Sighting Public History:
A Re-education on Race and Space
in the City of Chicago

by

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B.A. History of Science, Harvard College, 2012

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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at the
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Project Abstract:

Sighting Public History is an effort to see Chicago, a city which I have always called home, and to see it with fresh eyes. The project takes as its focus sites of black public history: locations in the built environment where history is put to work in the public realm. It is an effort to re-educate one's self using the visual grammar of the city. The project uses the concept of *sights* — authored photographs, maps and written reflections — to offer a subjective view of public history at work in Chicago's historically black South and West Sides. Where and how are histories of the black experience put to work here? How do public parks and boulevards, streetscapes and thresholds of private homes, and collections and exhibitions of storied black cultural organizations compose an urban constellation of black public history? How does this constellation perform a powerful pedagogic function by teaching individuals and communities about the history of race in the city — including the systemic injustices borne by Chicago's black communities, and the way these communities have responded through politics, art, cultural programming, and community organizing? Ultimately, *Sighting Public History* asks, what kinds of history do Chicago's black communities carry, and how are these histories carried?

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I. BEGINNING TO SIGHT 5

Introduction: Beginning to Sight 7
Discussion of Methods: Ways of Sighting 9
Literature Review: Reading to Sight 13
Bounds of Sight 16

II. SIGHTING PUBLIC HISTORY: 19

A Re-education on Race and Space
in the City of Chicago

III. REFLECTIONS ON SIGHTING 111

Reflections on Sighting 113
Sighting the Future 120
A Final Note on Sighting 124

Acknowledgements 127
Text End-Notes 128
Map End Notes 136
Bibliography 141

I. BEGINNING TO SIGHT:

Introduction, Methods,
Literature Review

31st Street Overpass, Illinois Central Railroad

I. Introduction: Beginning to Sight

In November 2018, just before Thanksgiving, President Obama sat down with author Dave Eggers on stage at a downtown hotel at the second annual convening of the Obama Summit. The convening, themed Common Hope: Uncommon Stories, brought together community leaders from across the nascent Obama Foundation's programming endeavors. Seated beside the former President, fellow Chicago native Dave Eggers asked about the decision to site the future Obama Presidential Center in Chicago, to which Obama offered his view of the city, where he first worked as a community organizer on the South Side in the mid 1980s:

> Chicago is this extraordinary laboratory because it is, I believe…the quintessentially American city… Chicago is sort of where the trains meet, and you've got east and west and north and south…The world is converging here in this powerful, amazing way…so it forces you to see…who we are in all our glory, but also all our warts…It gives us a place to tell this larger story that I'm describing…and it's not unique to Chicago. It's just that it's a place that I'm familiar with, that Michelle and I know very well, and that we owe a great debt to, but it's also one that I think speaks to the larger story and contest of ideas that exists around the world.[1]

Building upon President Obama's reading of the city, *Sighting Public History* is an effort *to see* Chicago, a city which I have always called home, and to see it with fresh eyes. The project takes as its focus sites of black public history: locations in the built environment where history is put to work in the public realm. It is an effort to reeducate one's self using the visual grammar of the city.

The proposed Obama Presidential Center (OPC) is as controversial as it is aspirational. It offers a vision of community investment and economic development on the South Side, while also raising fears of displacement and real estate speculation. The OPC promises to "give new life" to the historic Olmsted-designed Jackson Park,[2] and yet it has prompted litigation from public park advocates who see the project as an appropriation – or even a desecration – of public parkland.[3] The OPC positions itself at once as a campus of resources for communities of the South Side and a leadership training-ground with a truly global reach. The project intends to advance a 21st century model of access and transparency to presidential records, yet the proposal has deeply disappointed presidential historians and archivists who see the OPC as undermining the precedents and institutions of presidential record keeping.[4]

Sighting Public History takes as its inspiration the narrow but essential part of the OPC's intention to "tell the Obamas' story within the context of history: civil rights history, African-American history, the history of Chicago, and United States history."[5] This intention puts the OPC's work squarely in the tradition of black public history, a tradition which has deep roots in Chicago.[6] While the complexity of the OPC proposal can and should be studied by city planners and cultural practitioners from a number of perspectives, this master's thesis examines the OPC's context in the black public history traditions of the city.

Where and how are histories of the black experience put to work here? What is the inventory of public history sites across the cultural geography of the black South and West Sides? How do public parks and boulevards, streetscapes and thresholds of private homes, and collections and exhibitions of storied black cultural organizations compose an urban constellation of black public history? How might this constellation perform a powerful pedagogic function by teaching individuals and communities about the history of race in the city, including the systemic injustices borne by Chicago's black communities, and the way these communities have responded through politics, art, cultural programming, and community organizing.

Moreover, how do sites of black public history across the city, in Obama's words — *force us to see* — glory, warts, and all? In what ways do these sites (declared and undeclared, marked and unmarked, mediated and unmediated) *become sights,* through methods of photography, cartography, and written reflection? In what instances do black public history sites *elude* sight? How, ultimately, might this constellation of black public history *sights* express the complexity of black experience in Chicago and more broadly in the United States?

II. Discussion of Methods: Ways of Sighting

Sighting Public History relies upon the integration of photography, written reflection, and cartography as methods of understanding Chicago's tradition and practices of black public history. These methods function as complementary modes of *sight*: photographic sight, literary sight, and cartographic sight.

Photographic Sight

In the stunning, landmark *Vision & Justice* edition of *Aperture,* published in the final summer of the Obama Presidency, guest editor Sarah Lewis selects as the introductory essay Henry Louis Gates' *Frederick Douglass's Camera Obscura*. Here Gates begins with the following words from Douglass, who was the most photographed person in 19th century America and a sophisticated theoretician and practitioner of the medium: "Poets, prophets, and reformers are all picture-makers—and this ability is the secret of their power and their achievements. They see what ought to be by the reflection of what is, and endeavor to remove the contradiction." [7]

Douglass, as Gates conveys, was a believer in photography's utility to advance social justice, and he was visionary in his efforts to convey the humanity and dignity of blackness through his catalog of over 160 photographic portraits, or "Douglass's," as Gates calls them. This photographic project, which spanned 54 years (from 1841, soon after Douglass's emancipation, to the day of his passing in 1895), reminds us of the intimacy of processes of picture-making and social reform.

Two examples from New York City reveal the prominence of picture-making in the history of city planning and broader public policy discourse. *How the Other Half Lives,* by social reformer Jacob Riis, used the photo-essay to bring to light the poverty of the city's highly segregated slums. Riis used documentary photography to broaden the audience of and bring emotional urgency to social reform efforts. *How the Other Half Lives* subsequently had direct impacts on public policy, including the 1894 and 1901 New York Tenement House Acts.[8] At the turn of the millennium, in a far different New York City, Joel Sternfeld's 2001 *Walking the High Line* provided a pivotal asset to the preservation and transformation efforts of the elevated rail led by the nonprofit Friends of the High Line.[9]

Images, Douglass tells us, show conditions as they are (or were), and provide an occasion to examine the gulf between "what is" and how they might or "ought" to be. In the case of Riis, he brought sight to the conditions of the urban poor as a foundation for reform. A century later, Sternfeld used visions of wild plant groves, suspended above New York City, to excite his readers about a kind of journey and movement through the city.

But the value of images is not merely transactional in arenas of social reform; their value is not derived from their ability to extract a measurable influence on policy. Images are instrumental, but they are also incremental in the labor of shifting perception and representation. Sarah Lewis asserts in her introduction to *Vision & Justice*, that images and photographs have the power to bridge worlds, to "process worlds unlike our own" and "get us to the point of benevolent surrender, making way for a new version of our collective selves."[10] As the artists and scholars of *Vision & Justice* attest, photographs are dynamic tools of cultural production: they are able to expand fields of vision and power social movements; they further justice through acts of representation. This work of photographs, Sarah Lewis describes, is the labor of *representational justice*.[11]

A number of contemporary photographic practices from *Vision & Justice* are worth noting which use diverse tactics of picture-making to advance representational justice. Dawoud Bey's *Birmingham Project* memorializes the victims of the Ku Klux Klan's 1963 bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham. These black and white portraits include city residents of the ages of the victims of the bombing, as well as residents of the ages of the victims had they been allowed to live.[12] These portraits, like Deanne Lawson's color photographs of the surviving family of the victims of the Charleston Emanuel A.M.E. Church lend sight to the enduring strength of black bodies while also insisting the viewer reckon with hateful, shameful legacies that have defined black experience.

Dawoud Bey's *Night Coming Tenderly, Black* (which I had the good fortune to see in person at the Art Institute of Chicago while conducting field research for this project) reminds us that even when the black body is not explicitly present in photographs about blackness, it is still implied. The subject of this series of large format landscape studies: stations along the Underground Railroad in Ohio. These landscapes of terrifying stillness appear at times imperceptibly dark, recalling the prints of Roy DeCarava. In this darkness, Bey conveys the complexity of blackness and black history. He pictures landscapes of terror, where black bodies were killed and tortured, but also where they organized and journeyed with the greatest resolve towards freedom. Here the black body is not visually rendered, but it is still pictured. Bey argues through *Night Coming Tenderly, Black*, that photography (or as I am calling "photographic sight"), is *the* medium to explore these spaces of blackness – even in the physical absence of the black body.[13]

In the spirit of and inspired by these extraordinary photographic practices, it is my hope to practice a kind of photographic sight — to explore spaces of blackness in Chicago as they *are* and *ought to be* – and in so doing, provide a space for reflection and introspection.

Literary Sight

It is through written reflection that I hope to deepen the possibilities of photographic sight. In this regard, the project takes inspiration from Teju Cole's *Blind Spot,* principally Cole's use of the photo-text diptych. Cole's images alone are remarkably complex and move between worlds, at times in spaces of intense cultural meaning: Selma, Lagos, and Beirut, to name a few of his subjects. As Siri Huvstedt points out in the introduction to the photo-book, Cole's images often invite a phenomenon of "uncanny displacement." Worlds collapse within a single photograph: an image inside an image, a world inside a world. These images in turn provide occasion for written reflection.[14]

Cole's reflections variously cite Greek mythology, the Christian Bible, 20th century film and literature, as well as major social-historical events, particularly ones of terror and violence: "witch-burning; the crimes of the Ku Klux Klan; the genocide of Hitler's National Socialism...9/11 in New York City; the brutality of ISIS; the murders of black men by police in the United States."[15] At times, written reflections and passages are paired with images of an entirely different world, of a different focus, and they operate in juxtaposition.

Between text and image, Cole conveys his conscious experience and his own "blind spots." The text does not aspire to resolve his images or the movement from one image or world to another. Rather the text and image work in complement and in tension to open the reader to Cole's subjective experience as a black body moving through the world.

Through written reflection, the possibilities of sight are deepened and opened: images provide inspiration for further inductive inquiry. Reading about and reflecting upon an image becomes a process of searching and connection-building. This is the task in the written reflections associated with each image in *Sighting Public History.* Like Cole's *Blind Spot*, they do not try to explain or resolve: they try to open images up and explore their content and visual operation. My intention is that through sequencing (text and image, and image and text) these paired reflections begin to express my conscious experience as a white scholar searching for historical meaning in this constellation of black public history.

Cartographic Sight

If photography can provide a ground-view qualitative sense of place, it is through cartography that the project seeks to reveal the spatial and geographic distribution and territorial dimensions of black public history at work. Are sights of black public history (marked and unmarked, declared and undeclared, mediated and unmediated) proximate or distant, and what are their adjacencies? How do marks of black public history on the aerial plane relate to large scale urban systems (infrastructure, industry, and open space) and community boundaries? Interjected throughout *Sighting Public History* are cartographic vignettes that ask these questions. These maps are not intended as direct explanations of either text or photograph. Cartography is used, rather, to ask how the marking of public history in the aerial plane can lend a complementary method of sight.

Several contemporary projects seek to map locations of black public history. In particular, there is the *African American Trail Project* from the Center for the Study of Race and Democracy at Tufts University, which examines the geographic distribution of black public history sites in the State of Massachusetts. The Trail Project has comprehensively mapped public history sites across the state and identified them as monuments, museums, schools, universities, among other typologies. The sites are then numbered, catalogued, and geographically coded according to their location in one of seven key clusters in the state, primarily in Greater Boston.[16] This is a noble effort to create a badly needed cultural inventory in Massachusetts and should serve as a model for parallel endeavors for states across the country.

But *Sighting Public History* does not just aspire to catalog public history sites in Chicago. Rather the project, through mapping, will engage the possibilities of a different kind of sight. James Corner explains these possibilities in his *Agency of Mapping*, in which he distinguishes between mappings and "tracings." Whereas tracings "propagate redundancies, mappings discover new worlds within past and present ones: they inaugurate new grounds upon the hidden traces of a living context."[17]

Where in Chicago do histories of individuals, events, and institutions claim territory in the geography of the present? Like the maps of Corner's interest, the cartographic vignettes included in *Sighting Public History* are intended as "mental constructs, ideas that enable and effect change," rather than being "transparent, neutral, or passive."[18] Through their authorship, these maps aspire to offer sight – my deeply subjective sight – of the city's black public history at work in the aerial plane of the built environment.

III. Literature Review: Reading to Sight

A range of literature has informed my selection of and engagement with these methods of photography, writing, and cartography.

Anthropologies of the City

To sight public history is to read the city. As Dolores Hayden argues, to read the city, one must understand the *power of place*. This is the "power of ordinary urban landscapes to nurture citizens' public memory, to encompass shared time in the form of shared territory."[19] While cities typically focus resources on architectural preservation of artifacts of wealth and power, to read the city and understand the power of place is to claim "the entire urban cultural landscape as an important American history, not just its architectural monuments."[20]

Hayden's *Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* is as much a conceptual foundation for reading the city as it is an urgent call-to-action for cultural practitioners to "use the forms of the city...to connect residents with urban landscape history and foster a stronger sense of belonging."[21] *Sighting Public History* seeks to answer this call-to-action while building upon the tradition of urban anthropological observation as a path towards understanding the cultural geography of Chicago's black public history.

This mode of reading the city conforms with conceptualizing civic space, the public realm, and parklands as economically, politically, and socially produced spaces, as argued by Galen Cranz in *Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America,* the seminal cultural history of urban parks in the United States. Cranz relates four primary movements in park design: the Pleasure Ground (1850-1900), the Reform Park (1900-1930), the Recreation Facility (1930-1965), and the Open Space System (1965-1989), which find form across the United States, and in Chicago in particular. The form and agenda of parks, boulevards, playgrounds, and other public realm amenities, Cranz argues, reflect the social and political values of their builders.[22] In reading Chicago, one is tasked with asking the question at the heart of Cranz's work: how do the observed conditions of the built environment reflect underlying power structures of the city?

