Urban school violence is common and when it becomes fatal constitutes a neglected theoretical counterpoint to highly publicized rural and suburban school shootings. Joseph White shot and killed Delondyn Lawson and injured two other youths at Tilden High School in the last fatal Chicago school shooting nearly a decade ago. This event was portrayed in extensive news coverage as random and senseless and by a jury trial as a first-degree homicide that was inexcusable as self-defense. Journalism often is described as the first draft of history, and trials often are seen as the more definitive record. Yet neither journalism nor trials are comprehensive sources of social history, especially of social conflict. The authors demonstrate that journalistic accounts can prejudge and stereotype lethal school violence, that trials often further depict these conflicts in legally authoritative but restricted and misleading ways, and that an exclusive focus on rural and suburban settings obscures a broader theoretical understanding of deadly school shootings.

First and Last Words
Apprehending the Social and Legal Facts of an Urban High School Shooting

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INTRODUCTION

Early studies (McGee and DeBernardo 1999; Vossekuil et al. 2000) of relatively infrequent rampage-like school shootings involving multiple victims in rural and suburban areas have reinforced public misperceptions of fatal school violence. These false perceptions are aggravated by misleading media coverage and court trials that confuse and confound the fact patterns of rural, suburban, and urban settings. A study by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (see Anderson et al. 2001) recently has provided a more comprehensive account that indicates that school shootings with single victims are much more common

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than those with multiple victims and that these single-victim incidents overwhelmingly involve non-White victims and offenders in urban settings.

The tendency of the public and the media to neglect urban school shootings involving individual non-White victims recently was noted by a committee established by the National Research Council [NRC] to conduct a Study of Youth Violence in Schools (see Moore et al. 2002:ES-1). The committee included two urban school shootings among six new case studies it commissioned and further noted that the urban and nonurban school shootings were qualitatively different. The school shooting at Tilden High School in Chicago that is the basis of this article is one of the two urban case studies undertaken for the NRC committee.

The Chicago shooting is usefully thought of as a "negative" or "deviant" case in the sense that it presents a contrast to the more dominant public image of school shootings as rural and suburban phenomena. The contrast provided by this case is an important corrective to the equation of school shootings in the public mind with the psychological problems of White rural and suburban males, and it brings into fuller view the vast majority of urban school shootings that involve non-White victims. Most significantly, this Chicago study indicates a fundamental misunderstanding of American school shootings that results from a diminution by the media and legal system of the role of social context in these deadly inner-city events. The central point of the case study reported in this article is that media and trial depictions routinely distort and obscure a larger sociological understanding of school shootings.

If the social context of the Tilden High School shooting could have been more clearly developed in the media coverage of this event and in the subsequent trial, it is likely that the defendant, Joseph White, would have been convicted and sentenced for a lesser charge than first-degree murder. We develop this point by reviewing the media depiction of this Chicago shooting as an unprovoked random and rampage-like attack by an African American teenager who willfully brought gang violence into his school. We then recount the further hardening of Joseph White's public image through the rejection in the trial, verdict, and sentencing of his stripped-down claim of self-defense. The social context of White's resort to the use of a gun at school was deemed

largely irrelevant for his legal defense. We finally demonstrate with a case study approach that Joseph White's behavior was a predictable if not normal (and albeit ill-advised) product of the historically rooted gang conflict that formed parameters of his everyday life within and outside of his South Side Chicago school.

This was the background to Joseph White's resorting to bringing a gun to school and the context in which he became criminally responsible for the illegal possession and use of this gun in an act that is legally most appropriately described as voluntary manslaughter or second-degree murder. A meaningful consideration of social context, acknowledging that White himself was a target of gang violence, might have called into question the appropriateness of a first-degree murder conviction and made a lesser charge and a reduced exposure at sentencing more likely. Before elaborating these points, we first explain how we use the Tilden High shooting to make these points in a negative or deviant case study.

