lakefront Framework Plan.” Chicago, 1999, 13.

<sup>122</sup> Chicago Park District, “Washington Park Framework,” 13–16.

<sup>123</sup> Chicago Park District, “Jackson Park Framework,” 3; Chicago Park District, “Washington Park Framework,” 13.

By depicting the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as Chicago Park's golden era, the planners are able to accept, without acknowledging, the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century's decline. This strategy also allows for reinvestment through modern techniques, including the injection of private involvement, framed as a way to carry out Olmsted's vision and return the parks and the city to distinction. In fact, the 2018 Framework Plan makes this explicit, "Integrate innovative strategies in landscape design, recreation, and cultural destinations to embrace the spirit of greatness established by the Columbian Exposition and continue the legacy of the parks."<sup>124</sup> The strategic employment of legacy does not limit the potential for economically-motivated development so long as the parks maintain the perceived essential elements of Olmsted's plan: nature and beauty in the landscape.

The Framework Plans' focus on mobility and connectivity draws from the City Beautiful Movement's interconnected green spaces, but, in the current era, is an attempt to incorporate the South Lakefront Parks into a city-wide network of culture. The plans recommend an integrated transportation system, including bike, pedestrian, public transit, and street networks to increase the circulation "to other regional parks and tourism destinations" and create a regional cultural network.<sup>125</sup> A major element of the new networks are private companies that partner with the city to operate transportation systems. The plan includes these as part of its drive to "continue to incorporate innovations that can deliver connectivity," which includes establishing app-based rideshare pickup and drop-off locations near attractions and bikeshare docks.<sup>126</sup>

As a node in the connected city-wide transportation network, the South Lakefront Parks are part of the city-scale push for tourism and the increase of cultural and economic value from

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<sup>124</sup> Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners, "South Lakefront Framework Plan (2018)," 43.

<sup>125</sup> Chicago Park District, "Jackson Park Framework," 2; Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners, "South Lakefront Framework Plan (2018)," 36.

<sup>126</sup> Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners, "South Lakefront Framework Plan (2018)," 36.

urban space. The 2018 Framework Plan recommended that in addition to the increasingly interconnected circulation networks, the parks be incorporated into tourism links to attractions downtown like Navy Pier and the Museum Campus, the North Side, and attractions in the area like the Museum of Science and Industry and DuSable Museum.<sup>127</sup> While Olmsted intended for the parks to be cultural institutions themselves, today's planning aims to generate cultural value through association with the cultural network, not as much through the park spaces themselves.

### Midway Plaisance: a public, private space

In 2000, the Park District and University of Chicago released an additional plan for redeveloping the Midway Plaisance in an early example of public-private partnership in governing public space. The commission that authored the Midway Plaisance Master Plan consisted of community leaders, the Chicago Park District, which owns and maintains the land, and the University of Chicago, which surrounds it. The plan highlighted similar potential for cultural and recreational value of the space as the South Lakefront Framework Plans. However, the dominant voice of the University of Chicago came through in strategies to revitalize the Hyde Park neighborhood to be more attractive for future and current University affiliates. When the Midway Plaisance Master Plan was written, its Commission described the Midway as an “underutilized” space, and the University, which at the time was formulating its University Master Plan, found it “clear that the Midway Plaisance, which bisects the campus, was a challenge that needed to be addressed.”<sup>128</sup>

Although the Midway is not part of the University's property, its presence disrupted the institution's image. To address it, the University joined the Midway Planning Commission and

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<sup>127</sup> Chicago Park District, “Jackson Park Framework,” 9.

<sup>128</sup> Chicago Park District and The University of Chicago. “The Midway Plaisance Master Plan.” Chicago, IL, Summer 2000, 2.

created jurisdiction in the space for themselves. Their presence is evident in the attitudes and priorities of the Midway Master Plan, which gives them heavy influence in creating the shape of the public park space without being accountable to the public.

Like the South Lakefront Parks Plan, the Midway Master Plan aimed to uplift the space culturally to attract visitors. The Plan emphasized the location of the Midway between cultural institutions such as the Museum of Science and Industry and the DuSable Museum of African American History; the existing cultural capital surrounding the space made it “ideally situated to become one of the area’s premiere attractions.” To realize the space’s cultural potential, the Plan highlighted proposed features such as new facilities, gardens, sports areas, and festivals “that will draw people from all over the city.”<sup>129</sup> These features promote active use and work with the University’s aim to transform the space to become vibrant, matching the level of activity happening within its private space.