Chicago Urban History, Political History, and Sociology

Public History hits the ground in the public realm, requiring a literacy of Chicago's urban history, from its physical planning, to social histories of its racial geography. A number of urban history texts have provided this essential context: William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis* examines the political and economic rationale for the rise of Chicago as the great interior city of the United States; journalist Lois Wille's *Forever Open, Clear, and Free: The Struggle for Chicago's Lakefront* provides a history of the contested interests that have shaped Chicago's parklands and lakefront; Colin Fischer's *Urban Green: Nature, Recreation, and the Working Class in Industrial Chicago* examines the history of the city's lakefront and parks, with a focus on their racial geography; and Gary Rivlin's *Fire on the Prairie,* a biography of Chicago's first black mayor, Harold Washington, offers a thorough 20th century racial-political history of the city.

Two works of sociology provide important context to understand the profound quantitative and qualitative effects of spatial segregation in Chicago. Robert Sampson's *Great American City* establishes through statistical indices the persistence of advantages and disadvantages across Chicago's highly segregated neighborhoods. There is no more potent force in shaping the life possibilities of an individual (in Chicago in particular, and in the United States more broadly) than the neighborhood one lives in, Sampson argues. Carlo Rotella's forthcoming *The World is Always Coming to End* offers a qualitative companion to Sampson. Rotella explores through a personal literary memoir of Chicago's South Shore the operation of *cultural neighborhood effects* on the individual. Rotella seeks to understand how *he* was shaped by the South Shore neighborhood. How do neighborhoods, Rotella asks, more generally, shape an individual's sensibilities, their store of life experiences, and their sense of place? How ultimately do these qualitative, cultural sensibilities shape one's life trajectory?[23]

Through *Sighting Public History*, I hope to understand how public history sites – and my own perception of these sites – might confirm or complicate the operation of these neighborhood effects in Chicago.

Black Public History

Chicago's contributions to the practice of black public history are well established, from the founding of the Ebony Museum of Negro History in 1961 (which became the DuSable Museum in 1968), to the creation of Negro History Week in 1926 (which later became Black History Month in 1977). Chicago's black cultural sector has played a leading role in the collection and dissemination of black history in the United States. *Black Public History in Chicago* by Ian Rocksborough-Smith surveys these endeavors led by teachers, writers, librarians, artists, and cultural workers more broadly.

Perhaps the first controversial public debate about black public history in Chicago surrounded the celebration of Colored American Day on October 11th, 1892, at the World's Columbian Exposition. The merits of the day ignited a spirited, emotional debate among black cultural leaders, from famed abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who viewed the event as a step towards cultural integration, to prominent social reformer Ida B. Wells, who considered the day an admission of cultural subservience. Colored American Day and other displays of black history at the Columbian Exposition are discussed in Christopher Reed's *All the World Is Here!: the Black Presence at White City.* Reed accounts for the diverse perspectives and engagements of both Africans and African Americans at the World's Fair, from the exhibition of African cultures along the Midway Plaisance, to the stories of African Americans who journeyed to the fair with hopes of inclusion.

Finally, and most comprehensively, Mabel O. Wilson's *Negro Building* provides a national survey of black museums and black public history endeavors. In Wilson's words, these were endeavors to "disprove the bleak forecasts augured by their fellow white citizens by taking measure of their own advancement."[24] Black museums, fairs, and community organizations formed a "black counter-public sphere," where "different agendas for social advancement, cultural identity, and national belonging could be presented, seen, and debated publicly."[25] These efforts include the founding of the DuSable Museum in Chicago and the International Afro American Museum in Detroit,[26] as well as post-Civil War celebrations of black culture across the North, including in Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York City.[27]

These texts collectively provide a context to understand the rich history of individuals and institutions which have shaped the practice of black public history in Chicago.

IV. Bounds of Sight

Before I begin, I would like to be explicit about who I am and why I am pursuing this project. This is, first and foremost, a study of home. As a proud Chicago native (and East Coast transplant of the last decade), I hope to better understand the deeply complicated place I have always called home. As a privileged, straight, white male, I have been afforded many advantages in my life and in my upbringing in Chicago. I grew up in a predominantly white, highly-educated, wealthy surround of the University of Chicago on the South Side. I later moved as a teenager to an even whiter and wealthier neighborhood in Lincoln Park on the North Side. These experiences have shaped me and how I approach questions of history and place in ways that I might never fully appreciate.

But I am also a dedicated student of cities. I am an aspiring scholar and cultural practitioner, and I have approached this complex subject of home with my fullest capacity for empathy, curiosity, love, and kindness. These are sights that I have never visited in Chicago's historic black communities. These are places and people I have not previously seen or known; these are communities that I am a stranger to, but they also feel deeply familiar.

It is important to take note of one final precedent: the display of *Open Casket*, a work by a white painter depicting the body of Emmett Till. The painting was displayed at the Whitney Biennial and incited protest and debate about the role of white cultural producers in engaging with black trauma. While I agree with artist Hannah Black that it is not acceptable for white cultural producers to "transmute Black suffering" for personal gain, I believe it is both necessary and important for white scholars and artists to engage with the national sins of racism, violence, and disinvestment at the heart of black suffering.[28] In response to Hannah Black, artist and writer Coco Fusco argued that to assume "any attempt by a white cultural producer to engage with racism via the expression of black pain is inherently unacceptable forecloses the effort to achieve interracial cooperation, mutual understanding, or universal anti-racist consciousness."[29]

Henry Louis Gates, in a similar spirit, was an early advocate for the integration of African American Studies as an academic field. "Unless it's a valid academic subject that everyone can study and everyone can teach, then it's not a real academic subject," said Gates in conversation with the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education.[30] In agreement with Gates, I believe the study of black public history should be no different: open to all good faith efforts of scholarship grounded in compassion, curiosity, and humility across lines of racial difference. I approach this project knowing that there are elements of black history and experience in Chicago that I will never fully understand. I will never fully understand the depths of black trauma in America. I will never fully understand the pain felt by the families and communities that have lost their children to racially-motivated violence, or senseless gun violence. I will never understand the pain of Emmett Till's family, and the sadness, shock, and trauma young black children and parents must continue to feel when they see Emmett Till's image.

But I do believe at the core of my being, that it is my job to listen, to look, to see with feeling and compassion, and work incrementally towards a future that is more just. The alternative — to ignore, to live blindly, to encourage invisibility, and to put the onus of healing on those that have been harmed — I personally find unacceptable.

It is in this spirit that I endeavor to sight Chicago's black public history. This is as much an effort to understand my own whiteness as it is a journey to see the complexity of blackness. I will not try to be authoritative or comprehensive. If the subject of this essay is the tool of history, my perspective of this tool is deeply subjective, and my response to fundamental questions of this study (where this tool has been used, who has used it, how they have used it, and to what end) are also subjective. These sights captured are a product of the books I have read, the people I have spoken to, and most importantly, who I am and my store of life experiences.

These are sights critical to various periods of black history and culture in the city, from the Great Migration and settlement of the nation's Black Metropolis, to the city's position respective to struggles for civil rights and economic justice. Chicago's black public history tradition emerged out of various cultural institutions like the DuSable Museum, which set an organizational precedent for parallel museum efforts across the United States,[31] and the South Side Community Art Center, the only remaining continuously-operating WPA-era community arts organization. Both organizations are fixtures on the South Side today and feature prominently in *Sighting Public History*.[32]

These are sights where black public history lives, where historical narratives are put to work to honor individuals, institutions, events, and movements of the past, which of course provide measures of progress, regress, or stasis in the present. These are sights of history at work in the public realm: in public parks, boulevards, streetscapes, and the thresholds of private homes. They span the geography of the city: from historic Bronzeville; southwest towards Marquette Park, where Martin Luther King disrupted the city's entrenched racial geography in the fight for fair housing; and east again, towards the South Shore's Rainbow Beach, where in 1961, NAACP youth led wade-ins in protest for equal access to the city's beaches.

These sights also offer my subjective view of catalytic racial traumas across Chicago, from 2337 West Monroe Street, where the Chicago Police assassinated the leadership of the Illinois Black Panther Party in 1969, to 29th Street Beach, where exactly one hundred years ago on July 27th, 1919, a young black boy named Eugene Williams was stoned to death by a white mob.[33] Such events contextualize the persistent racial violence and police brutality in Chicago today.

In total, I aspire to capture a constellation of sights — declared and undeclared, marked and unmarked, named and unnamed, mediated and unmediated — expressing elements of black history and culture in Chicago. These sights peer into the collections of institutions, the monuments of streetscapes, the memorials created out of community, and the present, everyday conditions of locations connected to local-historical movements and events that have shaped the city.

Ultimately, *Sighting Public History* asks, *what kinds of history do Chicago's black communities carry, and how are these histories carried?*

II. SIGHTING PUBLIC HISTORY:

A Re-education on Race and Space in the City of Chicago

29th Street Breakwater

“Seeks for solaces in snow
In the crusted wintertime.
Ice jewels glint and glow.
Half-blue shadows slanting grow
Over blue and silver rime.
And the crunching in the crust
Chills her nicely as it must.”

- Gwendolyn Brooks, The Anniad (text from her living memorial in Gwendolyn Brooks Park)

Beach Battles

Rainbow Beach

On a hot July day in 1960, a black policeman brought his family and friends to Rainbow Beach Park. Like Dr. King in Marquette Park, and a black boy named Eugene Williams floating in the lake on a string of railroad ties, officer Harold Carr was attacked with rocks by a white mob.[34] This kind of racially motivated violence was not unusual on the lakefront at that time. Just three years prior, a crowd of nearly 7,000 whites mobbed a group of 100 black picnickers south of Rainbow Beach at Calumet Park.[35]

Later that summer in 1960, the leader of the NAACP youth council, Velma Murphy Hill, responded to the de facto segregation of Rainbow Beach by organizing a protest: a wade-in. Like Carr, she was violently attacked by a white mob, ultimately receiving 17 stitches in her head after getting hit with a rock. A picture of Hill in the *Chicago Defender*, head-shaved, galvanized further protests. In the summer of 1961, Hill and other youth waded again into the waters of Lake Michigan, again facing white mobs, white resistance, and white violence.

In 2011, upon the 50th anniversary of the wade-ins, leaders of the protests including Hill convened to mark their struggle on a rock beside the Rainbow Beach Field House.

My first understanding of segregation as an elementary school student in Chicago was through images of the Jim Crow South: photographs of water fountains and bathroom signs. But these were photographs of an *other* place, an *other* people, some *other* oppressor — somewhere cruel and unfair, but someplace else. But as Rainbow, Calumet, 63rd Street, 29th Street, and 39th Street Beach attest, that pervasive racial violence was *here* and a defining force in Chicago's lakefront history.

Martin Luther King Drive

A marking in the earth of the city, dedicated by Mayor Richard M. Daley, who landmarked much of historic Bronzeville in the 1990s.[36] Here, cast in bronze, is the social infrastructure of Bronzeville's past. Once derisively called the Black Belt in the early 20th century, artists and activists began to refer to the geography between the South Loop (to the north), Washington Park (to the south), the Illinois Central Railroad (to the east) and the Penn Central Railroad (to the west), as *Bronzeville*.[37] Anthropologists St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton later renamed this area in their landmark study as *Black Metropolis:* "the second largest Negro city in the world, only New York's Harlem exceeding it in size. It is a city within a city—a narrow tongue of land, seven miles in length and one and one-half miles in width, where more than 300,000 Negroes are packed solidly in the heart of the Midwest Metropolis."[38]

Here the map, stamped into the median, is one of many markings along Martin Luther King Drive: the George Washington Monument by Daniel Chester French, sword in hand, riding on horseback; the beautiful Greystone Ida B. Wells-Barnett House, tucked along the west-side of the boulevard just north of 37th Street; the *Victory Monument* south of 35th Street memorializing contributions of the black Eighth Regiment of the Illinois National Guard in World War I; and finally, at 26th Street, the *Monument to the Great Migration North* (1994). Here a black man, suitcase in hand, faces north towards Martin Luther King Drive's terminal point at McCormick Place, the city's endless campus of convention halls.

Martin Luther King Drive itself is its own historical marking, and every marking tells a story. Originally South Park Boulevard, King Drive was renamed by Mayor Richard J. Daley in 1968 as a measure to calm the city's black communities after the devastation of the race riots following King's assassination just months prior, and in anticipation of the 1968 Democratic National Convention. According to Daley's biographer, Mike Royko, the mayor approved the City Council's renaming of South Park Boulevard, which runs exclusively through the black South Side, and rejected suggestions of city-length streets that cross between historically black and white neighborhoods.[39] And so South Park Boulevard was renamed on August 8th, 1968, exactly here, at the 35th Street intersection, where 28 years later, Daley's son would dedicate this map of Historic Bronzeville.[40]

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN MUSEUM

In Kerry James Marshall's graphic novel *Rhythm Master*, a boy named Farrell stumbles into the Ancient Egyptian Museum. Here he meets an older man, Rhythm Master, who teaches him to conjure African spirits of the past. The tale of Farrell and Rhythm Master moves through a Bronzeville crushed by systemic poverty, disinvestment, violence, and racism; but the graphic novel remains cosmic in proportion – with Farrell and Rhythm Master at its center, and the Ancient Egyptian Museum their sanctuary. Like Marshall's masterful history paintings, *Rhythm Master* pointedly critiques representations of blackness in American museums of arts and culture. When Marshall first exhibited *Rhythm Master* at the Carnegie International in Pittsburgh, he printed the panels on newsprint and taped them to the glass displays of the museum's Treasure Room, blocking view of the prized, protected collections.[41]

The Ancient Egyptian Museum is a private home, as is the Griffiths-Burroughs House across the street, another stunning Greystone with stately front steps, covered in bright-green worn turf. Here in 1961, Charles and Margaret Burroughs opened their home to the public as the Ebony Museum of Negro History,[42] which they renamed in 1968: the DuSable Museum of African American History.[43]

South Side Community Art Center, First Floor

The Georgian panels are as they were throughout the 20th century. The holes – thin, and varying in size and angle – cover the wall immediately to the right as you enter the first floor galleries. They are their own testament: they are their own constellation.

At the front window remains the original piano (where Nat King Cole played), and hung along the wall opposing the empty wall is a painting with a twisted white form that is the unmistakable evil of a Klansman tumbling through a lush green landscape in a tangle of trees. Ensnared between, in the foreground, is a nude, twisted black body.

The Klansman appears across the South Side: head-to-toe, fully-robed in the DuSable Museum beside Fred Hampton's jacket; and here again, on the third floor of the South Side Community Art Center, on a stray canvas nailed to the wall, shooting a handgun into the air.

South Side Commnity Arts Center, Third Floor

“We are right up there with the Grand Canyon,” the Executive Director said to a group of visitors, grantee applicants for a program at a Chicago foundation.

This is where Charles White taught drawing classes. He taught Kerry James Marshall. In photographs, White moves through the space with absolute elegance, beautifully dressed, hand on his hip, as he leads an intimate figure drawing session.[44]

Charles White helped build the South Side Community Art Center as a WPA staff artist, and the Center helped bring Charles White national attention. In 1940, at the age of 22, he exhibited *There Were No Crops This Year* at the American Negro Exposition at the Chicago Coliseum, in celebration of the 70th anniversary of the passage of the 13th amendment.[45] White benefited from the social and cultural infrastructure of Bronzeville. He attended readings at the Hall Branch Library, where Vivian Harsh, Chicago’s first black library branch manager, created the Harsh Collection of African American History and Literature.[46]

The South Side Community Art Center remains the only continuously operating WPA-era community arts organization in the United States, and it was accordingly listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2018.[47] It is indeed up there with the Grand Canyon.

