

A city of struggle

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Protesters in Chicago demand justice for Laquan McDonald. Photo: naarpr.org

The long shadow of the Chicago race riot, Part 8

The sudden death of Harold Washington in 1987 was a godsend to Chicago's power structure. Most of Washington's supporters wanted Alderman Timothy Evans to be made mayor.

Alderman Ed Burke and other racists saw an opportunity to split the Black members of the City Council. Eleven years before, these bigots revolted when the Black President Pro Tempore Wilson Frost proclaimed himself mayor.

Now, in 1987, they threw their support to the African American President Pro Tempore Eugene Sawyer. The masses were outraged at this treachery. At least 5,000 people protested outside City Hall.

Sawyer was elected mayor at 4:01 a.m. on Dec. 2, 1987, [by a vote of 29-19](#). Only five Black aldermen voted for him.

Sawyer was soon gotten rid of. [Richard M. Daley beat him](#) in the 1989 primary. The Daley family had become so hated by African Americans that Richard-the-second got just 5 percent of the Black vote.

With millions in campaign funds provided by big business, Daley defeated Timothy Evans in the general election. (Evans ran on the Harold Washington Parry ticket.)

The son of the pig who had Fred Hampton and Mark Clark murdered was re-elected mayor five times. What happened to the hopes of all those who put Harold Washington in City Hall?

A long depression for Black workers

The movement that elected Harold Washington was a concluding act to the struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. It served as a springboard to the Rev. Jesse Jackson's

presidential campaign in 1984.

The Daley Machine had to be broken. It was broken, at least temporarily.

In the meantime, Chicago, like most other big cities in the Midwest and Northeast, has shrunk. Chicago's population has fallen from nearly 3.6 million in 1960 to 2.7 million today.

It's still a powerhouse. Chicago's metropolitan region has grown to nearly 10 million people.

In the early 1980s, the Black community suffered the biggest drop in income since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Between 1978 and 1982, the median income of African American families in the Midwest fell by nearly 36 percent.

Deliberate deindustrialization was the culprit. U.S. Steel's South Works in Chicago shut down. So did nearby Wisconsin Steel that was owned by International Harvester. [Employment at Stewart Warner](#) fell from 5,000 in the 1970s in Chicago to 20 in the late 1990s.

It wasn't just automation or even capitalist decay that got rid of these jobs. Big capital was determined to get rid of its dependence on Black workers in basic industry.

Back in 1970, a quarter of the workers in U.S. steel mills and auto plants were Black. Many of the new auto plants built since then were in areas with small numbers of African Americans.

Even in 2018, African Americans in the Midwest were poorer than they were 40 years before. Adjusted for inflation, Black family median income there in 2018 was just \$44,790, as compared to \$48,510 in 1978.

White workers suffered too. Hundreds of thousands of white workers were thrown out of factories along with their Black and Latinx sisters and brothers. White family income dropped 7 percent from 1978 to 1982, one-fifth of the decrease for African American families.

While [African American median family income](#) in the Midwest was the highest of any region in 1978, by 1982 it was the lowest, even below the South.

A small reverse migration to the South began because that's where the jobs were. Instead of being employed in the big plants, many Black youth were being railroaded to the big prisons.

It was this economic reaction — which scattered, demoralized and incarcerated large numbers of workers — that allowed the Daley family to make a comeback.

Welcome fellow workers and fighters

While the Great Migration of African Americans came to an end, another Great Migration began of Latinx people. Chicago's Latinx community is now 800,000 strong. Two million live in the metropolitan region.

Immigrant bashing is old rotten news. The Honorable Marcus Garvey was an immigrant from Jamaica who was framed and deported.

For decades there's been a Mexican community in Chicago. But in the early 1930s, a massive deportation drive across the U.S. rounded up hundreds of thousands of Mexican people.

Thirty miles from Chicago, the U.S. Steel works in Gary, Ind., fired every Mexican worker who wasn't a U.S. citizen. Mexicans were among those shot in 1937's Memorial Day massacre.

Over the last 40 years, millions of Mexican people have been forced to leave their country by increased poverty. Between 1981 and 1986 alone, vampire-like U.S. and other foreign banks [sucked \\$63.6 billion in interest payments](#) out of Mexico. That's worth over \$200 billion in today's dollars. In those same years, real wages for Mexican workers were [cut almost in half](#).

Hundreds of thousands of U.S. workers lost their jobs because of the North America Free Trade Agreement. But millions of Mexicans were [shoved off their land](#) by heavily subsidized U.S. corn exports that jumped from two million tons in 1992 to over ten million tons in 2008.