Similar to how the South Lakefront Framework Plan and Olmsted and Vaux’s original plan sought to use the parks to increase the cultural and economic capital of the whole city, the commission for the Midway sought to uplift the whole Hyde Park neighborhood. They made this expansive mission clear from the start claiming “the redevelopment of the Midway Plaisance is a keystone in the revitalization of the mid-South Side of Chicago” and “will be an anchor for the redevelopment of the surrounding communities and a gateway to the many outstanding cultural opportunities nearby.”<sup>130</sup> The plan did not specify what revitalization would mean for the neighborhood and the “mid-South Side” aside from attracting people from elsewhere to the area, but did imply that the surrounding neighborhoods do not meet the standards of the University.

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<sup>129</sup> Chicago Park District and The University of Chicago, 3; 1.

<sup>130</sup> Chicago Park District and The University of Chicago, 2.

However broad the Master Plan’s stated aim for user inclusion, it excluded the bordering Woodlawn neighborhood. The plan listed the nearby populations that would utilize the Midway as “thousands of University of Chicago students and staff, the strong Hyde Park neighborhood, and the *residential development* of Woodlawn.”<sup>131</sup> The University affiliates and the “strong” Hyde Park residents contrast with the Plan’s characterization of Woodlawn. As of 2018, the population of Hyde Park was 46.7% white and 26.8% Black; the population of Woodlawn was 8.1% white and 82.9% Black. Despite having demographics that differ from the University of Chicago, Woodlawn is a *neighborhood*, not simply a residential development.<sup>132</sup> Although, the University has increased its development in the neighborhood in recent years, expanding past the Midway and threatening to displace the residents of Woodlawn, 77.5% of whom are renters.<sup>133</sup>



To left: Figure 7. University of Chicago Markers with Crest overlooking the Midway (photo by Angela Luning).  
To right: Figure 8. University of Chicago emergency blue light call boxes (photo mine).

The University has marked its dominant claim on the Midway visually and physically in

<sup>131</sup>Chicago Park District and The University of Chicago, 3. Emphasis mine.

<sup>132</sup>Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. “Hyde Park, Chicago Community Area.” Community Data Snapshot. Chicago: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2020, 3; Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. “Woodlawn, Chicago Community Area.” Community Data Snapshot. Chicago: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2020, 3.

<sup>133</sup>Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, “Woodlawn, Chicago Community Area,” 5.

the landscape. The most overt markers of the University's spatial claims are the small monuments at both ends of the Midway, facing the length of the Midway (Figure 7). If one is oriented to look at them straight on, they would see the whole Midway sprawling behind the signs, as if marking the park space rather than the University property on either side.

The other major physical marker of the University on the Midway are the University emergency blue-light phone boxes on nearly every block (Figure 8). The emergency phones, connected to the University of Chicago Police Department (UCPD), as well as the UCPD cars constantly patrolling and UCPD officers in front of University buildings facing the Midway, show the thorough surveillance of the Midway park space by the University. It also shows the extension of the campus and University power beyond the private boundaries of the campus.

The people surveilled by UCPD, and thus marked as unwelcome in the public park of the Midway are disproportionately Black. A *Chicago Reporter* article published in 2016 analyzed data from UCPD interactions and found that in the ten months since UCPD had started publishing data, all but 11 of the 166 people that had been stopped on foot in their area had been Black. One Black resident interviewed in the article remembered being stopped on the Midway at age 14 and being told by the UCPD officer "Y'all don't belong over here." The patrol area of the UCPD, in partnership with the City of Chicago, is 3.5 square miles. It includes the Midway, as well as north and south of University boundaries, partially into Jackson Park and not into Washington Park. Approximately 65,000 people not affiliated with the University, 59% who are Black, reside and are policed in the area. At the time of the article, 93 percent of those stopped on foot were Black.<sup>134</sup> As the University stakes their claim to space beyond their buildings and

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<sup>134</sup>Newman, Jonah. "New Data Supports Old Accusations of Racial Profiling by University of Chicago Police Department." *Chicago Reporter*, April 5, 2016, sec. Criminal Justice. <https://www.chicagoreporter.com/new-data-supports-old-accusations-of-racial-profiling-by-university-of-chicago-police-department/>.

into the surrounding neighborhoods, and over the Midway through policing, Black and non-university residents are deterred from using the park space.