Harold Washington Cultural Center

Harold is everywhere in the city. There is the Harold Washington Library, downtown, where I went many times as a kid to pick out books with my mom. And on the South Side, just north of 53rd Street, there is the Harold Washington Playlot Park, where I learned to ride a swing and took the training wheels off of my first bicycle. Around the time of the park's renaming in 1992, I was three years old.

But the focus of this project is those places where I have not been: the Harold Washington Wing at the DuSable Museum. Here they have an animatronic likeness of Harold Washington seated at his desk in a model of the mayor's office. This Harold is staged beside a glass display case holding a blackened Ashanti stool, which was painted at the time of Harold's death with animal blood by a Ghanaian King to symbolize the death of a great "Chief." [48]

South Side Community Art Center, Second Floor

Kerry James Marshall sits on the balcony of the former Georgian home, in a photograph spanning generations of South Side Community Art Center (SSCAC) artists, educators, and community members. Marshall was born in Los Angeles but adopted Chicago as his home and the center of his artistic practice. He married his wife here, in the backyard of the SSCAC.

Marshall first learned of White as a fifth grader at the 49th Street Library in South-Central Los Angeles during Negro History Week. Here he came across an illustrated book: *Great Negroes, Past and Present*. “I suppose the simple contradiction of a black man named White in a book about ‘negroes’ struck me as ironic,” Marshall recalls in his introduction to Charles White’s recent retrospective text, which was published as a companion to White’s stunning exhibition at MoMA.[49]

Years later, Marshall recalls, “the chain of coincidences linking me to my mentor closed full circle with the miraculous appearance of the *Great Negroes* book in a shuttered building I bought for my studio in Chicago, the city of his birth. There it was atop a pile of papers in a desk drawer left behind by the previous owners, worn and tattered, held together with duct tape…My eyes popped and my heart pounded just as they had at his studio door at Otis. Just thinking about that moment sends a shiver through my body.” [50]

There is of course a much deeper chain of coincidences at work that brought White and Marshall together, for it was in Chicago, in 1926, at the Wabash YMCA, that Carter Woodson, founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, created Negro History Week. Negro History Week provided a context and platform for White and others to organize black artistic practice and cultural production in Chicago. It was through Negro History Week that White mobilized his artistic practice as a young man, and it was through Negro History Week that Kerry James Marshall found his mentor in Charles White.[51]

Wabash YMCA

Gwendolyn Brooks Park

As a white kid who grew up in a non-religious household, in an insular, predominantly white and Jewish community, I had never been to a Sunday church service before. It is seldom that I am the only white person in a room — and rarely if ever in Chicago, where I go home to be mostly with my (white) family.

I was nervous about attending the service. I was scared to enter a sacred space in a community that is not my own. I was scared of being perceived an intruder or imposter. I was scared that I would embarrass myself, or worse, hurt someone. I didn't trust myself to bridge this cultural divide – to communicate warmth and gratitude in an unfamiliar setting. I was scared to tell my family where I was going that morning because I thought it would confuse them and subsequently make me again mistrust my own desire to *see* a different part of the city.

Quinn Chapel

I was stunned by the warmth and generosity of the people of Quinn Chapel. Without exception I was received with firm handshakes, hugs, and words of warmth – from the threshold of the Chapel in the cold morning air, where the greeters shook my hand (“Welcome, welcome — you a neighborhood guy?”), to the cluttered sanctum of Pastor Moody’s office, where he called me “brother.”

The service started with a circle prayer, where the congregation held hands: tight grips, warm bodies, and ritual *amens* to start the morning off right. It was clear that it wasn’t a chore for the congregation members to be there. They came because it gave them something. It gave them warmth, which I felt on many occasions through the morning.

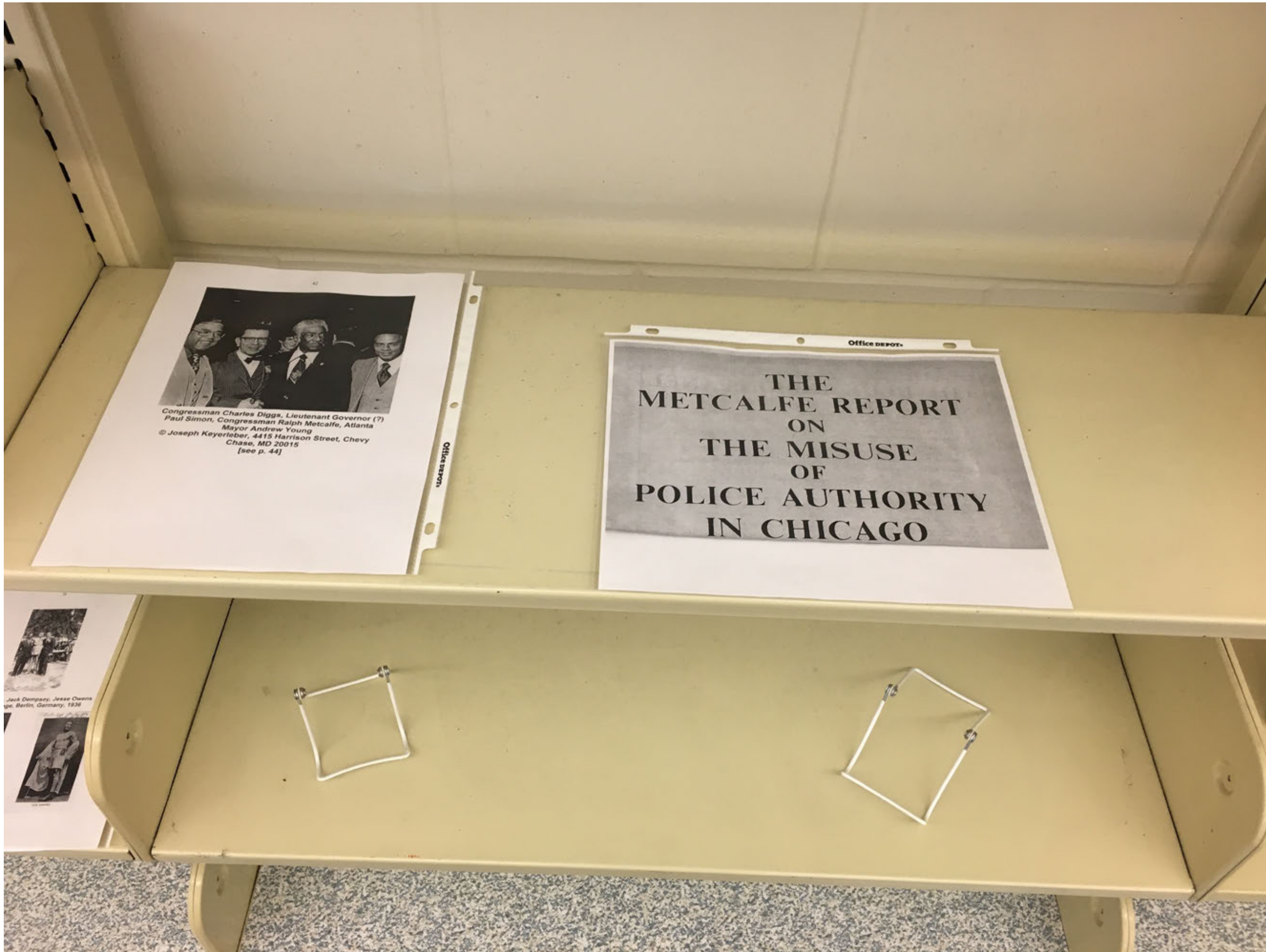
After the morning prayer, I settled in the back row, at which point two women motioned to me and invited me to sit with them in the middle of the room. And so I joined them, again with a bit of hesitation, but overwhelmed by the warmth of the room.

On the shelf below, to the left, are images of Ralph Metcalfe in Berlin in 1936, where he competed in the Olympic Games alongside Jesse Owens and won both gold and silver medals.[52]

I was lucky to come to Chicago at the tail-end of Black History Month, a public history endeavor with deep roots in the city. I visited numerous branches of the Chicago Public Libraries, where display cases celebrated the national titans of black history (Malcolm and Martin), as well as lesser-known local leaders and visionaries. Here, at the Carter Woodson Regional Library, the focus was on two patriarchal figures of the public history tradition: Carter Woodson, who conceived of Negro History Week as the leader of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History at the Wabash YMCA in 1926, and Congressman Ralph Metcalfe, who introduced a resolution in the United States House of Representatives to formally institute Black History Month on February 1st, 1977.[53] In Metcalfe's words, the resolution:

> (1) recognizes February 1977 as "Black History Month";
> (2) encourages all citizens of the United States to learn about and recognize the heritage of our black citizens; and
> (3) calls upon all citizens of the United States to commit themselves to rectify the injustices suffered by our black citizens.[54]

Metcalfe was a complicated figure. He was a decorated Olympian turned prominent black Chicago alderman, a successor to William Dawson as a representative in Congress, and for much of his career, a loyalist to Chicago's democratic political machine.[55] As alderman, he held the pro tem position in the City Council, a position "long on symbolism but short on genuine power." [56] A Daley loyalist for much of his career, Metcalfe finally broke rank with the mayor over the issue of police brutality after his friend, a black South Side dentist, was brutally beaten during a routine traffic stop.[57]



Carter Woodson Regional Library

Carter Woodson Regional Library

Metcalfe subsequently became one of the country's outspoken critics of police brutality. He led a congressional Blue Ribbon Panel, which published the 1972 *Metcalfe Report on the Misuse of Police Authority in Chicago*.[58] Included in the report were the testimonies of numerous black residents who had suffered physical and psychological injury at the hands of the Chicago Police, including Mrs. Bennye Moon:

> Mrs. Bennye Moon, Black, widow and a mother, described an incident in August of 1968 involving herself and her then pregnant daughter. When neighbors called police to quell an argument between Mrs. Moon's son and then daughter-in-law, the officers became abusive of her son. Mrs. Moon said that when she protested, a policeman pistol whipped her, breaking two ribs and dislocating her shoulder. Mrs. Moon's seventeen-year-old daughter, then with child, told the policeman not to hit her mother. The officer then hit the young lady in her stomach. She suffered blackouts until her baby's premature birth. Her son was born with a blind, sunken eye and a dislocated, perforated heart. Mrs. Moon filed a complaint with IAD was told that the policemen acted improperly but was not informed whether the policeman was punished.[59]

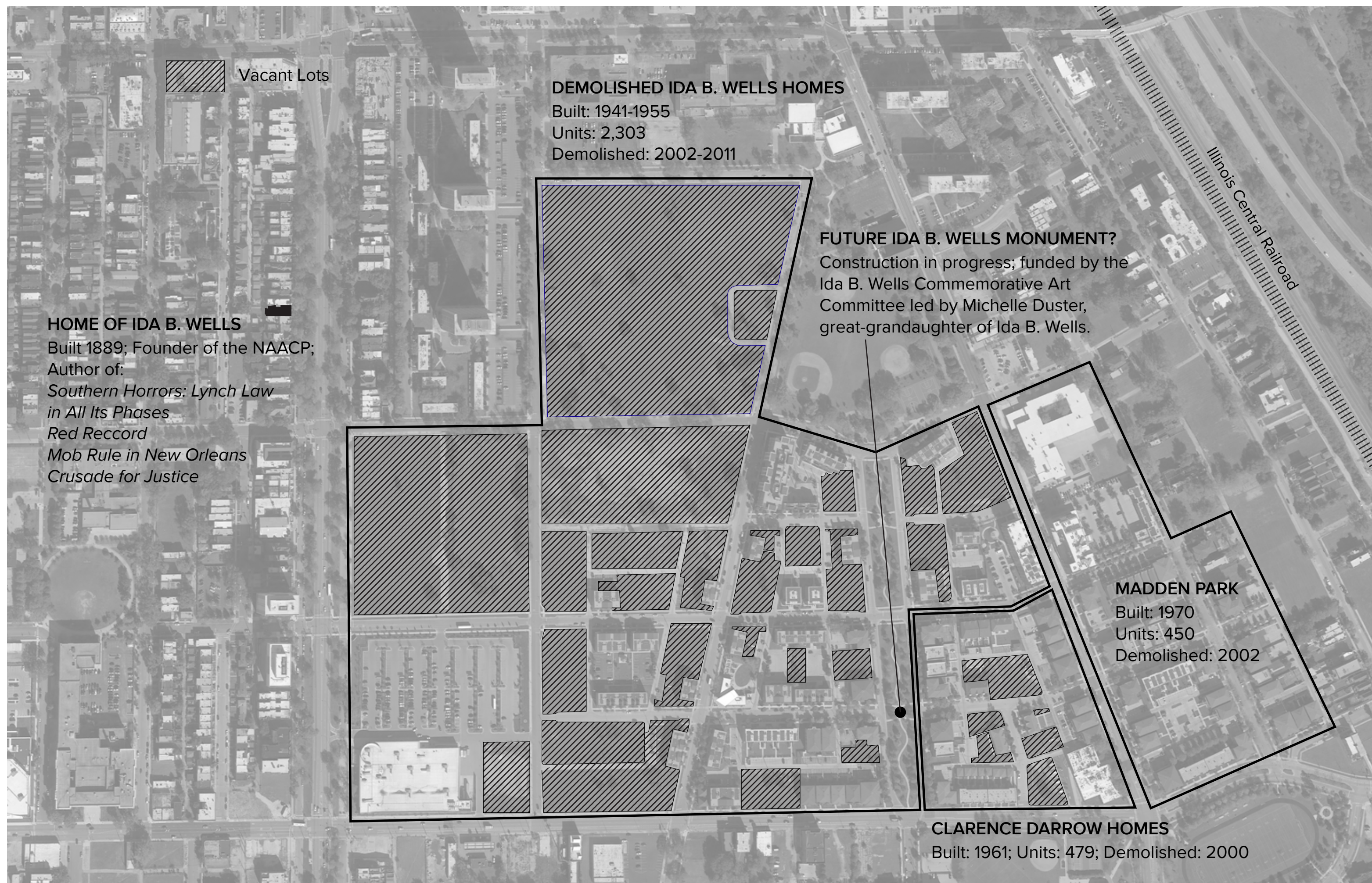
Daley responded to the Metcalfe Report with the full force of the Chicago political machine: he sent building inspectors to Metcalfe's Third Ward headquarters to write the congressman up for a litany of code violations; he stripped Metcalfe of machine-allocated patronage jobs; and ultimately, he ran a party loyalist to oppose Metcalfe in his upcoming reelection race.[60]

Quinn Chapel

At the close of the service, William, a young man from the row behind me thanked me for joining the congregation for the morning and invited me on a tour of the church building. He proceeded to tell the history of the Church with the aid of a quilt on the wall. He told me of the Church's founding, and the struggle to secure land in the city when African Americans couldn't legally purchase property. He told me of the church's move to its present location at the grey-stone chapel on Wabash Avenue. The final patch he spoke of was a screen-printed patch of a dark oak church pew, #58, which was donated by Quinn Chapel in 2006 to the Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington D.C..[61]

The pew conveys in one sense a triumphant journey of an object from the oldest black church in the city to the most comprehensive collection of black history and culture in the nation. But black public historians, including Margaret and Charles Burroughs in Chicago and leaders of parallel museum efforts across the country, were suspect of a top-down national approach to the collection and dissemination of black history and culture. The Burroughs notably opposed the 1965 bill to create a Federal Commission on Negro History.[62] Ultimately, it wasn't until 2003 that Congress sponsored the creation of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, which opened its doors as the Smithsonian in 2016.[63]

William then invited me and the other newcomers to Pastor Moody's office to say hi. The husband of the couple I toured with told Pastor Moody that he was a Barnett, meaning he was related to the ancestors of Ida B. Wells-Barnett, including Michelle Duster, his first-cousin and the surviving granddaughter of Ida.