The next section of the article discusses the problem of deviant cases. The following three sections analyze the Tilden High shooting from three different perspectives. First, we examine the treatment of the shooting within the news media. Second, we analyze how the shooting was presented and understood at Joseph White's trial. Finally, we examine the shooting in terms of the specific social and geographical situation in which it occurred. We conclude the article by discussing the need to examine and contest accounts of events by understanding the social processes and contexts that they are a part of.

STUDYING DEVIANT CASES

Urban school shootings more often are connected to specific interpersonal, group-based status disputes, in which the parties are looking to settle a score that produces a single victim rather than involving a lashing out at an institution more broadly, or at an unclearly defined group, with the consequence of producing multiple victims. The interpersonal nature of the disputes that often lead to urban school shootings by minority youth brings contextual considerations of group process and social structure into the picture. Contextual considerations are not well developed in media and legal accounts of these shootings. In this

section, we explain how a qualitative case study focusing on a negative or deviant case can correct and provide a more comprehensive account of the social sources of urban school shootings.

Journalism frequently is described as the first draft of history, while court trials and legal verdicts often are treated as more authoritative historical records. As Michael Schudson (1992) noted, however, journalism and trials are "cultural vehicles" through which past events (in his case Watergate) travel and become part of our collective perception and memory, "sometimes with fateful consequences for public understanding of subsequent events" (p. 66). At both the national and local level, commonsense and taken-for-granted assumptions are imposed on events to provide satisfying explanatory accounts of newsworthy events to a collective audience. In the Chicago school shooting analyzed below, the scripted story is that an unprovoked youthful shooter brought a gun to school with the wild and willful intent to kill fellow students.

Although we will cast doubt on the sufficiency and validity of media and legal accounts of the Chicago school shooting, the fact that such accounts are available, and that these materials can be compared and contrasted with school, police, and court records and interviews with participants as well as observers of these events, means that there are opportunities for a mixture of methodological approaches in case studies of school shootings. The potential use of mixed methods and a holistic focus on selected events makes the case study approach uniquely attractive for in-depth analysis of negative or deviant cases like urban school shootings. As Giordano (1989) pointed out, "every theory has negative cases. Rather then ignore them, analyzing their characteristics in more detail offers a useful mechanism for refining and extending a given perspective" (p. 278).

Charles Ragin (1999:1137; see also 1987) observed that the case-oriented strategy "is centrally concerned with making sense of a relatively small number of cases . . . because they are substantively or theoretically significant in some way." The case-oriented strategy contrasts with a variable-oriented approach that is "centrally concerned with the problem of assessing the relationship between aspects of cases across a large sample of 'observations,' usually with the goal of specifying general patterns that hold for a population." In the current instance, the case study approach to a fatal urban school shooting with

a non-White perpetrator and victim is chosen for both substantive and theoretical reasons: as a means of moving beyond the widely shared empirical assumptions and psycho-dynamic accounts of fatal school shootings that are restrictively focused on the status problems of marginalized White, rural, and suburban youth. A combination of urban with rural and suburban case studies can broaden the contexts of our explanatory accounts in theoretically and substantively important ways (Eckstein 1975; Yin 1994), elaborating and diversifying our national understanding of lethal school violence.

Ragin further emphasized that to reveal the substantively and theoretically meaningful detail in the case study approach, it is often necessary to triangulate methods and data sources. The concept of triangulation (Webb et al. 1966) is a metaphor borrowed from the use of multiple reference points for navigation and military purposes (Smith 1975). Jick (1979) reiterated the importance of the triangulated case study approach in diverse contexts for the realization of explanatory goals, emphasizing that "the deviant or off-quadrant dimension of a phenomenon" can lead to "an enriched explanation of the research problem" (p. 609). Ragin (1994) added that in this kind of qualitative research, "there is a reciprocal clarification of the underlying character of the phenomena under investigation and the theoretical concepts that they are believed to exemplify" (p. 103).