Although the 2000 Master Plan for the Midway Plaisance claimed that development of the park would “build a bridge between the Hyde Park and Woodlawn Communities,” the marking of public space for the University and the policing of that space makes the Midway seem more of a border between the University/Hyde Park to the north and Woodlawn to the South.<sup>135</sup> Worse, the University’s use of the Midway as a tool for spreading the University’s social and economic control through development endangers residential security of inhabitants in neighborhoods south and west of the park.

#### The Obama Presidential Center: private project in the park

The Obama Presidential Center (OPC), announced in 2016, is set to break ground in August 2021. The project has been delayed for years because of its contentious location on the western side of Jackson Park which is currently open field space (Figure 9). Instead of the traditional Presidential Library, the OPC will have four buildings surrounded by park space; these will include the Presidential Museum, the Forum for use as a community space, a new branch of the Chicago Public Library, and the

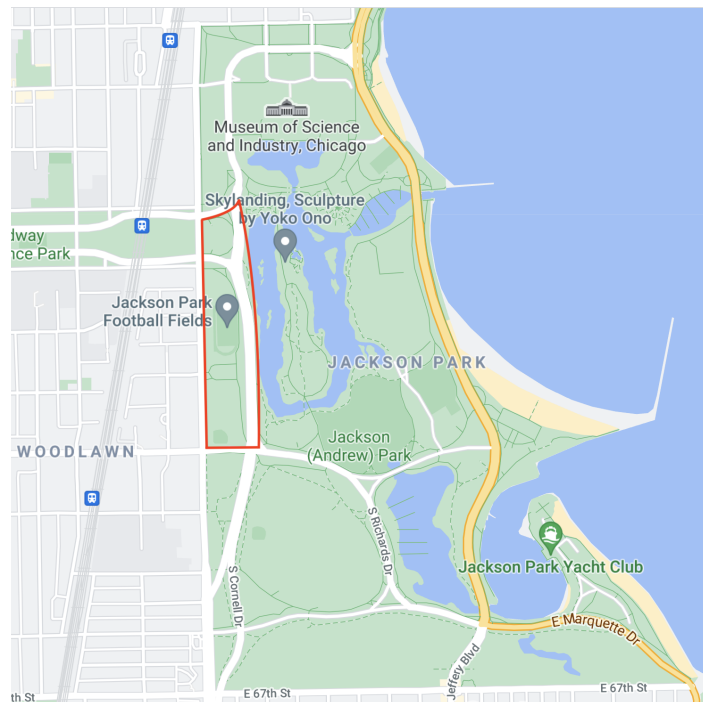


Figure 9. Obama Presidential Center site in Jackson Park outlined in red, including Cornell Drive (Google Maps — outline mine).

<sup>135</sup> Chicago Park District and The University of Chicago, “The Midway Plaisance Master Plan,” 2.

Program, Athletic, and Activity Center. The buildings will surround a public plaza for gatherings, public art, and host performances and fairs.<sup>136</sup> The spaces will be free to the public with the exception of the museum and parts of the Forum.

OPC planners argue that the Center will enhance the larger park space. The Center will sit on 19.3 acres of the park and its buildings will take up 2.2 acres. The proposal included the closure and absorption of Cornell Drive which currently separates the plot from the larger park. This addition and the replacement of parkland to be lost on Midway Plaisance is set to increase total parkland by 2.5 acres.<sup>137</sup> The center also claims that the public spaces and parkland to be constructed as part of the Center's landscape will enhance the park as a whole giving "South Side residents a world-class park" with beautiful greenery, walking paths, play areas, a great lawn and even a participatory garden on the roof of the library.<sup>138</sup> The buildings are to be integrated into the landscape physically; the buildings will be low to the ground and set into hills with the exception of the library which is designed to rise tall above the park.