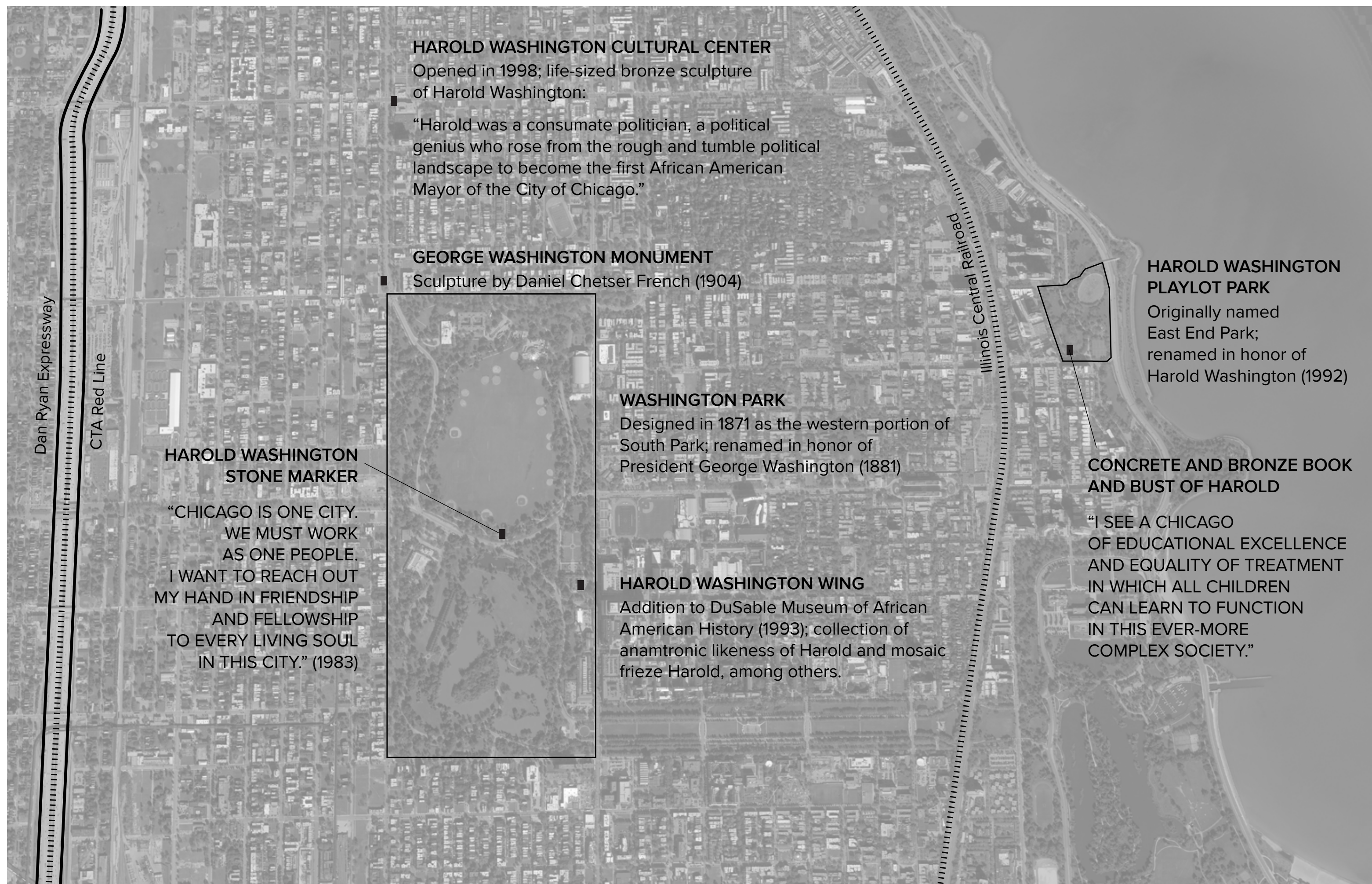


Ida B. Wells Home and Homes

DuSable Museum of African American History

There is a recursiveness with names in the city. Beside her book, *Lynching Our National Crime*, her desk stands in a plexiglass case in the DuSable Museum. Originally the Ebony Museum of Negro History in Bronzeville, the founders Charles and Margaret Burroughs renamed the organization in honor of Jean Baptiste Point DuSable, a Haitian fur trader and the first black settler of the City of Chicago. In 1972, they moved the museum from their private home to its current location in Washington Park.

And here, in Washington Park, there is an ambiguity. Washington Park is in an official sense recognized by the city as honoring George Washington, but during the Great Migration, it was thought of universally as Booker T. Washington Park.[64] Yet today, others may still think of the park as Harold's Washington Park, given the outsized influence of the city's first black mayor.



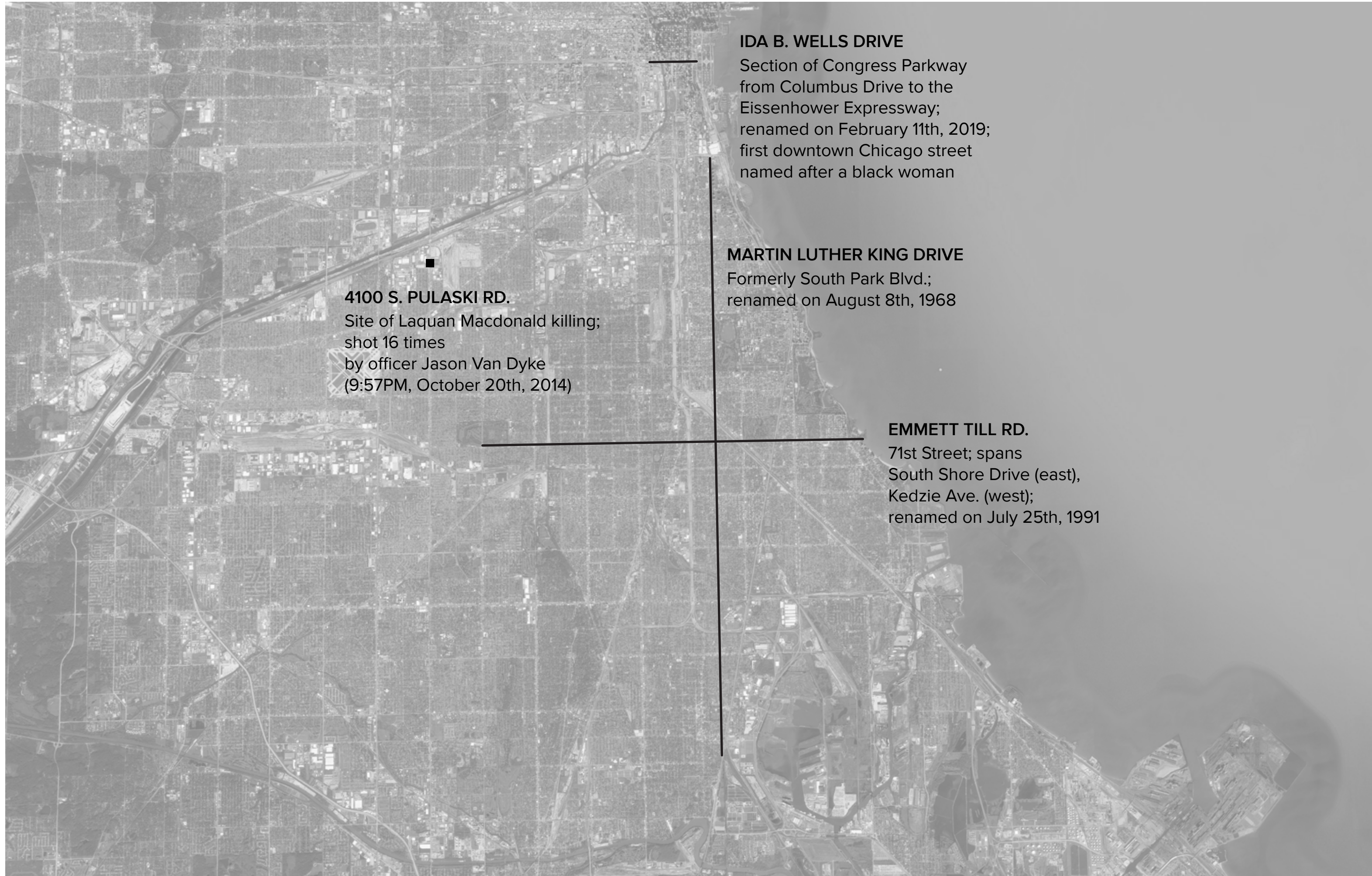
Harold

Jackson Park

Frederick Douglass took residence in Chicago during the summer of the Columbian Exposition. Douglass, a former slave and the most famous black man in America, came to Chicago to speak at the Exposition's "Colored American Day." While Douglass advocated for full participation in the day's events, he was formidably opposed by writer, activist, and Chicago resident, Ida B. Wells, who viewed the program as a shameful tokenization of black culture. As Christopher Reed describes in *All the World is Here!: The Black Presence at the White City*: "Wells refused to treat the special day as anything other than an insult. She assessed it as an attempt to relegate African Americans to a separate and inferior status that accentuated subordination. Her mind filled with the racial stereotypes of minstrelsy, cakewalking, and watermelon contests whenever she imagined what the day would bring."[65]

There are limits to markers. Their physicality and definition resist nuance. When do markers unearth truths and contested histories carried by communities, and when do they obstruct connection and burry deeper understanding? Excavation here reveals an emotional contest of ideas about blackness – about the merits of integration and emigration, and the risks of tokenization in representation.

A stone and metal tablet, set before a parkland grove, is not an obvious venue to revisit such a spirited debate.



Major Roads

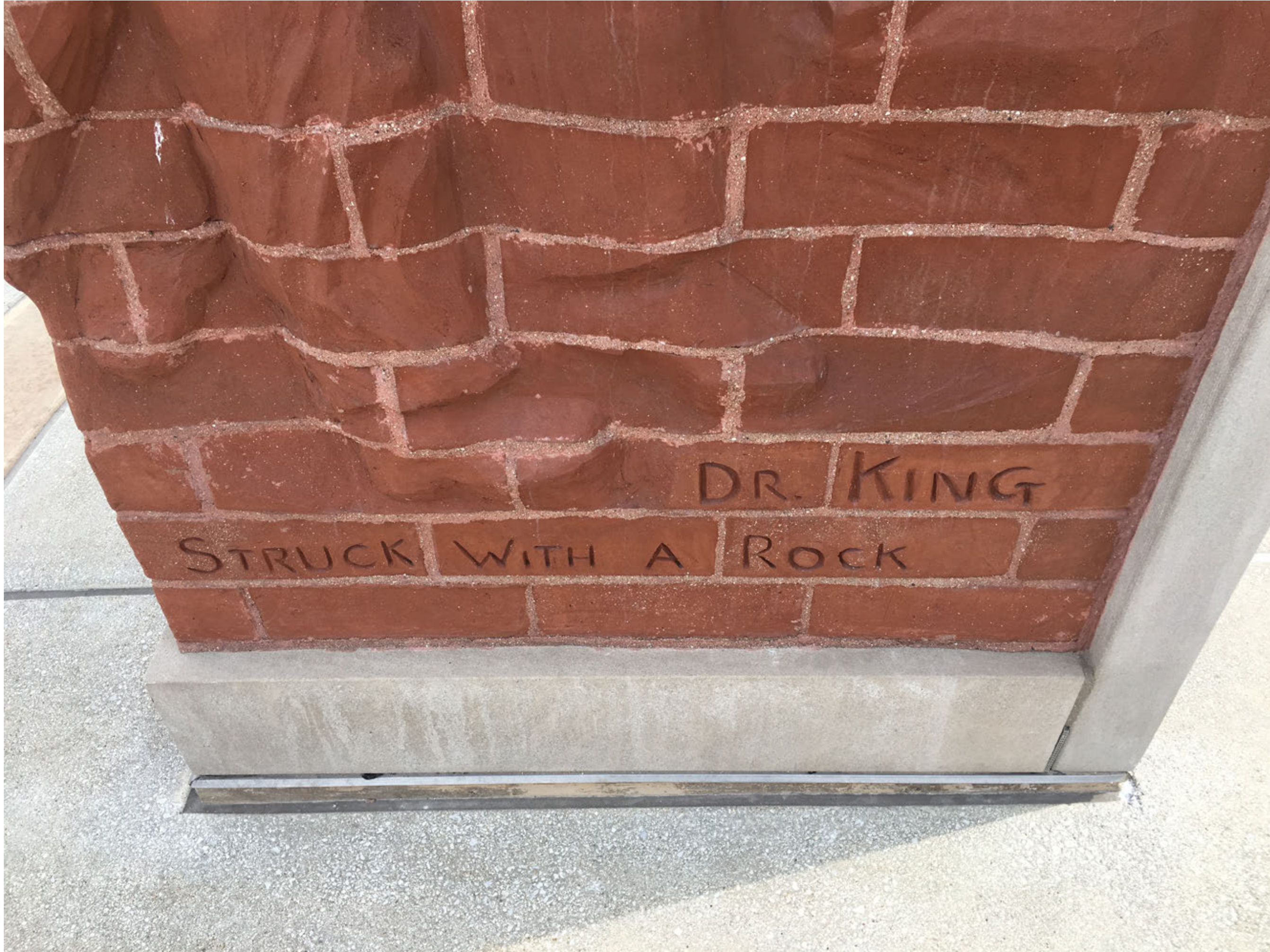
Roberts Temple Church of God in Christ

Among the many controversial decisions by the Obama Foundation, the nonprofit developing the Obama Presidential Center, is their resistance to signing a community benefits agreement. Among the grievances of the advocacy coalition pursuing the community benefits agreement, is the placement of "a commemorative marker at the 63rd Street Metra Station as the departure location for Emmett Till before traveling to his death in Mississippi."[66]

The process of racial reconciliation across the landscape of Emmett Till's journey from Chicago to the town of Money, Mississippi is endless. Apart from the fact that the investigation into his murder remains ongoing and was recently reopened by the Justice Department in January of 2018, the small town of Money, Mississippi remains haunted by the boy's murder. Money, like Chicago, is its own landscape of racial trauma, including eleven markers of sites related to Emmett's murder.[67]

There is the Emmett Till Interpretive Center across the road from the courthouse where Till's killers were acquitted. The Bryant Grocery Store, where Till and his cousins encountered a 21-year-old white woman Carolyn Bryant, remains in shambles, and in the possession of one of the families of the all-white jurors that acquitted Till's killers. There is a purple sign marking the site beside the riverbank where Till's body was found, but it has been repeatedly vandalized and remains punctured by bullet holes.[68]

These markers are fought for. They require care and protection. And the marking of Roberts Temple Church of God is as important as any across this landscape of trauma, for it was here that Till was laid to rest – at his mother's insistence – in a public service, in an open casket: to preserve *sight*, for the world to *see*.