Puerto Ricans were driven out of their beautiful homeland by Wall Street's colonial occupation and its Operation Bootstrap. The Lincoln Park neighborhood was a center of Chicago's Puerto Rican community. Led by José "Cha Cha" Jiménez, the Young Lords became a revolutionary force for change.

Power broker Robert Moses drove out thousands of Puerto Rican families from Manhattan's Upper West Side to build Lincoln Center. Mayor Richard J. Daley's urban removal program drove Puerto Ricans and other poor people out of Lincoln Park.

More than three million people have left Central American countries to come to the U.S. because of intense poverty and death squads. U.S. corporations, like United Fruit, are responsible for both.

The name "Chicago" is derived from the Indigenous word "checagou." But Indigenous people were driven out with the 1833 Treaty of Chicago.

Today around 80,000 Indigenous people live in the Chicago area. A key factor was the Indian Relocation Act of 1956, which [offered one-way tickets](#) to Indigenous families to move from reservations to what were often urban slums.

Hundreds of thousands of Asian people have also come to the Chicago region.

All of these workers from other lands — and Indigenous people whose land was stolen—are playing an increasing role in the working-class struggle.

An outstanding example is how immigrant workers revived May Day in the city where it was born. In 2006, [300,000 people came out in Chicago](#) to celebrate International Workers' Day.

Fire sales and police torture

The second edition of Daley family rule was not quite as crude, but it was just as corrupt. Chicago became a leader in privatizing its infrastructure.

The Chicago Skyway, a toll road that links the Indiana toll road to the Dan Ryan expressway, was [leased to private investors](#) in 2005 for \$1.83 billion. This was chump change for giving it away. The buyers made a billion-dollar profit when [they flipped the Skyway](#) ten years later.

Daley also handed over Chicago's parking meters. Wheeler-dealers led by Wall Street's Morgan Stanley investment bank gobbled them up in 2008. Morgan Stanley had earlier grabbed a 99-year-long lease on the city's parking garages.

The \$1.16 billion that the city got for the meters [was a billion dollars too low](#). Chicago had to [give \\$20 million back](#) to the new owners in 2018 because construction had taken a large number of parking meters out of service.

What really rocked the city were revelations about police torture. Between 1972 and 1991, police commander Jon Burge and his "midnight crew" used electric shocks, strangulation and burning to coerce confessions from over 110 Black prisoners. Ten were sent to death row.

In 1982, Richard M. Daley, then Cook County state's attorney, was told about Burge's crew torturing Andrew Wilson. Daley [refused to investigate](#).

These outrages helped lead Illinois Gov. George Ryan to commute the sentences of 167 prisoners on death row. Ryan pardoned four condemned prisoners who had been tortured.

The deep state, which is the real state apparatus of police and prisons, paid Ryan back. The former governor was jailed for five years on corruption charges.

Ryan may have been guilty. But why haven't any members of the Daley family been prosecuted?

Fight back

Daley eventually wore out his welcome with big business by a series of contracting scandals, some of which involved his son Patrick. Former congressperson and investment banker Rahm Emanuel was put into City Hall in 2011.

Emanuel continued the attacks on poor people. He closed 50 schools in 2013.

The Chicago Teachers Union led a fightback against these cuts. In their recent 2019 strike, the CTU demanded smaller class sizes as well as nurses and counselors in every school. Teachers are fighting for the "common good."

The 25,000 members of the CTU are militant and strong. They've gone on strike almost a dozen times in the last 50 years. In 1987, the teachers walked out for 19 days, while a 2012 strike lasted more than a week.

These strikes echo the [Chicago teacher's revolt in 1933](#). Teachers stormed the City National Bank and Trust Co., demanding their back pay. They confronted bank president and former U.S. Vice President Charles Dawes.

The vicious Chicago Police Department continues to kill, brutalize and frame people. Just between 2008 and 2015, they killed 108 people. [More than 1,600 people](#) have been shot by cops since 1986.

The 2014 police murder of Laquan McDonald horrified the city. Police Officer Jason Van Dyke shot the 17-year-old Black youth 16 times.

The police brass tried to cover up the murder. Mayor Emanuel suppressed a video of this shooting until after he was re-elected. Community outrage finally compelled the state to prosecute Van Dyke, who was convicted of second-degree murder.

Leading the struggle against police atrocities is the Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression. One of its co-chairs is the former prisoner and longtime activist Frank Chapman, author of "The Damned Don't Cry." Together with community members, they are demanding a [Civilian Police Accountability Council \(CPAC\)](#).

In the spirit of the Haymarket martyrs and Fred Hampton, the people of Chicago are fighting back.

Sources: "Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality" by Bruce Nelson; "Organized Labor and the Black Worker 1619-1973" by Philip S. Foner

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