However, these additions are not satisfactory to some community groups. In 2018, Protect Our Parks, a Chicago nonprofit organization, filed a lawsuit against the City of Chicago, accusing the Obama Foundation of pulling an "institutional bait and switch." After the Park District sold the parkland to the City of Chicago, the Foundation acquired usage after making a deal with the city for a symbolic \$10.<sup>139</sup> The suit claimed that because the Foundation is a

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<sup>136</sup>The Obama Foundation. "The Obama Presidential Center." Obama Foundation. Accessed March 29, 2021. <https://www.obama.org/the-center/>.

<sup>137</sup> Evans, Maxwell. "Obama Presidential Center To Break Ground This Summer In Jackson Park." *Block Club Chicago*. February 3, 2021. <https://blockclubchicago.org/2021/02/03/obama-presidential-center-will-break-ground-this-summer-in-jackson-park/>; The Obama Foundation. "Our Community Commitments." Obama Foundation. Accessed March 29, 2021. <https://www.obama.org/commitments/>.

<sup>138</sup> The Obama Foundation, "Our Community Commitments"; The Obama Foundation, "The Obama Presidential Center."

<sup>139</sup>Evans, Maxwell. "Park Activists, City Officials Return To Court In Ongoing Battle Over Obama Center Construction." *Block Club Chicago*. May 22, 2020.



non-governmental entity and the project an attraction rather than a presidential library, the city lacked the authority to transfer it public land.<sup>140</sup> One of the plaintiffs said the “lawsuit is about fighting to preserve valuable park space in a city that is becoming home to more and more skyscrapers and buildings.”<sup>141</sup> They add that although the project claims to only use 3% of parkland, the number does not take into account how much of the park is already publicly inaccessible in large areas, like the golf course; really, they argue, the project consumes a much higher percentage of accessible parkland.<sup>142</sup> While the Court dismissed the case in 2019, saying the OPC would provide “multiple benefits to the public” which justified the use of public land, Protect our Parks plans to continue fighting. The contentious battle over the public and private uses of parkland today are distinctly present in the OPC process.

The concern over the project goes beyond the scope of protecting green space and outside the boundaries of Jackson Park as well. Community activists worry about the project’s potential to displace residents in nearby neighborhoods. Residents from Woodlawn, South Shore, and Washington Park neighborhood in coalition with organizations including University of Chicago students asked the Foundation and City to agree to a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA). The CBA would “require that jobs be set aside for people in communities around the Obama presidential center, protect housing for working families, low incomes, and home owners, [and]

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<sup>140</sup>Briscoe, Tony. “Federal Lawsuit Accuses Obama Center Organizers of Pulling an ‘Institutional Bait and Switch.’” *Chicago Tribune*. May 15, 2015, sec. , News, Obama Presidential Center. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/obama-center/ct-met-obama-center-lawsuit-20180514-story.html>.

<sup>141</sup>Bowean, Lolly. “A Small Band of Environmentalists Takes Fight against Obama Presidential Center to Court.” *Chicago Tribune*. August 3, 2018, sec. News. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/obama-center/ct-met-obama-presidential-center-environmentalists-lawsuit-20180724-story.html>.

<sup>142</sup> Evans, “Park Activists, City Officials Return To Court In Ongoing Battle Over Obama Center Construction.”

strengthen neighborhood schools,” and bind the Obama Foundation, City of Chicago, and the University of Chicago to investments in the community and protections against displacement.<sup>143</sup>

Although the Obama Foundation claimed to agree with proposed actions, hiring locally and creating housing security, they rejected the CBA saying that the project would bring prosperity, not displacement, to the area. In 2017, former President Obama himself made it clear that the OPC was not the enemy to the community

The community benefit agreement concept is actually one that can be a really useful tool...if you have a bunch of developers coming in that want to build a high-rise or for-profit enterprise in your neighborhood... But here's the thing: we are a nonprofit and aren't making money. We are just bringing money to the community.<sup>144</sup>

Later in 2018, Obama claimed that gentrification was not a problem for the area: “it is not my experience ... that the big problem on the South Side has been too much development, too much economic activity, too many people being displaced because all these folks from Lincoln Park are filling in to the South Side. That's not what's happening.”<sup>145</sup> Although North Side gentrifiers may not be invading, the project has the potential to raise property values beyond what community renters and homeowners can afford, especially when the broader renewal of the South Side the Foundation and city argue will come with the project is realized. Without affordable housing guarantees, there is no way to hold the project and the city accountable to the residents of the neighborhoods surrounding the project.