Marquette Park

“The people of Mississippi ought to come to Chicago to learn to hate,” said King after being struck by a rock while peacefully protesting for fair housing in Marquette Park.[69]

The MLK Living Memorial was built just three years ago, on August 5th, 2016, on the fifty-year anniversary of King’s violent attack, here, by a white mob.

Anniversaries have their way of forging reckoning in Chicago. They are constant. 2019 marks the centennial of the 1919 Race Riots (and similar riots across the United States), the 50th anniversary of the FBI’s assassination of Fred Hampton, and the five-year anniversary of the Chicago Police Officer Jason Van Dyke’s murder of Laquan McDonald. 2018 was the 50th anniversary of King’s assassination in Memphis and the subsequent riots across the South and West Sides of Chicago, and like 1919, the gravity of this anniversary multiplies when you consider the many other US cities that faced similarly destructive riots.

Perhaps these anniversaries are trivial in the sea of historic hardships borne by the South and West Sides of Chicago, where racism, poverty, and senseless violence are facts of life. But anniversaries offer ways of surfacing important historic events for discussion, and they should certainly not be missed out of ignorance.

4100 South Pulaski Road

I looked for any kind of mark or sign that would suggest what happened almost five years ago on October 20th, 2014.

On the east side of the road, across from Burger King, just north of 41st Street, I noticed a tree banded with green and blue cellophane ribbons, a handmade cross of two sticks claiming the ground below, a series of weather-worn pictures of a young woman, and the words: “Happy 21st B-Day, Lindsey.”

I pulled up the police forensic map on my phone which diagrammed the movements of the various police cars, and officers, and here I noticed a labeled building: Dunkin’ Donuts.[70]

From the memorial for Lindsey, I popped into Dunkin’ Donuts and ordered a small coffee and a plain donut. As the young Latina cashier rang me up, I very tentatively asked: “Is this where the shooting happened – the Laquan McDonald shooting?” To which she responded with a simple “no” and carried on.

I crossed Pulaski Road to return to my car and looked up again as I crossed the northbound lane.

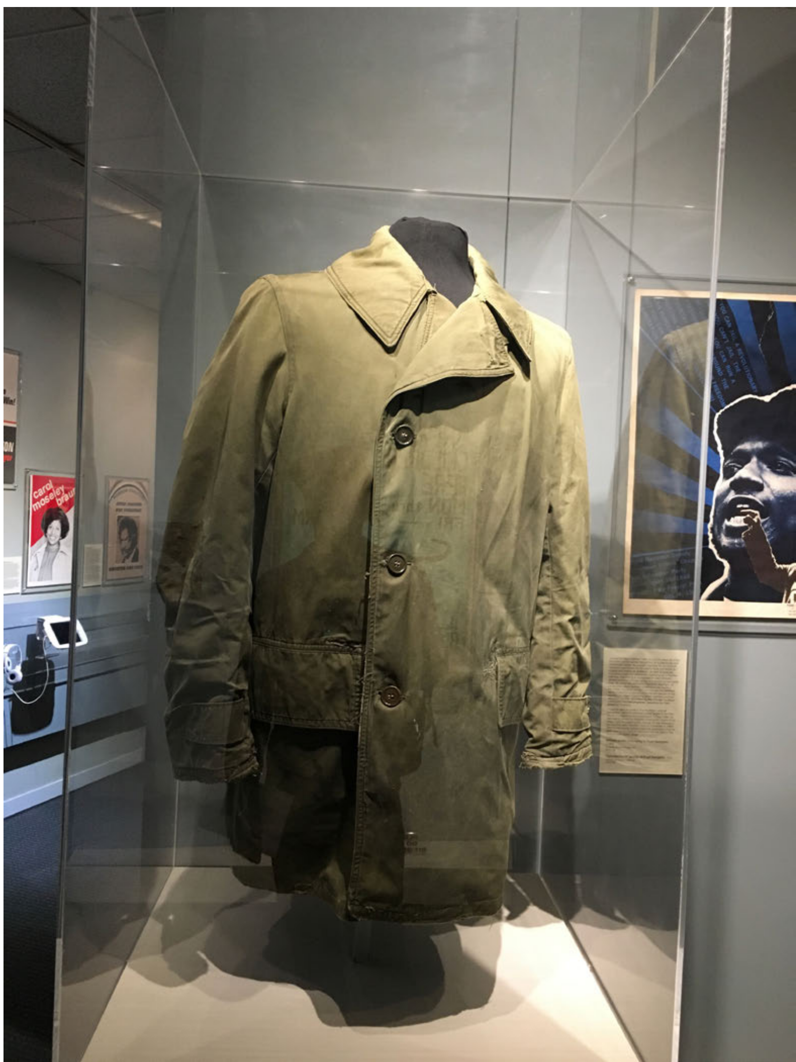
In the wake of the killing of Laquan McDonald, a Police Accountability Task Force published its *Recommendations for Reform*, which found in Chicago patterns of unjustified killings by police, discriminatory policing of black bodies, systemic racism in the Chicago Police Department, and the following determination: “The truth is that at the time Van Dyke fired the first of 16 shots, Laquan McDonald posed no immediate threat to anyone.” [71] [72]

In the Vivian Harsh Collection, they held an exhibit on the Black Panthers in a small gallery tucked beside a large, light-flooded atrium dominated by Richard Hunt's bronze-welded *Jacob's Ladder:* a figure ascending upward, and a twisted ladder descending from the skylights.[73]

Among the programs implemented by the Illinois Black Panther Party was the Free Breakfast Program. This was initiated in July of 1969, just a few months before Fred Hampton's killing. The program was headquartered at The Better Boys Foundation at 1512 South Pulaski. This was after program's initial site, a church, was raided by the Chicago Police, and all of the food, destroyed.[74]

In the DuSable Museum, Fred Hampton's Jacket looms.[75] It looms with a feeling of floating. Across the room, encased in plexi, is a pale blue sign on a plank of plywood. Here the following words are etched above a black cat, in thick black ink:

> FREE
> BREAKFAST FOR
> CHILDREN SERVED
> HERE
> MON.thru
> FRI – 7AM to 9AM



DuSable Museum of African American History

2337 West Monroe Street

“Does anybody ever come by here?” I asked of the older man on the stoop.

“From time to time,” he said. “In November or December...whenever it happened. Fred Jr. comes by. He never knew his dad. His mom was pregnant when it happened.”

Fifty years ago, Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, leaders of the Illinois Black Panther party, were killed by the Chicago Police and FBI under the direction of Daley protégé and State Attorney Edward Hanrahan. The early morning raid happened here, at 2337 West Monroe, on December 4th, 1969. Hampton and Clark were 21 and 22-years-old respectively.

Journalist and historian Gary Rivlin tells us: “Hanrahan claimed it was a miracle that none of his men were hurt, so ferocious was the hail of bullets and shotgun blasts from inside the safe house, but ballistic evidence, confirmed by a grand jury, proved otherwise. FBI ballistic experts were able to trace only a single spent bullet to a Panther gun; the other ninety or so expended bullets were fired from police shotguns, pistols, and machine guns...a mattress soaked with blood and littered with flesh proved that Hampton was still in bed when he was killed.”[76]

In the Vivian Harsh Collection at the Carter Woodson Regional Library, they exhibit a reproduction of the FBI’s ballistic site plan: black pools of ink represent the blood-soaked floors and Hampton’s blood-soaked bed, and white erasures in the walls in every direction indicate the storm of bullets.

Martin Luther King Drive

In the attic of the South Side Community Art Center a boy unfurls a chain, with each link a word: slavery, police, lynching, white supremacy.

The boy is being looked upon by a cast of ghostly dark figures, perhaps Martin, Malcolm, and a few which I cannot read. Above them are these words:

BLACK LIVES MATTER
HANDS UP DON'T SHOOT
I CANT BREATH
I AM TRAVON MARTIN.

Here, at times like this, there feels an animate spirit, weaving together the historical and the everyday, which in certain light approaches the mythological.

Legler Branch Library

“I am certain they could get more money if they sold the Picasso sculpture in Daley Plaza. Considering that only last year Mayor Emanuel and Commissioner Kelly dedicated another mural I designed downtown for which I was asked to accept one dollar…you could say the City of Big Shoulders has wrung every bit of value they could from the fruits of my labor.”[77] Marshall responded to *Art News* after hearing that the city had decided to put his painting, *Knowledge and Wonder* (which was originally commissioned by the city for the Legler Branch Library in 1995) up for auction at Christie’s in New York. The city did this with the expectation that the millions in auction proceeds would fund a facility upgrade for the library branch in West Garfield Park. The city has since pulled the painting from the auction after a torrent of criticism, including Marshall’s rebuke of the Mayor.

The walls remain dotted with holes, drilled deep, that held the anchors of *Knowledge and Wonder*, once spanning 10 x 23 feet along the second-floor balcony. The plaque was also removed, and there was no notice as to when the painting would return to the library. Around the corner, a bulletin board featured a collection of signs and drawings from children. They read:

Black Lives Matter
Black Lives Matter
BLACK LIVES MATTER.
Black Lives Matter
Black Power, Black Lives Matter
Black lives MATTERS
BLACK lives Matter
Black Lives Matter
Black Lives Matter
Black lives Matter
I MATTER!
“Be the voice not the echo” “Always speak the truth even if your voice shake.”

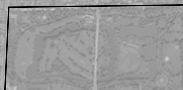
71st Street, Emmett Till Road

Simeon Wright was also just a teenager the night his cousin, who he called Bobo, was abducted by two white men — Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam — from the bed the boys shared at the Wright family home on Dark Fear Road in Money, Mississippi.[78]

There is a photo of Wright at the renaming of 71st Street in 2005 in honor of his cousin. His eyes are closed as he stands beside the sign. Following the incident at Bryant's Grocery & Meat Market, Wright and his cousins did not speak of what happened and did not tell their father Moses, fearing that he might send Emmett home to Chicago.[79]

Emmett Till Road cuts eight miles straight across the South Side: from the South Shore Cultural Center, where Barack and Michelle Obama were married in 1992; past the 63rd Street stop of the Illinois Central Railroad, where Emmett kissed his mother Mamie Till goodbye; past Oak Woods Cemetery, where Harold Washington, Ida B. Wells, Jesse Owens, and Nancy Green (born into slavery and introduced as Aunt Jemima at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893) are buried; through Grand Crossing, where I once worked as an assistant teacher in an all-black 6th grade summer school classroom; through Englewood and West Englewood, and finally ending at Kedzie Avenue on the south end of Marquette Park, where Dr. King was attacked in 1966. Each intersection: Emmett Till. A home. Emmett Till. A church. Emmett Till. Here, a school (Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Academy of Social Justice). Emmett Till.

There is a relentlessness to the marking, but it notably ends in Marquette Park (ground-zero of white supremacy, neo-Nazism,[80] and Klan activity in Chicago[81]). Marquette Park is also just a few blocks shy of Pulaski Road, where four miles north, another Chicago boy, Laquan Macdonald, was killed.



Two Chicago Boys

A railbed cuts through the heart of Englewood along Hamilton (Alexander) Park and Lily Gardens Park (named after the two grand basins of water lilies that once stood in the park, which were later replaced by the Chicago Park District with a playground).[82]

A vacant lot abuts the south end of Lily Gardens. Here Chicago Public Schools Superintendent Benjamin C. Willis devised a plan to site a campus of mobile classrooms for which he once presented a gauzy watercolor rendering before cameras and reporters at a press conference.[83]

In all, Willis created some 625 mobile classrooms (known infamously as Willis Wagons) for the city's growing black population, which he placed in vacant lots, parking lots, and adjacent to school buildings, including nearby Guggenheim Elementary School at 71st and Sangamon. One prior scheme to ease the overcrowding of Englewood's black public schools involved transferring some 435 children to a defunct warehouse at 71st and Stewart.[84] He subsequently conceived this vision for a campus beside the railbed at 73rd and South Lowe Ave.

But here, Willis's watercolor vision floundered. Here, black school children laid in the mud to block construction vehicles. Here, a young, Brooklyn-born, white undergraduate at the University of Chicago by the name of Bernie Sanders was arrested for protesting in solidarity. Here, in the heat of the summer in 1963, black bodies in protest were handled, grabbed, lifted, twisted, and beaten.

Here, again, there remains a hollow.

73rd and South Lowe Ave.

I came to Pullman to learn about the Pullman Porters and the groundwork they laid for the civil rights movement. Though the black male porters were integral to realizing George Pullman's vision of luxury travel in the United States, their families were systematically excluded from the white company town of Pullman,[85] which President Obama designated a national landmark in 2015.[86]

At the center of Pullman is the black Greenstone United Methodist Church, which keeps its doors open. When I approached the church, a man named Troy sweeping the sidewalk asked if I wanted to see the inside. "Walk right in," he said, "and stay as long as you like," as he returned to his broom, headphones, and the late-March sunshine.

Troy has been working at the church for five years now. He is from Roseland, across the tracks of the Illinois Central Railroad. Roseland is where Obama worked as a community organizer beginning in 1985, two years after the election of Harold Washington.[87] Obama's portrait along with those of the Pullman Porters spans the length of the 111th Street underpass below the tracks of the historic railbed.

Troy came and joined me in the church. He told me that he buried his mother in the church. And after years of trouble and hard times, he confided, "God gave me the keys to his house."

I asked Troy why the black community chose to congregate at the center of a town from which it was historically excluded. "It's funny isn't it," he told me, but couldn't offer much in the way of an explanation.