Although quantitative studies may often defer to the logic of triangulation by introducing some qualitative case material in interpreting their numerical results, the case study approach gives priority to qualitative materials, usually through interviews and observations. The emphasis in this work is often on "thick" and "holistic" description, with particular attention to "how" as well as "why" events happen. This emphasis may be especially important in revealing how concerns that lead to fatal shootings in urban settings differ from those that provoke such outcomes in rural and suburban settings. Below, we suggest the status concerns that provoke lethal outcomes in these settings differ in group-related aspects that may only become fully apparent as urban cases are brought into comparison with cases in rural and suburban settings.

These are the priorities we bring to the study of a fatal, 1992 school shooting on the South Side of Chicago. First, we recount the evolving coverage of the shooting as a news story that began with a misleading

and individualized image of a random and senseless rampage that more accurately reflects White, rural, and suburban shootings than the urban African American reality of the South Side of Chicago. Next, we combine interviews with the defense lawyers in this case with court transcripts to describe how the legal rendering of the case through the trial and sentencing of the perpetrator, Joseph White, narrowed its policy implications and further obscured its social and structural understanding. Then, we combine community, census, and justice system data with more than 30 interviews we conducted over the past year to elaborate the racial, economic, and historical context of this shooting and to provide a broader social and historical framework for understanding the group-based status conflict the shooting involved. Quotes taken from our own interviews are unreferenced, while quotes taken from news accounts and trial testimony are referenced by date to their original sources (see the appendix for a listing of the news accounts and trial testimony).

NEWS REPORTS OF AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY

We trace in this section the heavy press coverage that cast a 1992 multiple-victim shooting at Chicago's Tilden High School as a random and senseless attack by an African American teenager, acting alone and without provocation. The description of the reckless and lethal nature of this attack and the absence of reported information about the social context of the shooting other than vague allusions to gang membership facilitated a charge of the 15-year-old shooter as an adult with first-degree murder. We will see next that the depiction of the case in the press combined stereotypical negative images of both random, rampage-like, rural-suburban school shootings and urban gang violence with little or no attention to the systematic vulnerabilities of being an African American teenager and coming of age with gangs and guns on the South Side of Chicago.

Although no student has been fatally shot in a Chicago public school since 1992, the last two fatal shootings occurred in high schools on the South Side of Chicago during a 10-day period from November 10 to 20, 1992. A youth accidentally shot himself at school in the first incident. The second incident is the focus of this study; it resulted

in the death of a 15-year-old boy, the serious wounding of a second youth, and a third youth who was shot in the foot. The youth who was killed, Delondyn Lawson, was identified in the first front-page news stories (November 20, 1992), while the shooter and other two victims were not.

The initial new stories came out on Friday, the day of the shooting. They reported the shooting as a response to a skirmish about a gambling debt. The gambling involved a dice game earlier in the week in a school washroom. The shooter was described as having "fired a handgun about four times randomly toward the skirmish." The attribution of randomness to the event suggested a rampage-like imagery that would have been familiar to readers from accounts of rural and suburban school shootings. Two unidentified suspects were reportedly arrested, and it was noted that metal detectors at the school were not functioning on the day of the shooting because they were being used on selected days to minimize cost and disruption.

The next day, Saturday, the story was again on page one, and the headline read, "Even Safety of Schools Shattered, Student Slain, 2 Others Wounded in Hallway at Tilden" (November 21, 1992). The story was built around the victim's mother, Linda Lawson, who asked, "What was I supposed to do with a 15-year-old? I drove him there in the morning, and I was there at 2:02 p.m. to pick him up. What else can you do? You have to send them to school." The story noted that Delondyn Lawson had been fatally shot in the back alongside the two other injured youths.