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<sup>143</sup> Obama Community Benefits Agreement Coalition, “Community Benefits Agreement.”

<sup>144</sup>Bowean, Lolly. “Obama Personally Answers Questions at Chicago Presidential Library Forum.” *Chicago Tribune*. September 15, 2017, sec. , News, Obama Presidential Center. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/obama-center/ct-obama-public-forum-library-20170915-story.html>.

<sup>145</sup>Kamin, Lolly, and Blair Bowean. “Obama Makes Pitch for His Center in Jackson Park: ‘Too Much Development’ Has Not Been the Problem for South Side.” *Chicago Tribune*. February 28, 2018, sec. , News, Obama Presidential Center. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/obama-center/ct-met-obama-presidential-center-20180227-story.html>.

Throughout the planning process for the OPC, the Obama Foundation and the city have touted the improvements the project will bring to the surrounding neighborhoods, the South Side, and the city as a whole. Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot declared: “The Obama Presidential Center and nearby capital improvement projects will undoubtedly distinguish our city’s historic South Side as a world-class economic and cultural hub.”<sup>146</sup> Clear from her statement, the Mayor hopes that this project will bring renewal to the surrounding neighborhoods and, in the tradition of Olmsted, distinguish the city on the world-stage. However, the idea that the project could lift the area out of decay, without community protections and against community wishes, is exactly the de-racialization of history that fueled the initial disinvestment in the space.

Although it is not as expansive as the proposed CBA, the protections and investments of the Woodlawn Affordable Housing Ordinance passed in 2020 were a notable triumph for activists and community members. In 2019, Aldermen Leslie Haiston and Jeanette Taylor introduced an expansive ordinance that included housing protections that stalled the OPC project for a year. The ordinance that passed was stronger than the city's meager previous proposal, but weaker than the activist’s CBA. It guaranteed the city reserve “at least 30 percent of new apartments developed on 52 vacant, city-owned lots in the neighborhood for ‘very low-income households’” and allocated \$4.5 million to promote homeownership in the neighborhood.<sup>147</sup> These protections are crucial for Woodlawn, and the CBA coalition claims it as a success; however, they are still pushing for more such as a “right to return” ordinance which would give preference to displaced residents for newly built affordable housing and passing CBAs that cover the South Shore and Washington Park neighborhoods that will also likely face property value changes due to the Center.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Evans, “Obama Presidential Center To Break Ground This Summer In Jackson Park.”

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Evans; Obama Community Benefits Agreement Coalition, “Community Benefits Agreement.”

### Citizenship in the South Lakefront Parks

Today, the South Lakefront Parks provide visitors plenty of space for recreation and leisure and welcome a diverse set of uses. The parks are more accessible than ever through the city's expansive transportation network. Compared to the Chicago average of 2.4 accessible park acres per 1,000 residents, South Shore, Woodlawn, and Hyde Park residents have access to 4, 7.8, and 15.6 acres respectively.<sup>149</sup> The planning of the parks includes more participation from community members and park advisory councils than there have been in the previous eras due to participatory planning meetings in the creation of each framework plan. In terms of access to, choice within, and even in some planning urban dwellers have a significant ability to use the space as urban citizens.

However, in order to conduct such large scale projects with cohesion across the expansive parkland through Olmsted's aesthetic ideals, the redevelopment projects were still very top-down and selectively excluded histories of struggle from the landscape. Redeveloping the parks to the aesthetic conditions of Olmsted's South Park allows the planners to celebrate the acclaimed history of the parks from that time and model it for the future while correcting the problematic elements that became part of the parks in the eras of disinvestment and segregation without having to acknowledge the decline or its causes. However, in the periods of struggle are when urban citizenship in the parks was fought for the hardest and most painfully, so erasing the spaces produced during those times without acknowledgement obscures those struggles and marginalizes those that engaged in them.