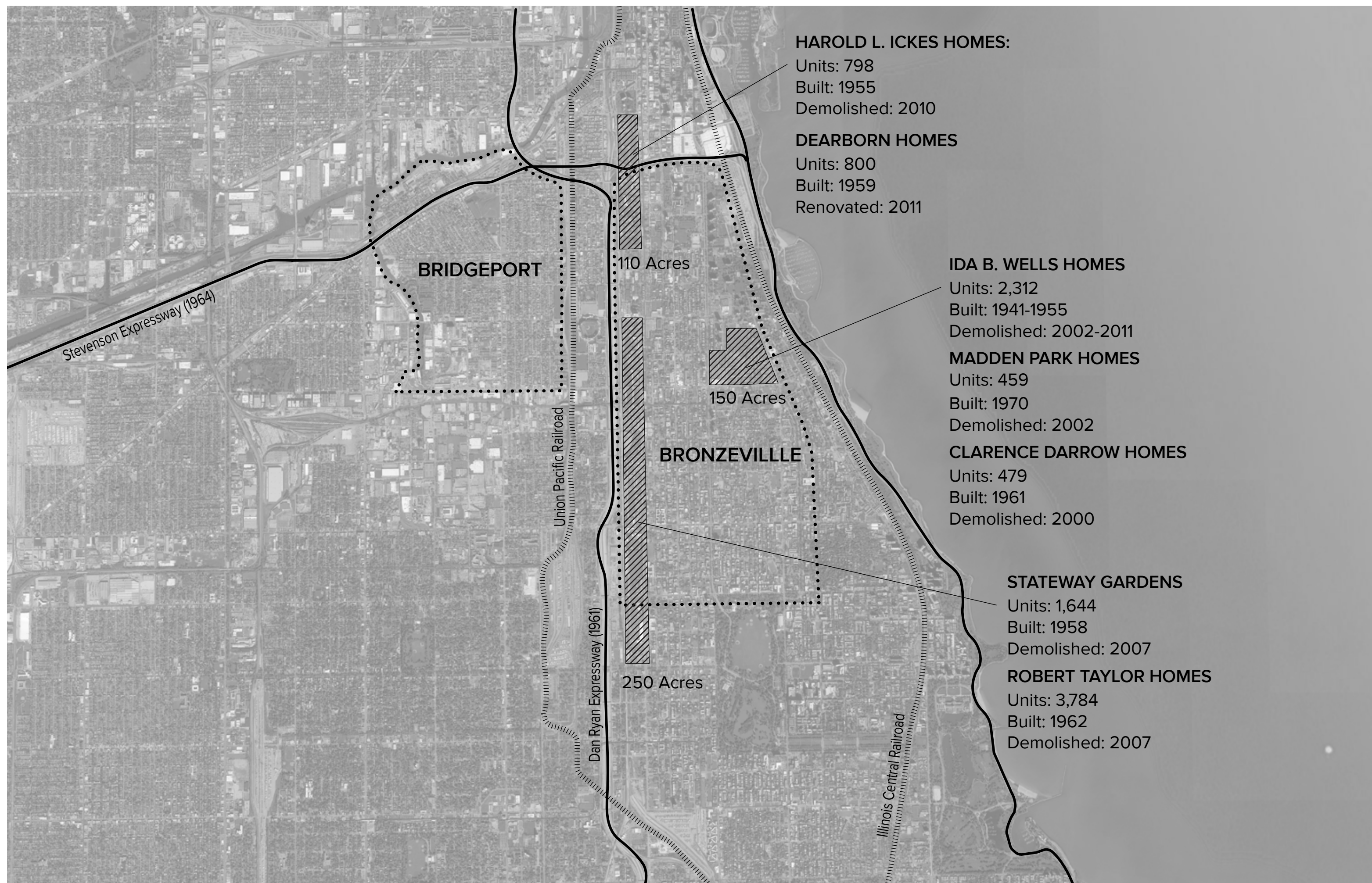
Pullman Historic District

36th and South Lowe Ave.

The Daley family lived directly across the street on South Lowe Avenue. It's a modest, quiet street running through Bridgeport, just west of the White Sox ballpark.

Bridgeport is and has been historically white and Irish Catholic, with deep ties to law enforcement. Accordingly, the majority of the bungalows on South Lowe and the surrounding streets bear some expression of solidarity.

This officer's portrait looks onto the streets of the Bridgeport neighborhood with haunting frequency – at times two or three visible at once, looking onto the street in different directions out bungalow windows. Large plastic blue ribbons are tethered up and down the block: to doors, front gates, windows, trees, street lights, and street signs. Black, white, and blue flags are hung beside the flag of the city, signs that read "WE SUPPORT FIRST RESPONDERS," and yard-signs for the local Catholic school.



Bridgeport and Bronzeville

Robert Taylor Homes

Chicago Torture Justice Center

“Tortured in Chicago,” followed by the date (or dates) during which the survivor was tortured. This was the format of the posters that were used in protest by survivors and organizers to secure reparations for the ruin caused by commander Jon Burge and his fellow officers from 1971 to 1992. These black cloth banners were displayed along a hallway at the University of Chicago’s Arts Incubator on Garfield Boulevard.[88]

The banners were one of the many devices of truth-telling used by organizers and survivors to pressure the city to pass a Reparations Ordinance on May 6th, 2015. “Whereas, the City Council wishes to acknowledge this exceedingly sad and painful chapter in Chicago’s history, and to formally express its profound regret for any and all shameful treatment of our fellow citizens that occurred,” the Ordinance states among its many damning proclamations.[89]

Signed by Mayor Rahm Emanuel, the Ordinance was framed in the entry room to the Chicago Torture Justice Center, located in a windowless community health clinic on West 63rd Street. Kitty corner were stacks of office supplies, and a “map of resilience” of the South Side: “Too often media, policymakers, and the general public associate communities of color on the South Side with violence and poverty. But we know our communities are so much more,” read the description. Small stick on dots represented sites of resilience and hope: “spaces of laughter, support, and connection.”

The creation of the Center to offer counseling services to the survivors was just one provision of the Reparations Ordinance, which also called for a public memorial for the survivors, an official apology from the City for torture under Burge’s command, the creation of a curriculum to be implemented in Chicago’s Public Schools, and free enrollment in Chicago’s City Colleges for the survivors and their family members.

But as Cindy Eigler, Co-Executive Director of the Center, explained when I visited, the Reparations Ordinance stopped short of funding the Center and the Memorial. The City has since allocated three years of funding, but that funding has now expired.[90] Meanwhile, under the purview of special prosecutors, the cases of more than 20 outstanding Burge torture survivors have been delayed and remain in prison indefinitely.[91]

The Ordinance is an important shift in the national conversation about state violence, a first step towards reconciliation, but still so far from justice.

37th and South Lowe Ave.

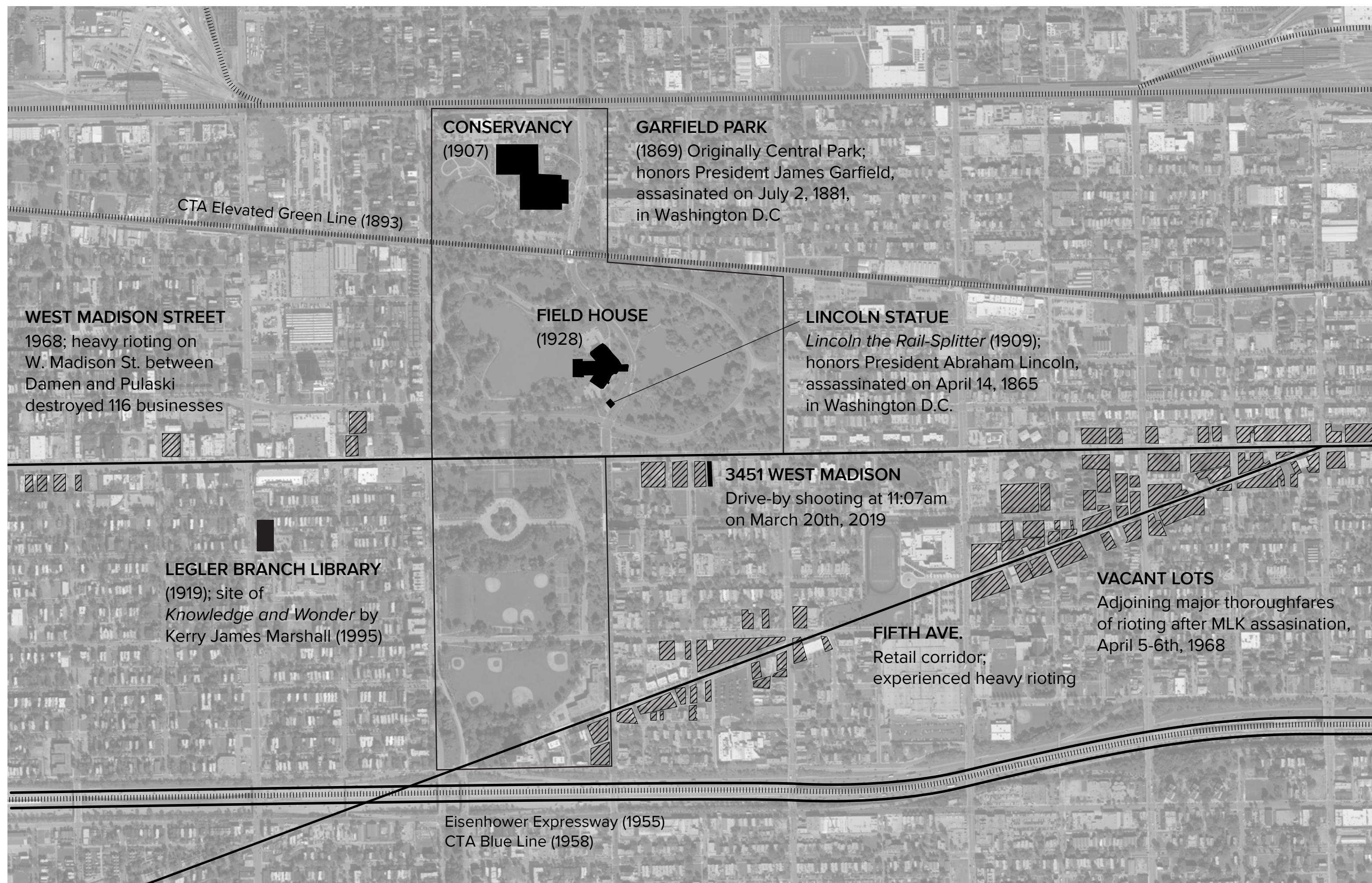
When I told Cindy about the blue ribbons on South Lowe, she offered some helpful perspective. Yes, that pain is real. Yes, there are good police officers. But the *system* of the Chicago Police is corrupt. The code of silence is corrupt. It's not just that Jon Burge was a bad cop. The system failed. Other officers fell in line and remained silent and complicit.

And the power imbalance is absolute. The police are taken care of. They have resources. Jon Burge received his pension. He served four years for obstruction of justice.

At Cindy's recommendation, I drove from the Center to the art gallery on Garfield Boulevard where the Chicago Torture Justice Memorials organization was exhibiting the proposal finalists for a memorial to the survivors. There I was able to meet Anthony, a kind, quiet, soft-spoken survivor who walks with a limp.

Anthony was at the exhibit for the afternoon to answer any questions of visitors.

He said he liked all of the proposals.



Garfield Park

29th Street Beach Marker

In its own way, it is a monument to Martin Luther King ("A RIOT IS THE VOICE OF THE OPPRESSED," it reads).

To understand the destruction of the 1968 Race Riots is to understand the closeness of King to the city. The people of Chicago felt a kinship with Dr. King. He made Chicago, however brief, his home in 1966, and he touched peoples' lives in this city during his residence. He came *here*; he rallied and marched *here*; he put his life on the line *here*; he shot pool, played with kids, and looked the city's mayor in the eye and demanded reform *here*.

But how do we memorialize the 1968 Race Riots, which have no memorial? How do we reckon with 1968? What is the relationship between this site and East Garfield Park? Is there a kinship? Does the breadth of the web of markers matter in that they reinforce narratives of systemic injustices?

In the case of the 1919 Race Riots, it was a white gang who attacked a black boy.[92] It is a glaring omission from this marker, which is even more problematic because the marker was placed by students from a high school in Elmhurst, Illinois, a predominantly white suburb (90% white and just 1.5% black).[93]

Who initiates the process of marking, and how do they do so in a manner that ensures its accuracy, power, and reach?

East Garfield Park

I'm sitting in the Garfield Park Conservatory built in 1907 by Jens Jensen. I believe it is one of the largest indoor conservatories in the United States, and I have actually been here once before, on the day before Thanksgiving in 2002, when my mom and stepdad rented one of the Conservatory rooms for their wedding.

I've heard gunshots before, most recently, one year ago, on my birthday, in New York City. I was playing basketball with my three closest friends in Nicholas Naquan Park in Brooklyn. The park, adjacent to the Gowanus Houses, was named after Nicholas Naquan Heyward Jr., who was just a young boy of thirteen when he was shot and killed by a police officer while playing with a toy gun.[94] The park, in his name, was always our favorite place to play in the mornings.

I drove through East Garfield Park on the West Side neighborhood to try to understand the impact of the 1968 riots in the area. I looked for any clear marker. There was the mural of Fred Hampton on West Madison, just a few blocks from the former headquarters of the Illinois Black Panther Party (which is now a Walgreens parking lot), and nearby, lies the site of the Black Panthers home on West Monroe, which was demolished and redeveloped as part of the Henry Horner Homes.

Along West Madison Street, I dropped into the local office of Representative Danny Davis, an eleven-term congressman. Here I spoke with Crystal, his staff assistant. She grew up on the West Side and remembered the horrors of the riots, and she also remembered Freedom Day, when she joined 250,000 public school students downtown in protest of school segregation.[95] But Crystal didn't have much in the way of concrete suggestions of places to go beyond what I had already seen, so I wandered back onto West Madison into the cold morning air.

Two police officers in black jackets with the word "SHERIFF" across their backs approached a low-rise public housing unit and knocked on the door. As I crossed to the south side of West Madison, I walked around the front of the #20 city bus. An older man and woman exited onto the sidewalk slowly, and I could hear the man inform the woman that two bodies were found in the neighborhood that morning.

From my parking spot across from the gold-domed Field House, I wandered over to a large mural on the side of a tire repair shop. On warn brick, a girl is lifted up by her father's arms with the help of bold rays of sun shining onto her. I inspected the mural, which was painted by an after-school program which I once participated in as a teenager, and then:

POP...POP...POP-POP-POP.

I knew the sound. I knew the sound from that spring day – my birthday playing basketball at Naquan. I've worked in neighborhoods where guns are a problem. I taught in a Brooklyn public school where the principal would tell the teaching staff to walk home early in pairs because she got a tip that there might be gang activity in the neighborhood.

I booked it from the mural, across the street, through the park, and straight to the Field House. As I cut through the park, sirens began to ring down Madison and through the park.

"They shooting at you?" an older guy in the park asked as I approached the gold-domed Field House.

"No," I told him, "but I was just a building-or-two down." "I wouldn't go down there," he said. "They're always shooting down there."

"How often," I asked.

"A lot – and it's about to get warm."

