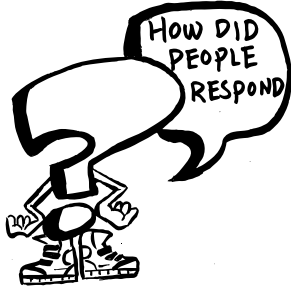


## Welcome to Part 4 of 5



Chicago's landscape had dramatically changed between 1920-'70 especially in and around the central areas (downtown and surrounding areas) and along the lakefront communities. Then, a barrage of strategic real estate developments supported by **Richard J. Daley's administration** were launched to "renew" the city and create "growth." In the process, displacement of mostly Black residents, along with many other Mexican, Puerto Rican, Asian, Irish, Italian, Polish, and poor White southerners occurred. This land, dubbed as "prime property" and soon worth billions, became a great speculative venture for some and survival for many.

In order to entice White middle class relocation into the city abandoned during suburban-bound White flight, Mayor Daley and corporate / real estate leaders set forth elaborate and expensive cultural, educational, architectural and transportation improvements. Corporate leaders, planners, and politicians saw this as vital to increasing Chicago's tax base, boosting the tourist economy, and preserving a White presence in a city that had risen to over 65% people of color. Between 1950 and 1970, Chicago's White population, mostly middle class, decreased by more than 20 percent. They fled just as **Black, Latino, Asian and American Indian** migrations increased. Possibly jolted by these numbers, corporate leaders and the Daley administration took action.

One result of these actions? "Between 1941 and 1965, 160,000 Blacks and 40,000 poor whites were displaced from their homes by freeway construction and city development projects. Only 3,100 received replacement public housing," explains Amy Sonnie and James Tracy in *Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power*, a book that helps document poor White and Black unity against urban renewal.

By the 1970s, many communities were in transition and turmoil. People were also fighting back. Who? How? Why? Take a look. We'll let you decide...

## Large Scale Public Housing is Built (1950s): Why?

"They look like horrible prisons," remarked a Northwestern University student, during a rainy day bus tour of Chicago while heading down the State Street corridor in 1999. "I can't believe people have to live like this. It's like Indian reservations in the middle of the city. Who could build this trap and why?" asked the dismayed eighteen year old from Iowa, as the tour bus drove past thirty blocks of rundown cement high rises lined with fenced-in porches, metal doors, and institutional designs resembling prison cell blocks.

Coming off the Great Depression, public housing had been built as early as 1937 in Chicago, with 7,644 units in existence by 1946. Due to overwhelming racial pressures, about 4,000 of these units segregated Blacks into the **Ida B. Wells, Robert H. Brooks, and Altgeld Gardens** housing projects. By 1976, about 40,000 CHA units would dot Chicago - housing about 5% of the total population. Unfortunately, it wasn't the housing boom one might think. In the case of the Ida B. Wells Homes, the same amount of units were demolished as were built - resulting in 17,544 applicants for only 1,662 units. While the Black community desperately needed every unit of housing they could obtain, regardless of location, public housing ended up serving particular social, economic and political desires by particular White leaders, such as Marshall Field's executive Earl Kribben, institutional leaders from the University of Chicago and middle class White ethnic groups.

As we have seen, creating a second Black "ghetto" by public housing was the result of many circumstances, people, and plans. It started with private developers and downtown interests deciding that Black families, community life, and cultural institutions were not desirable near Chicago's valuable downtown shopping district and lakefront lands, regardless



of neighborhood vitality and property upkeep. It continued with real estate agents as “**panic peddlers**” scaring Whites in bordering communities around the Black Belt to never sell to Blacks. Once a Black family moved in, agents pushed Whites to sell low, then turned around and sold them to Black families at two to three times the value of the property - exploiting both seller and buyer at once. **Restrictive covenants** were utilized by middle and upper class White communities to guarantee the exclusion of Black families in places like Hyde Park and Uptown. For those White working class communities with less legal capabilities (e.g., South Deering, Bridgeport, Airport Homes), acts of violence, rioting, and other forms of intimidation were the weapons of choice to keep Blacks from moving in and even from walking the neighborhood streets.

These combined acts of aggression compounded overcrowded conditions and led to a

crisis in housing for Black Chicagoans - with Latino, Asian, and poor White families facing similar conditions. Many people organized for housing dignity. Larger groups such as the NAACP and Urban League, along with smaller groups, took housing issues to the streets, the courts, and newspapers. The man-made housing crisis, however, opened the political doors and economic coffers for uprooting, displacing, and further segregating thousands of Black families into a tiny, yet elongated strip of land on State Street.

In private meetings with Chicago’s power players to the halls of the State Assembly and the U.S. Congress arrived laws that, as mentioned before, expedited “slum clearance,” “relocation,” “redevelopment,” and “urban renewal.” These include legislation passed in 1947 (**Redevelopment and Relocation Act**, Illinois) and in 1949 (**Housing Act**, United States Congress). Guided by corporate leaders and

Stateway Gardens and Robert Taylor Homes looking south; the largest single stretch of public housing in the world; evictions had begun by 1981; photo by John White, CST.