Joseph White was identified in this story as the alleged shooter and as a 15-year-old freshman at Tilden now charged in adult court with first-degree murder. He had fled from the school, pursued by other youth and a security guard, and hid under a nearby back porch before being found and arrested. The story again mentioned the dice game and now briefly the possibility of gang involvement but with little or no elaboration of the latter theme other than leaving the impression that Joseph alone might have been a gang member. Delondyn Lawson was described as a "great dancer and funny," a boy who liked football and video games and who was trying to stay away from gangs.

The White case marked the entry of Mayor Richard Daley into the matter of urban school shootings. The mayor criticized the random use of metal detectors that was defended by the police and schools,

arguing that the practice was insufficient. "They have to realize you have to run them every day," the mayor insisted," because if we run them in the federal building and in the state criminal justice system, you can't get (guns) in there." The mayor asked, "What's more important? Children are more important than anybody else in society. And that shooting, the death of a young child, directly affects everyone." The mother of a sophomore girl at Tilden elaborated the headline of the story by observing that, "It's bad enough they're (the gangs) taking violence into the neighborhoods, but when they're taking it into the schools, it's bad." She emphasized that schools are different, "They're just here to learn. They're not here to be dying." Between the mayor and the mother, the media cast the incident as a test of vigilance: a sacred space, schools, had now come under attack just as the streets had fallen victim to violence before them. The media cast White's actions as a litmus test of responsiveness to this new threat, and the ultimatum to get guns and gangs out of the schools was now riding on the disposition of Joseph White.

The third day, Sunday, brought another page-one story focused on the apparent randomness of the deadly victimization, saying, "Student was in the Wrong Place at Wrong Time" (November 22, 1992:1). Joseph White again was identified as the charged assailant who was in jail and had been denied bond in court on Saturday. The story then focused on Delondyn and his family. His mother described Delondyn as a child who cried easily and who recently had been attending funerals for boys he knew at a rate of one or two a month. "His friends are constantly dying around him," his mother reported. "They're getting shot on the corners. Every month somebody he knew in his age group was dying." Delondyn's former school principal called it an American tragedy.

The news story reported that while he was walking between classes, "a bullet tore through Delondyn's back and through his heart," killing him almost instantly. Delondyn had been staying with his aunt and then his father until his mother had retaken custody of him in the preceding weeks. She was trying to help Delondyn keep out of trouble and get his grades up, in part by picking him up after classes each day and then tutoring him for two hours of schoolwork. Other members of the family said that he was not in a gang but that his friends were. "The guys who are in the gang grew up with him," a relative explained. "It's

not like he don't know them. He's got to go through them. These are kids that he's seen all his life." This article raised the gang theme but seemed more intent on disclaiming any involvement of the victims in gang activity. Instead, Delondyn came to symbolize the innocent caught in the crossfire and therefore to heighten the heinousness of White's violence.

The final phase of the initial coverage of the Tilden High shooting came in a page-seven story the following Tuesday (November 24, 1992:18). The family of Joseph White had retained Chicago attorney Robert Habib to represent their son, and he appeared in Cook County Circuit Court on Monday seeking to bar the news media from further reporting the boy's name since he was a juvenile. Yet White had already been charged as an adult, and raising this issue simply resulted in his name appearing again in the same sentence as the report of the judge's refusal to suppress his identity, followed by a repetition of the report of the Saturday refusal of the appeal for his release on bond. Habib noted that the State's Attorney asserted in the bond hearing that, "White just walked in . . . and started shooting." As a result, "you had that image right off the bat, that Joseph White had made an unprovoked attack in the school, literally just walked in and started firing." The media and legal reconstructions of the shooting now began to reinforce one another and the image of Joseph White as a cold killer.

Habib later encountered the judge who had denied the suppression of Joseph White's name. The judge confided that, "You know, quite frankly, had there been no publicity on the case, I probably would have granted your motion. But at this point, we'd look like total fools given the fact that everybody in Chicago knows his name." Habib felt he had probably already lost the case at this point. "He was convicted in the media, before we had a chance."