East Garfield Park

East Garfield Park

Garfield Park was originally Central Park (oddly Central Park Boulevard remains to the north of the park much like South Park Baptist Church remains on King Drive in Bronzeville). It was Central Park from 1869-1881 because it was at the center of the West Park System (Washington and Jackson Parks comprising the South Park System), and in 1881 it was renamed Garfield Park in honor of the name-sake President who was assassinated that year.[96]

In the Field House, I caught my breadth under the weight of the dome: gold-leafed on the exterior roof, but a muddy greenish brown in its interior. I approached an older man, a receptionist seated directly below the dome's center. I asked for the restroom, and he directed me upstairs, where I continued. Here I sat in one of the stalls and pulled up a police radio stream on my phone. I think I heard something about Madison Street.

"Hey – you're not doing any drugs in there?" the man yelled into the bathroom over the stall.

"No, sir."

I turned the police stream off, left the stall sweating, and moved onward to the Conservancy across the park to collect myself.

One privilege of whiteness is the expectation that you will come out of these situations safe because ultimately the city is a safe space for you to move through. There is, I believe, a more sinister tendency, which is the willingness to move through the city scared: in fear that you will be hurt, that you are threatened by others, and for some white people, that other is often a person of color.

When I got home later that day, I searched "East Garfield Park Shooting." This of course rendered an endless stream of horrific local news stories, and there was this:

“A man was shot in the leg Monday morning in East Garfield Park on the West Side.

The 21-year-old was in the 3400 block of West Madison at 11:07 a.m. when someone shot at him from a dark blue vehicle, according to Chicago police.

The man was taken to Mount Sinai Hospital in good condition with a gunshot wound to the right leg, police said.

Area North detectives are investigating.” [97]

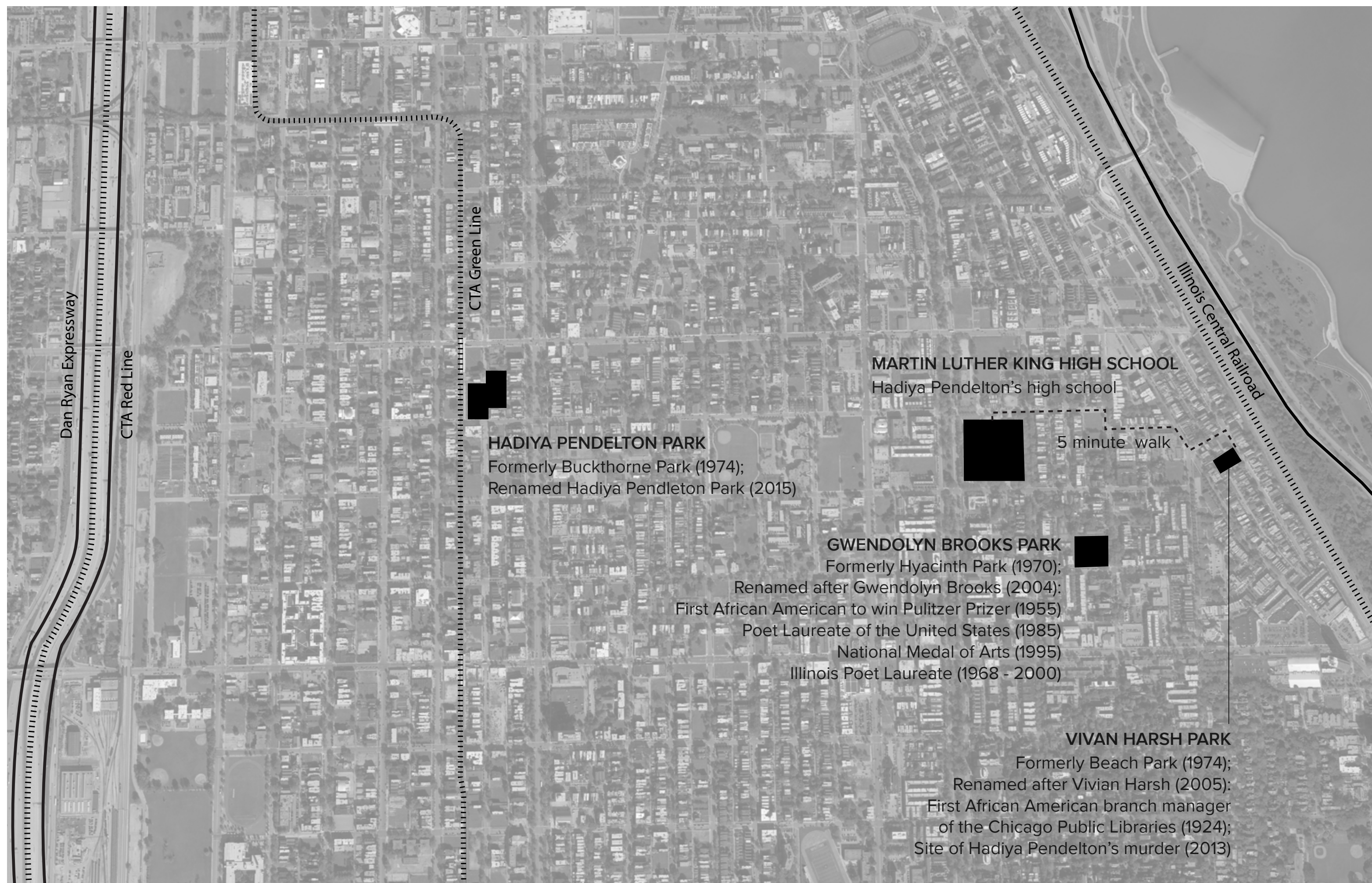
East Garfield Park

William, our tour guide and a member of Quinn's Historic Preservation Committee, took us to the Church's upstairs, which exists today as it has since the Church's move to Wabash Avenue in 1892 (save for some plush red carpeting and a layer of crumbling paint over the Church's original tin roof). The altar is the same altar where many leaders of African American politics and culture have spoken. Think of a titan of African American history, and if he or she ever came to Chicago, that person likely spoke here. William took us to a placard (dated October 8th, 1902) commemorating the visit of President William McKinley to thank the black congregants for their service to the country in the Spanish-American War.

William concluded the tour of the church with his own rendition of the following words from pan-African writer and historian Dr. John Henrik Clarke:

History is not everything, but it is a starting point. History is a clock that people use to tell their political and cultural time of day. It is a compass they use to find themselves on the map of human geography. It tells them where they are, but more importantly, what they must be.[98]

Quinn Chapel



Three Bronzeville Parks

Vivian Harsh Park

There is, in the Stony Island Arts Bank, a work called *Objects of Care: A Material Memorial for Tamir Rice*. I wanted to include mention of this because it is such a powerful object, but I do not feel comfortable sharing an image. I once tried to draw the disassembled wood gazebo to understand it, but that too felt wrong.

Vivian Harsh Park is named after the first African American branch manager of the Chicago Public Library system. Her portrait, taken by the *Chicago Defender* on the opening day of the George Cleveland Hall Branch Library, is displayed at the Carter Woodson Regional Library, where the Harsh Research Collection is held and the Harsh Reader's Circle meets on the third Saturday of each month. In her portrait, taken on January 16th, 1932, Vivian Harsh stands, radiant, supervising her fellow library clerks at the circulation desk at the center of the Hall Branch Library's dark-mahogany atrium.

The park, in her name, is where Hadiya Pendleton, a hopeful black high school student at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. College Prep was killed just days after she performed as a majorette at President Obama's Inauguration.

In his 2013 State of the Union, Obama said "Just three weeks ago, she was here, in Washington, with her classmates, performing for her country at my inauguration...And a week later, she was shot and killed in a Chicago park after school, just a mile away from my house."[99]

Samaria Rice, after her son Tamir was killed by a Cleveland Police officer while playing with a toy gun in a city park, gave artist Theaster Gates the gazebo under which Tamir was killed, for safe keeping.

At the entrance, her bronze bust: hand touching head, two fingers pressing upon her temple, with dark shadows curling into her hand. Bright light warms her hair and shoulders, and below: “Gwendolyn Brooks: The Oracle of Bronzeville. June 7, 1917 - December 3, 2000.” From her bust, a winding gravel path — a series of stepping stones, each engraved, dark and crisp, with an excerpt from one of her poems:

Grant me that I am human, that I hurt
That I can cry.

And if sun comes
How shall we greet him?
Shall we not dread him?
Shall we not fear him
After so lengthy a Session with Shade?

It pains me that I do not know more of her poems.

Small grey pebbles from the winding path scatter across the stones, forming their own constellations. The path leads to a wood platform: a safe space for contemplation and ritual. Tethered to the scaffold: colored tarps with poems, written by children. Their titles: The Goodbye, rainbow, Ode, Everyday, and a few more which I don’t remember.

Gwendolyn Brooks Park

Hadiya became a national story at the time of her killing because of the senselessness of the tragedy and the strange circumstances connecting her to the President of the United States.

I remember Hadiya Pendleton's death because I too attended President Obama's Inauguration. I ran several field offices for Obama in a suburb called Wheat Ridge, Colorado, in the closing months of the campaign. In January, I flew to Washington D.C. to reconvene and celebrate with friends and campaign coworkers. In the brisk morning we stood on the National Mall, packed close together, and watched the President forcefully appeal to the tasks of citizenship. At night, we danced, wild and joyful, at the Inaugural Ball.

The week that followed was a long, gray, hangover: back in Chicago, living at home, jobless and searching. I don't remember where or when I first encountered Hadiya's name and image, and this terrible story, but I do remember a deep despair.

For too many, her story has faded, but here, in her park, in her name, her story burns bright. Senseless gun violence is a fact of life on the South and West Sides of Chicago. Hadiya's marker is not a celebration of a life lived — because her's was a life unfulfilled. Her marker, rather, is a call to action.

Hadiya Pendelton Park

III. REFLECTIONS ON SIGHTING

Sighting the Future

King Branch Library

I. Reflections on Sighting

As I reflect on the process of sighting, I find myself returning to the words of Dr. John Henrik Clarke, quoted so elegantly by William at Quinn Chapel, standing before a marker in the upstairs sanctuary. If history is a tool (a clock, a compass) that we use to measure the condition of human endeavor, I hope I have conveyed that here in Chicago, the tool of black public history is put to work with remarkable dexterity.

Consider the aesthetic properties of the markers of black public history sighted: a bronze map of a Black Metropolis stamped into the median of a boulevard; history paintings and murals animating streets, buildings, and underpasses; roads, parks, and boulevards named and renamed, at times recalling the most traumatic of histories; ephemera and artifacts, coats and desks, which the city's black cultural institutions have collected, protected, and displayed; and of course there are those formally simple markers of stone, metal and text, which stand in the public realm, claiming ground, and testifying to history.

I am both embarrassed and amazed that each sight (with the exception of the Garfield Park Conservatory where my mother and stepfather got married in 2002), was my first sight. Though I have lived in and regularly visited Chicago for thirty years now, much of the city's black public history has until now, entirely eluded my sight. Despite having lived on both the North and South Sides, and despite being educated in good schools that championed progressive values and celebrated diversity, my local-historical knowledge was completely deficient. There were many significant gaps in my understanding of the systemic injustices borne by the city's black communities, as well as the remarkable contributions of individuals, institutions, and communities towards justice. While I cannot claim for certain the cause of this deficiency, I argue through *Sighting Public History* that the city's spatial segregation is a potent force in shaping the histories we do and do not know. This project only presents one data point (me), but I suspect, with regard to this deficiency, that I am not the only one.

If the project of public history, as Dolores Hayden argues, is to "use the forms of the city…to connect residents with urban landscape history and foster a stronger sense of belonging," to what extent is this project possible in a city that is so deeply segregated?[100] In Chicago, I argue, the project of public history is activated through processes of *sighting:* through complementary methods of photography, writing, and cartography. Black public history, I argue, is completely invisible if you are not looking, which in a city as historically segregated as Chicago is entirely possible (and for many a certainty), but this history is also everywhere when you begin to look.

So what do you see when you begin to look? Through these processes of sighting and reflecting on sighting, I have identified themes, lessons learned, and questions outlined below that should be of interest to cultural practitioners, public historians, as well as a range of public policy and city planning professionals.

Sighting Adjacencies

When you do begin to look, you see strange adjacencies. In the map *Garfield Park*, I was intrigued that the Legler Branch Library (where Kerry James Marshall's *Knowledge and Wonder* once hung and hopefully will soon return) sits quietly among the ruin and vacancy persisting from the 1968 Race Riots. Also noteworthy is the location of the *Lincoln the Rail-splitter* statue (honoring President Lincoln; assassinated on April 14th, 1865) within Garfield Park (honoring President Garfield; assassinated on July 2nd, 1881), both of which are adjacent to a lunch counter at 3451 West Madison Street, where there was a drive-by shooting at 11:07am during my visit on March 20th, 2019. These adjacencies underscore the persistence of senseless violence in American culture.

In *Two Chicago Boys*, another map, we see that *Objects of Care: A Material Memorial for Tamir Rice* (the park gazebo under which he was killed by an Ohio policeman, collected in Fall 2016 by artist Theaster Gates) lies proximate to a number of markers of Emmett Till's life in Chicago and fateful journey to Mississippi to visit his cousins in 1955. In the related photograph, *71st Street, Emmett Till Road*, we see the bent, brown sign marking Emmett Till Road in the foreground, and in the background stands the sign for the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Academy for Social Justice.

These are just some examples of the surprising convergence of histories and chronologies that variously collapse, cluster, and intersect in Chicago's built environment. These strange adjacencies — both marked and unmarked — are fruitful grounds for reflection and connection.

Sighting Uncertainty

There is uncertainty in these processes of sight, particularly sighting events that are unmarked or undeclared. How do you know you have arrived at a sight and are seeing what you are after? In *Legler Branch Library*, there was nothing to indicate that Kerry James Marshall's masterful mural had been taken down or temporarily moved. But there were holes, drilled deep into the walls forming two rectangles: one large rectangle marking the edges of the 10 x 23-foot canvas, and one small rectangle marking the placement of the expository plaque. Four spot fixtures hung above, lighting up the wall as if the canvas had never moved, but there was nothing to mark the city's controversial decision to sell the painting, nor was there any kind of note to prompt discourse about the relationship between the status of the painting and debates about access to arts and culture in the city. The merits of this kind of marker and possibility of such a marker we will turn to in "Sighting the Future," but this is to say that it is at times exceedingly difficult to know when you arrived at an unmarked sight.

In sighting the demolition of Chicago's public housing projects in *Bronzeville and Bridgeport* and *Ida B. Wells Home and Homes*, there were no markers to indicate where these buildings once stood. There were of course subtle photogenic clues in the ground-plane such as concrete paths running through vacant lots, and the contours of building foundations that emerged through the large, open swaths of grass at demolition sites, but nothing to mark the community that once lived there, the homes that were destroyed, or the failed, oppressive policies that shaped these spaces in the built environment. It was only through sifting through the Chicago Housing Authority's annual reports and plans that I was able to find basic data on the site configuration and demolition of these housing projects.[101] The maps of *Sighting Public History* don't present precise building footprints or former site plans but rather use more uncertain hatch marks to represent the persistence of vacancy in these urban spaces.

