



The Facts Behind the Faces

A POLICY PAPER FROM THE CHICAGO COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS



Photo by Chuck Cherney, Chicago Tribune

HOUSING AND HOMICIDE

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1990s, homicide and violent crime dropped dramatically in New York City but not in Chicago. No single factor can fully explain the reasons for Chicago's persistently high rates of violence. Our data¹ suggest Chicago's homicide rate stayed high while New York City's dropped because of:

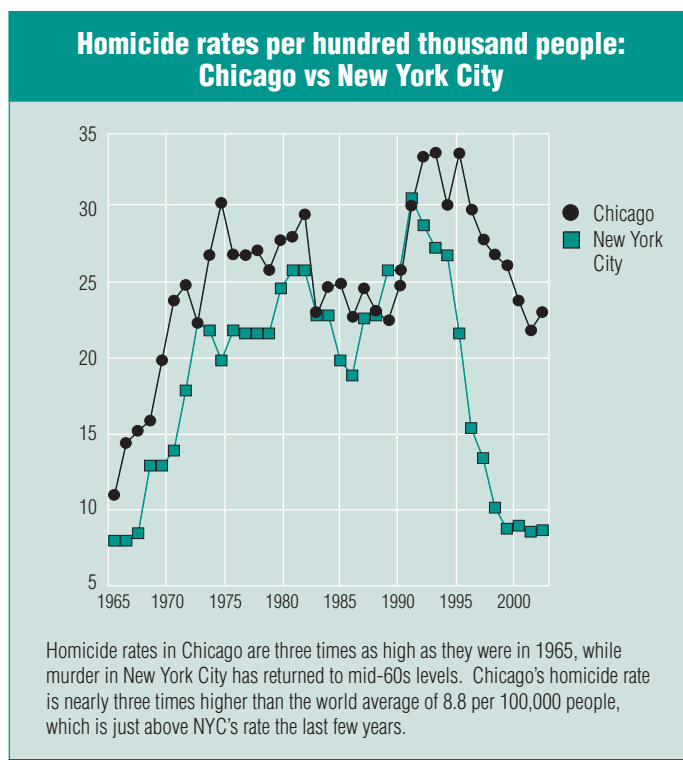
1. Continuing disputes over drug markets by Chicago's institutionalized gangs
2. Police tactics that fractured gang leadership
3. Surprisingly, displacement caused by the demolition of public housing

Our studies have concluded that a city's housing policy is one crucial component in any effective effort to reduce violence.

CONTEXT

A comparison between Chicago and New York City begins to reveal substantial differences in both housing policy and the nature of gangs in the two cities:

- Chicago's gangs have institutionalized and New York City's have not. Chicago's major gangs began in the 1950s and 1960s and show no signs of disappearing. On the other hand, gangs in New York City have come and gone, and new ones continue to take their place. Research in New York City² has



shown that drug crews that ran NYC's crack cocaine businesses had few neighborhood ties and were feared by residents, who did not object when police cracked down. In Chicago, similar police pressure has not succeeded in uprooting gangs with a 50-year neighborhood history.

- In New York City, as in most other cities, the crack markets went through various stages before declining and stabilizing. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, crack wars swept through U.S. cities, but homicide declined in most as rivals settled disputes

and neighbors sickened of violence. In Chicago, just as the crack market was set to stabilize, the Chicago Housing Authority began displacing thousands of people, including local branches of drug-selling gangs.³ Gangs displaced from public housing could not find an area to sell drugs that was not already claimed by another gang, and new violent disputes resulted.

- Interviews with Chicago gang members confirm the turmoil caused by the influx of new gang members and drug customers into areas of high violence. The far

south side of Chicago, where many Robert Taylor Homes gang members relocated and where violence is perceived to be out of control, is called by residents the "wild, wild, west" or the "wild hundreds" (after the street numbers).

- In New York City, housing projects were not torn down in the 1990s and residents were not displaced. Instead, NYC embarked on a 10-year plan that invested \$5 billion in affordable housing. In the South Bronx alone, the City invested \$1.5 billion dollars in housing in less than 10 years. This led to the South Bronx's reversal of decades of population loss, with an 11 percent gain in population in the 1990s and dramatic drops in crime.