Habib's only recourse was to encourage White's mother, Karen, to try to recast the public image of her son. Karen appeared before television cameras to answer reporters' questions (November 23, 1992:1). "Any parent with kids understands there are no model kids," she began. Picking up on the American tragedy theme introduced by Lawson's former school principal, she then observed that, "It's a tragedy for both and all parties concerned—for the families and the kids. He is a victim of a tragic situation that cannot be altered." Karen White then

echoed Mayor Daley's pleas for the regular use of metal detectors. An editorial in *The Chicago Tribune* (December 1, 1992) also took up Daley's theme, observing, "had metal detectors been used routinely at Tilden, Delondyn Lawson's killer might have been deprived of his weapon—or at least forced to use it elsewhere."

Less frequent but continuing news stories appeared over the following days and weeks. Habib did not push for the case to go quickly to trial, hoping the intervening time would allow the effect of the pretrial publicity to subside. However, the appearance of an article in June 1993 in *People* magazine about Delondyn Lawson and his mother, Linda, focusing on the loss of her son brought new attention to the shooting and to a national audience (June 14, 1993:48-49). Linda Lawson revealed that Delondyn had not wanted to go to school on the day he was shot and that she had worried that he was becoming involved with gang members. She wondered now, "was he having problems he didn't want to tell me about?" This was the first real hint in the news media that there was a more complicated gang dimension to this shooting that involved Lawson as well as White and the other victims.

Still, Delondyn was described as a "helpmate with a tender heart" and Joseph White as the youth who "had pulled a small semiautomatic pistol from his waistband and blasted away until he ran out of bullets." Linda described how she learned from a neighbor that her son was a victim in the shooting and rushed first to the school and then to the hospital. "When I came through the door, I knew, . . . no one had to tell me." She continued, "Seeing my baby laying up there, that's a feeling I can't describe. . . . I think the thing that hurt me most was that I wasn't there with him (when he died)." Linda's sister, Cathy, looked for answers: "Do you blame the boy or the boy's parents or the school?"

White's lawyer, Habib, knew the practical answers to these questions. His client was going to be depicted as a violent gang member and receive a prison sentence. Habib therefore initiated plea negotiations in an attempt to reduce the charge and sentence. Plea negotiations could have offered an opportunity to emphasize the context of the shooting and the provocation and threat that gang activity posed to Joseph White as potential mitigating factors in the determination of the charge and prospective sentence. But there would be no plea-bargaining. Habib

was stonewalled with the response that there was too much adverse publicity about the shooting to bargain.

> I tried several times in conferences with the State's Attorney, and they just came back and said, "No, we can't do it. The supervisor says no way. Because of the pressure on us, we cannot give you a plea on this case."

With the alternatives exhausted, the case finally went to trial more than a year after the shooting, on January 19, 1994. As was true with the media's account of the incident, the trial also erased the context of gang violence, the worried mind-set of Joseph White that prompted him to bring a gun to school. These two versions of the truth have staying power: the National School Safety Center report (2002) still does not classify this case as gang related or as involving multiple victims.

THE PEOPLE VERSUS JOSEPH WHITE

In this section, we consider the trial, verdict, and sentencing of Joseph White. These legal proceedings did little to illuminate the marginal position that White occupied in the gang life of his neighborhood and instead hardened the image of White as a gang member who had aggressively chosen to bring a gun and gang violence into his school. We will see that these proceedings provided little opportunity for White to describe his reactive relationship to neighborhood gangs—the sense that some level of association with gangs was probably unavoidable and in this sense a "normal" aspect of teen life on Chicago's South Side. Moreover, the trial failed to explore the ways in which school authorities and the police were unavailable as alternative means of dealing with the threats Joseph White had to contend with. Neither seemed like a plausible source of support for him. The absence of these contextual factors left only one kind of account standing. The individual actor willfully bringing a gun to school to use it against his enemies became the dominant script.