There is also uncertainty even where there are highly-didactic, expository marks. The 1919 Race Riot marker, which rests beside the lakefront bike path beside 29th Street is "dedicated to all the victims of the race riot that began near this place." With the infill of the lake to create Lake Shore Drive and Burnham Park between 1920 and 1940 (pictured in the map *Beach Battles)*, it is difficult to know exactly where along the now-buried 29th Street beach that Eugene Williams was struck and drowned.[102] But how on earth can a single precise point, a single mark in the built environment, convey the full complexity of an event as chaotic and uncertain as a riot which left 38 people dead, 537 injured, and 1,000 more homeless.[103]

These processes of sight, I argue, may still prevail in uncertain conditions. As one last example, I came to Englewood to photograph some of the schools that were at the frontlines of school segregation protests in 1963 (see *73rd and South Lowe Ave*.) It was through this search that I first sighted Emmett Till Road having no prior knowledge of its existence. Such is the nature of public history in Chicago: in searching for a particular sight you inevitably discover adjacent markings and make connections within this larger constellation. The power of photography, cartography, and reflective writing in these uncertain conditions are their collective abilities to resolve what is known, unknown, and perhaps unknowable of a sight.

Sighting Absence: Sighting Movement

There is an intentional stillness and emptiness to the photographs of *Sighting Public History*. Like Dawoud Bey's landscapes in *Night Coming Tenderly, Black*, these are still images largely devoid of bodies: playgrounds without children, paths without pedestrians, galleries without viewers, and walls without paintings. For example, the photograph and writing of *South Side Community Art Center, Third Floor*, is a meditation on Charles White. It is about his body and the way he carried himself. It is about the cultural leadership he practiced. These are photographs of the built fabric and cultural fabric of place, but they are absent bodies; they are absent the journeying and movement which they imply.

There are a few photographs with bodies. *2237 West Monroe* pictures a man who lives next to the lot number where Fred Hampton and Mark Clark were assassinated by the Chicago Police Department at the direction of the highest levels of law enforcement.[104] This is a photograph of the present, but it is my intention for it to as well be a view of the past. Just as Dawoud Bey's *Birmingham Project* portraits invoke the tragedy of the 16th Street Church Bombings, *2337 West Monroe* invokes the tragic death of two young men at the hands of the police.

Movement is implied differently in the maps: it is found in the lines of roads, highways, and trains that cut through the geographies presented. In *Garfield Park,* the Stevenson Expressway moves past the region of the city most impacted by the 1968 Race Riots. In *Bridgeport and Bronzeville,* these lines of movement run between deeply segregated white and black neighborhoods, and along a corridor of demolished public housing projects. These lines of highways and railroads are both physical barriers between neighborhoods that may obstruct sight of public history, but they are also axes of high velocity — of the city moving past and around these sights.

The photographs also sight my movement; they picture my subjective view and my own deeply subjective endeavor to understand Chicago's sights of black public history. They chart my own journey, cameraphone in hand, trying to gather visual evidence of history in these uncertain conditions. These photographs variously sight histories of built worlds that no longer exist (large, demolished public housing projects), traumatic events that destructively transpired across regions of the city (the 1919 and 1968 Race Riots), embedded community organizations that have shaped the cultural fabric of the city through time (the DuSable Museum and the SSCAC), and individuals who are no longer living (from Frederick Douglass to Tamir Rice). These photographs, as Siri Hustvedt describes of Teju Cole's *Blind Spot,* aspire to be studies "of a person's embodied consciousness in relation to the visible world." [105]

These are photographs of my conscious searching for answers of black history in Chicago in the visible, built world of the city. Like Cole, the only thing that I am certain of are the presence of blind spots in human fields of vision. These blind spots manifest in the photographs and maps, between text, photograph, and map, and from location to location across the city. But that is precisely the point. The black experience in Chicago is multitudinous. The record of public history is of course incomplete. All I can claim in these maps, photographs, and writing, is my own movement and journeying in which I try to understand these histories and their material conditions in the built environment.

Illinois Central Railroad

Sighting Trauma: Sighting Strength

This project does not shy away from examining the legacies of injustice and trauma in Chicago. As I have argued in “Bounds of Sight,” this kind of study is both ethical and necessary among white scholars (and white Americans more generally). It would be a grave misreading, however, to suggest that *Sighting Public History* is only concerned with black trauma – or even worse – that it is exploitative of black trauma, exhibitionist in nature, or representative of a tragic view of the city.

There are moments of focused attention towards the deepest of traumas. The photograph *71st Street, Emmett Till Road* examines a trauma as profound as any, but the subject of my focus here is the artifact of public history: the serial renaming of 71st Street, eight miles across the city. Spanning many neighborhoods, diverse communities, and the fields of vision of countless people, Emmett Till Road claims space for truth-telling and historical reflection. It is a gesture of remarkable strength.

The death of Tamir Rice is every bit as traumatic (and as I have acknowledged, I will never fully understand this trauma). But Samaria Rice’s gift of the gazebo under which her son Tamir was killed, “for safe keeping,” is a gesture of remarkable strength and a testament to the power of public history. To sight such strength requires deep compassion and humility.

I would finally consider the sight of Hadiya Pendleton, which was strangely, deeply personal. It was traumatic, and I remember that trauma. It is important that her story is told and remembered. And I do believe, with great thought and consideration, that I have helped tell her story through the sighting of her public history. I submit that photographs and maps such as these – pictured with care and humility, from the subjective vantage – act as measures of truth-telling and narrative-building, and this is precisely the strength of public history. This is a tradition that I have learned from the city through the study of its visual vernacular.

Returning to President Obama, I am not so sure that Chicago does *force you to see*. If my own experience of sighting public history is at all generalizable, the spatial segregation of the city may severely diminish access to sight. The built fabric of the city often makes it very difficult to see. One also has to *want* to see, and even still, one sees through the lens of individual subjectivity. However, through active modes of sighting (photography, cartography, and reflective writing), the city may *invite you to see*. The city may invite you to see and feel these intersections of trauma and strength manifest in the works and institutions of public history.

Quinn Chapel

II. Sighting the Future

Developing and Redeveloping Sights

When Dr. King moved with his family to Chicago to transition his agenda from civil rights towards one of broader economic justice, he chose 1550 South Hamlin Ave. in North Lawndale as the headquarters of his campaign. He chose to live here, in a tenement, in solidarity with black Chicagoans who lived in deplorable conditions due to discriminatory housing practices. The third-floor tenement where they lived was ultimately demolished in 1991, after suffering further damage in the 1968 Race Riots. The lot stood vacant among the 2,000 vacant lots in North Lawndale until 2006, when the Lawndale Christian Development Corporation assembled a broad coalition (including the City government) to redevelop the site.[106] The redeveloped subsidized housing opened in 2011 and includes a number of markers (as well as a ground floor exhibit) to further understanding of King's legacy in North Lawndale.

The case of the Dr. King Legacy Apartments raises important questions about how cities engage in ethically redeveloping sites that carry important historical legacies, while still preserving elements of *sight*. Consider, for example, any number of the vacant lots sighted, from *73rd and South Lowe Ave*. (the frontlines of 1960s school segregation protests) to *East Garfield Park* (much of which remains ravaged by the 1968 Race Riots). An important component of ethical redevelopment and investment in these areas, I believe, are endeavors to further sight and local-historical literacy.

Many sights of public history, marked and unmarked, directly implicate the City in propagating oppression, violence, and deeply discriminatory policies. In looking forward, what is the role of cities and governments in engaging in historical marking as a process of reflection and reconciliation? In the 2015 Reparations Ordinance, the City Council called for a memorial to be constructed in memory of the survivors of torture at the hands of the Chicago Police Department, and yet, as discussed in *63rd and South Lowe Ave*., the City stopped short of funding such a memorial, putting the onus on the survivors themselves and advocates to raise money for their own memorial.

In *Ida B. Wells Home and Homes*, I have marked the future location of the to-be-constructed Ida B. Wells memorial in the redeveloped site of the Ida B. Wells Homes. Is the onus of historical reflection here again on the community and memorial organizers (Ida B. Wells' granddaughter Michelle Duster), or is there the possibility of the city acknowledging oppressive state policies and actions by serving as active supporters and stakeholders of such memorials?

MLK Legacy Apartments

City officials and the city government (through the Department of Planning and Development and the Commission on Chicago Landmarks), I argue, can play a vital role in these processes of historical marking and reconciliation. Consider for example, *Major Roads*, which includes Martin Luther King Drive, Emmett Till Road, and the newly named Ida B. Wells Drive. Ida B. Wells Drive is the first downtown street to be named after an African American Woman,[107] and the city has notably chosen a street to rename that once honored John Tyler, a former United States President turned secessionist.[108] Cultural shifts in representation are gradual and require labor. Consider the simple fact that it took until 2018 for the New York Times to publish an obituary for Ida B. Wells.[109]

Names and markers are not trivial matters: they carry historical traumas and legacies; personal and collective memories; they are fought for by families and communities, and they have the power to shift cultural representation in the built environment and deepen understanding in a society. Every mark tells a story, and communities exhaust time, money, and energy to mark these histories in the built environment. I hope I have conveyed the merits of broad city participation in such processes.

Sighting the Obama Presidential Center (OPC)

As discussed in *Roberts Temple Church of God*, one of the provisions of the pending OPC Community Benefits Agreement is the placement of a historical marker at the 63rd Street Metra Station, where Emmett Till departed to Mississippi in 1955. This provision raises important questions about how the OPC, which will attract hundreds of thousands of visitors annually,[110] will relate to the vast and complex constellation of black public history on the South Side and in the city beyond.

How deeply has the OPC looked towards this constellation? What has been their methodology for understanding the cultural inventory of these sites? How might the OPC visitor journey extend beyond the Center towards other community organizations engaged in cultural production and public history work, from the Stony Island Arts Bank to the South Side Community Art Center? What scope of urban-historical research is required for a deeply aspirational project like the OPC to succeed in a complex cultural context?

As one example, consider the simple fact that the OPC, pending litigation brought on by parkland advocates, will lie within Jackson Park, which is named after Andrew Jackson, former United States President and architect of the Indian Removal Act of 1830.[111] If the mission of the OPC is ultimately to “remind young visitors…that their potential is limitless,” how would the OPC surface for discussion its physical presence in a park of such a problematic name?[112] Where and how could the OPC discuss the name of Jackson Park to engage in powerful acts of reflection and truth-telling?

There is compelling evidence that the Obama Foundation has taken positive steps to embed their work within the cultural fabric of the city. In the Summer of 2018, when the Obama Foundation brought its class of Obama Scholars to Chicago for a leadership training, the OPC staff led the international cohort of graduate students on a tour across the South Side, with stops in Jackson Park, Historic Pullman, and the Lilydale First Baptist Church, where President Obama worked as a community organizer beginning in 1985.[113] In another instance, when the Obama Summit convened in November 2018, the Foundation sent Summit participants in small groups to historic community restaurants across the city, including sites in Bridgeport and Bronzeville.[114] This spirit of programming, which reaches far-beyond the planned campus of the OPC, positions the organization as an important catalyst for exchange and movement through the historically segregated city.

I have argued through *Sighting Public History*, that markings of public history in the built environment belong to a visual vernacular that requires a specific kind of searching and visual literacy. How might the OPC help visitors and program participants develop greater literacy in the markings of public history?

Ultimately, these questions I ask of the OPC are generalizable to the broader cultural sector: how can a large, ambitious, aspirational cultural project ethically, responsibly situate their work in a complex historical and cultural context? How can sites of public history – marked and unmarked, mediated and unmediated – offer organizations like the OPC pedagogic opportunities to consider questions of history, identity, space, and race, that are intimately connected to their mission. While I will stop short of offering an actionable methodology, I offer the following plea to those working in the cultural sector, including staff at the Obama Presidential Center: *look*.

Look for markings of history manifest in the built environment. Look for visual evidence of oppressive social structures and traumatic historical legacies, but also look for the way these legacies have been resisted in the built environment. Look at the histories of the city that are and aren't present, and look at how they are present. In Chicago, this kind of searching makes visible and material specific ways that the city has been shaped by systemic injustices, but also its movements towards justice through political and community organizing, activism, and cultural work.

Look, I ask, because this kind of searching, I hope I have conveyed through *Sighting Public History*, is deeply clarifying. This work has changed how I view the city. It has changed me, and I do believe it has the power to change others engaged in community and cultural work.

A Final Note on Sighting

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention some lessons learned from attending *Vision & Justice: a Convening*, which brought together a rarefied, deeply accomplished group of black academics, artists, and social justice advocates to build upon the conversation started in the landmark *Vision & Justice* issue of *Aperture*. The convening took place in the Old Radcliffe Gymnasium, and in the sanctum of Sander's Theatre, where I once took an introductory economics class as a junior at Harvard College. It is easy to take for granted what hallowed grounds these are.

I rose that rainy morning to the howling trumpet of Wynton Marsalis; Teju Cole reverentially discussing the works of photographer LaToya Ruby Frazier; a dialogue between David Adjaye, visionary architect of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, and Theaster Gates, the founder of the Stony Island Arts Bank in Chicago. Young activists Naomi Wadler and Yara Shahidi took the stage and implored the audience to always ask "what do you see? And what do you not see? *Who* do you see, and who do you not see?"

Chicago's cultural imprint was all over the event in exciting ways. It makes me wonder what so many of the city's visionary artists and organizers would think:

> What would Charles White think to see Carrie Mae Weems and Vijay Iyer in the Old Radcliffe Gymnasium deliver a performance of *Grace Notes Reflections for Now*, a meditation and offering to the Emanuel Nine and those lives lost in acts of police violence?
>
> What would Margaret Burroughs, founder of the South Side Community Art Center and DuSable Museum think to see Theaster Gates discussing his chosen artistic form: *democratic space*, or David Adjaye discussing the task of designing the experience of black history on the National Mall?
>
> What would Carter Woodson, the second black man to receive a PhD in History from Harvard, think of seeing Professor Henry Louis Gates, seated beside visionary director Ava DuVernay, considering together the future of black cinema and black representation?
>
> What would Vivian Harsh say if she were up on stage with Drew Gilpin Faust, the first woman president of Harvard University, and Wynton Marsalis, patriarch of American Jazz, discussing the tasks of cultural citizenship?
>
> How would mighty Gwendolyn Brooks respond to hear the poet Elizabeth Alexander so forcefully recite her poem, "The Boy Died in My Alley," as an introduction to criminal justice warrior Bryan Stevenson's transcendent keynote address.

So many things I heard over the course of the convening affirmed what I believe is the spirit of the project of sighting black public history:

> "Never run from what is hard," Wynton Marsalis told the audience so encouragingly.
>
> "Pictures come, and they let us get to work," said art historian Sarah Lewis.
>
> From David Adjaye, "public memory doesn't come up in a value-engineering contract," but ""we have to live together and learn to negotiate space and identity."
>
> "We can't get to justice without doing things that are uncomfortable," insisted Bryan Stevenson, as he called for a movement towards truth and reconciliation in the United States.

This convening gives me hope. These brilliant, visionary people give me hope. Their strong voices give me hope. The inseparable fields of vision and justice have never felt closer, and I do believe their union is a worthy calling.

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