- Similar areas (e.g., Lawndale and Englewood) in Chicago did not receive significant affordable-housing investment and had continuing 1990s population losses: 11 percent for Lawndale and 18 percent for Englewood. The CHA announced it would tear down 21,000 units of public housing. Combining those displaced by demolition and those forced out through deteriorating conditions, more than 100,000 people will be displaced. By 2005, all 4,300 units of Robert Taylor Homes will be demolished and its 27,000 residents moved elsewhere. Actual numbers of the displaced from public housing need to include non-leaseholders, an estimated one for every three leaseholders.⁴ According to CCH, requests for emergency housing

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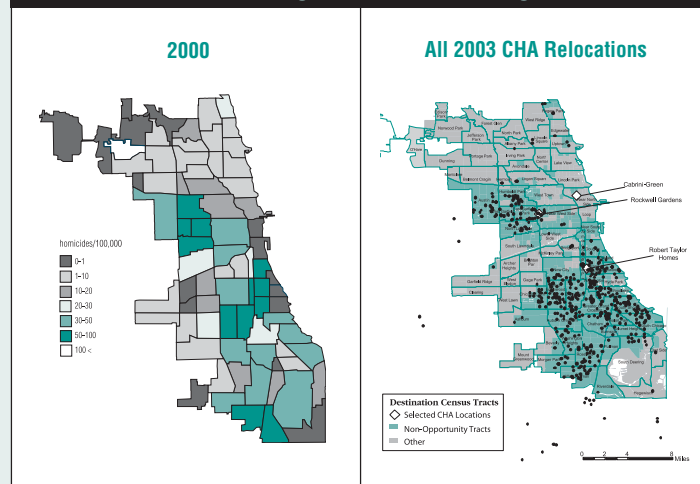
assistance have dramatically increased in the last few years. Although the CHA claims to be rehabbing or replacing 25,000 units,⁵ the regional need for affordable housing is estimated as more than 150,000 new units.⁶ Chicago's housing policy appears to be little more than the demolition of public housing plus gentrification, whereas New York City has invested heavily in affordable housing and has not displaced public housing tenants.

■ In New York City, "zero tolerance" policies eliminated the drug crew infrastructure; in Chicago, similar tactics fragmented the gangs, and "outlaw" factions emerged throughout the city. The Chicago Police Department arrested nearly the entire leadership of the Black Gangster Disciples and other major gangs. With experienced leaders incapacitated and not available for day-to-day gang supervision, local gangs split and violence expanded from being only intragang to being also intragang.

The study concludes that addressing Chicago's violence problems may have more to do with flooding a neighborhood with affordable housing than with police patrols or closed circuit television cameras. The demolition of public housing and gentrification combine to push African Americans and Latinos into high-violence areas. Rather than rehabilitate and stabilize existing communities and public housing, Chicago has adopted a policy of forced displacement.

Chicago's housing policies may violate international law. Principle 8 of the UN

Homicides in Chicago Residential Neighborhoods



Chicago's public housing tenants are being displaced into areas of highest violence.

Guidelines on Rights of Internally Displaced People states: "Displacement shall not be carried out in a manner that violates the rights to life, dignity, liberty and security of those affected." The displacement of the majority of public housing tenants to areas of high homicide would seem to run counter to this UN guideline.

CONCLUSION

Policies of gang suppression in Chicago have backfired by fragmenting, not uprooting, local gangs and by increasing violence. Police pressure has created a less stable situation within communities, with gangs now fighting not only their rivals but outlaw factions as well. Police tactics of "zero tolerance" don't appear to work in cities, such as Chicago, where gangs have institutionalized. As a study in South Africa of similarly institutionalized gangs concluded, "The symbiotic relationship between gang and community cannot be broken by force."⁷ Violence control policies need to recognize institutionalized gangs as persisting social actors within communi-

ties and to combine law enforcement with negotiation, jobs, and resources.

How gentrification and population turnover are carried out can have important consequences for controlling violence.

Urban space is being redivided all over the globe as city centers are reclaimed as places for work and residence of the affluent. New York City's and Chicago's contrasting patterns of, respectively, investment in affordable housing and displacement suggest local officials should resist the temptation to forcibly displace poor residents who "get in the way" of gentrification or urban development. Rather than engaging in involuntary displacement, the City would be wise to provide adequate affordable housing. It also should promote the introduction of wealth into neighborhoods in a way that benefits both longtime residents and newcomers. CHA tenants appear to have just cause to appeal to the United Nations under its *Guidelines on Rights of Internally Displaced Peoples*.

Violence and housing policy in Chicago are closely tied to this city's long history of racism. Internationally, the removal of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities from the sight and territory of dominant groups has drawn global condemnation. "Ethnic cleansing" of various types has reproduced and intensified old patterns of racism and intolerance and reinforced social exclusion. In Chicago, more than 100,000 "internally displaced persons" are 99 percent African Americans who have had little or no say in their forced migration. "White flight," which used to mean white people fleeing to the suburbs, now refers to a mythical "right of return" of affluent whites replacing minorities from the neighborhoods closest to the Loop.

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