THE TRIAL

The trial of Joseph White revealed more of the social context of this shooting than the newspaper accounts provided, but the case

nonetheless was argued in ways that continued to obscure if not distort the nature of the interpersonal dispute that provoked this incident. Legal cases tend to reconstruct social events in ways that fit with the required procedures, statutes, and precedents that the law makes available. Consequently, narratives based on trials often distort the behaviors and motives (and sometimes even the identities) of the participants and the broader social context in which the events in question have emerged.

Some of the most telling testimony in the trial came from Joseph White himself, and the following discussion is based largely on his testimony, with some elaboration as indicated from our recent interviews. In court, Joseph acknowledged some association with the Mickey Cobras gang and then moved to a description of the gambling dispute that led to the shooting. Ten years later, in a retrospective interview conducted from prison, Joseph indicated that he actually was not in any very meaningful sense a member of the Mickey Cobra gang, saying,

> I told them that I was a distant member. I was fifteen—so it wasn't no, it wasn't much, you know what I mean? I was really a member through association. O.K., you live here, so this is what you are. But I never wore any, I wasn't walking around with a gang insignia, no tattoos.

He noted that if he had been a more central member of a gang, he would have had some backup support in the midst of the dispute.

The conflict developed over a Monday morning dice game in the upstairs locker room at Tilden. The first witness for the prosecution, Dewaun Glover, had joined the game and was losing 10 to 20 dollars at a time. Glover indicated that he was losing money that came from the head of his gang, the Blackstone Rangers. Other members of the gang had joined the group when Dewaun tried to reclaim the money he had lost. Before a fight broke out, a police officer arrived and took Joseph and Dewaun to the school disciplinarian's office. Both youths were suspended for three days.

While Joseph was away from school on suspension, two youths told him that "if [he] didn't bring the money that [he] was going to get whipped or banged" (January 20, 1994:174). Joseph recalled in court (January 20, 1994:177) that "I knew that they were going to beat me up, but I didn't know whether they would have a gun." He later said, "I didn't put it past them, because I had seen on at least two other

occasions where a guy may have had a golf club in his locker." His mother recalled that Joseph had refused to let her become involved: "Joey didn't want to appear cowardly or scared, that's the reason he didn't want me to go up, he told me later he didn't want me to be involved because he felt that we were powerless against the gangs." Another youth in the neighborhood who had heard about the dispute approached Joseph with a small, semiautomatic pistol, which Joseph loaded and test fired.

Joseph bought the weapon and was carrying it on the day of the shooting, thinking he was most likely to be jumped by members of the Blackstone Rangers as he walked through their territory on the way to or from school. Indeed, Joseph was chased by members of the gang on the way to school, but the shooting occurred later as he arrived at the top of a stairwell inside the school.

Joseph was walking with a girl who testified on his behalf. When they arrived at the top of the stairs, Delodyn Lawson was standing with Dewaun Glover in an area of the hallway that the Blackstones commonly occupied. Dewaun crossed in front of Joseph, and he remembered him saying something like, "Hey, man, what's up with my money?" (January 20, 1994:185). Another unidentified youth reportedly said, "Man, we didn't come here to talk. Let's do what we gone do so I can put this (guy's) . . . head up in his locker." Joseph continued, "And then I began to get hit, and I fell. And when I fell, I didn't fall flat; I kind of braced myself with my hands" (January 20, 1994:187). The cluster around him included Delondyn, Dewaun, and other Blackstone gang members. Attorney Habib asked, "Did you think you could run away at this point?" and Joseph answered, "I had no way of getting out. I tried, but I . . . couldn't" (January 20, 1994:191).