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<sup>149</sup>Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. "South Shore, Chicago Community Area." Community Data Snapshot. Chicago: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2020, 9; Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, "Woodlawn, Chicago Community Area," 9; Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, "Hyde Park, Chicago Community Area," 9.

The major involvement of private actors in the current era of park planning and governance is the most major way that urban dwellers are de-centered and even marginalized from their urban citizenship in park space. When private actors produce and change public land, they are able to do so without accountability to the public. When their objectives for the space do not align with the preservation of urban citizenship and ability of urban dwellers to fully inhabit urban space, private actors remain more in control of the shape of the space. This has been expressed through the private surveillance of urban dwellers in public spaces, as has been seen in the case of the UCPD, the Midway, and the exclusion of Black urban dwellers.

The South Lakefront Parks and Midway redevelopments have framed the benefits of the projects for urban dwellers as coming from the accessibility of better planned, culturally infused spatial resources. A major theme of the park projects in the current era is the promise of planners that the project will help to uplift not only the park space but the surrounding areas and the city. Planners see their ability to drastically transform the landscape as a gift to urban dwellers, however true urban citizenship comes from the production of space by the urban dwellers themselves.

## Conclusion

By examining 150 years of Chicago park planning and governance history, it is clear that parks are both spaces on which power is exercised, and from which power can be produced. Chicago has proven to be a rich case study for understanding the ways parks are used to assert, expand, and suppress urban citizenship. Through the eras of park creation, racialization, disinvestment, and neoliberalization, I have explored the ways these themes, and the themes of nature, control, and urbanism, have shaped urban dwellers' experiences and ability to exist in and through the city.

Citizenship continues to be complex and difficult to define. Through this case study, it is clear that actors who plan and govern parks from above can, and do, use them in ways that inhibit the full appropriation and participation in the production of urban space by urban dwellers. They have done this through ordering the space to suppress lower-class uses of the park (creation); condoning, and even promoting, violence against Black Chicagoans and marginalizing them from the city as a whole (racialization); de-centering the urban dwellers as primary users of the parks and failing to maintain the spaces themselves (disinvestment); and giving private interests the power to shape public space without responsibility to value urban dwellers over projects of commodification (neoliberalization).

These top-down planning processes tended to position parks as a fix to urban problems. They rely on the assumption that parks are intrinsically good, but in doing so, the social processes ingrained in the production of space and the agency of individuals are obscured. The case study in Chicago is particularly useful in assessing this because urban dwellers have had access to green space, at least physically, for nearly the entire existence of the city. Yet, as we have seen, physical access to parks does not mean that urban dwellers are welcome in them, that

they are able to use them freely, or even that they offer any value to those that would like to use them. The problems of inequality have not been corrected through the parks, more often, they are simply reproduced within park space. Viewing parks as automatically beneficial allows planners to be uncritical and avoid addressing the deeper social, economic, and racial inequalities that are so intertwined with urbanization. This view absolves planners of the responsibility of taking into account the actual needs of those who inhabit the city.

Despite top-down suppression of urban citizenship, it would also be a mistake to view citizenship as rights granted or suppressed from above. Throughout this case study, a major theme has been the struggle urban dwellers have engaged in through and in the parks for greater claim to fully inhabit the city. Urban dwellers' very presence in the parks, involving the space in the process of conducting their daily lives, has proven how powerfully urban dwellers can appropriate urban space. Urban dwellers have also proven how powerfully they can assert their right to participate in the production of urban space through their continued usage of the parks in their everyday. Their refusal to disengage from political organization and celebration in the face of exclusive governance produced more welcoming and nurturing spaces to which they can more fully belong. In using and transforming urban space through their appropriation and participation in the production of parks, urban dwellers have asserted time and again their right to exist in the city, their right to create their own spaces, and their right to be transformed by those spaces.

The struggle of urban dwellers throughout history to make such claims to the parks and the city has been a process that is ingrained in their landscapes today. By keeping visible the legacy of the struggles in which they have engaged, urban dwellers can push back against the homogenizing and de-historicizing tendency of top-down planning. Understanding the spaces as

products of, and influences in, dynamic social processes keeps these legacies, and urban dwellers, centered.



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