The shooting that followed might be decoded by the male posturing that is prevalent in both youth and gang culture. Short and Strodtbeck (1965) noted in their research from an earlier era in Chicago that

> gang rivalries were often focused on turf, men defending 'theirs' against the encroachment of another man. Such incursions are a sign of 'disrespect' which leads to men needing to display toughness. Fights were often a matter of chance combined with a tough guy image. (P. 87)

More recently, Elijah Anderson's (1999) *Code of the Street* developed the notion that young men are forced to posture and bluster lest they be

taken as weak and therefore vulnerable to attack. While provocative language may cover over a frightened kid, it becomes an essential part of the "tool kit" of social maneuvering in communities left unprotected by police and high in predatory characters.

Dewaun Glover testified that when he asked Joseph where the Blackstone's missing money was, Joseph replied, "I ain't giving your money back, pussy" (January 19, 1994:26). Joseph's refusing to give the money back and signaling disrespect for Dewaun by calling him a derogatory name probably provoked the skirmish that escalated until Joseph pulled his gun and shot into the cluster of students around him. Yet these considerations of respect and status had no legal relevance in the case and were therefore given no further consideration in court.

Instead, a considerable amount of time was taken in connected testimony to establish whether the shots that Joseph fired came "defensively" from the ground or more "aggressively" from a standing position. In his own words,

> When I fell, I fell on my arm, and I caught myself. I never was really flat on the floor. And then after—after I—a few seconds, that's when I reached for the gun and begin to get up. And before I got all the way up, I shot the gun. And a guy jumped; either he was jumping to get to the floor so he wouldn't get shot, or he was trying to knock the gun out of my hand. And the gun went off two other times, and at that point I turned around, and I ran. (January 20, 1994:194)

Joseph insisted in response to questions that his intent was not to kill anyone. "They were never aimed to no particular person. And the fact that the guy got killed, it was not on purpose, sir. My intent was to get the crowd up off me" (January 20, 1994:220). Joseph said he then ran not because he felt guilty but because he was terrified: "I was scared. I never felt like that again in my whole life. I was afraid" (January 20, 1994:197).

In his closing arguments, Joseph's attorney, Habib, argued that the shooting was essentially an act of self-defense.

> Is there anyone of you who would have said, no, I would have stayed there and got beaten? He did what any reasonable person would have done at this point. He took out the gun to defend himself. Joseph White may be guilty of something, he had no right to bring this gun onto school property. That's a separate charge, though, unlawful use of a weapon on school property. (January 21, 1994:83)

The prosecution responded,

> How can you say he's afraid when somebody else is hitting the ground, or running, because somebody is yelling 'he has a gun,' and that's why he did not truly then believe he had the right to self-defense, that he was mad, and, unfortunately, he had that loaded gun in his pocket. (January 21, 1994:109)

The prosecution view was that,

> There is only one person in the whole group that has a dead body to his credit, and that's that guy standing right over there, Mickey Cobra, who settles a dispute with a gun, and you cannot let him do that, and that's going to be your decision, and what you will decide is your message to the rest of society about what is, or is not, going to be tolerated. (January 21, 1994:110)

The bottom line for the defense was that if the jury did not come back with a finding of innocence based on self-defense, then the only plausible alternative was second-degree murder or voluntary manslaughter. Any of these findings would have acknowledged the gang-based provocation of the shooting in an urban setting where the police were more of a threat than a protection, and self-protection was common, albeit here obviously misguidedly through the fatal use of a gun in a school. The legal challenge was to find the procedure to make the charge better fit the social reality of the crime.

In the end, the trial and its narrative, like the media account, fell short of providing a full account. The trial narrative disassociated actors from their social context and focused on the behaviors that were deemed relevant to resolving the legal dispute at hand. The self-defense claim was a slimmed-down version of an explanation based on social context. The place of social context was in this way legally diminished to the point that it all but disappeared.

THE VERDICT

The trial that began on a Wednesday was finished on Friday, and the jury retired to reach its verdict. Hours went by without the jury's return. This gave some grounds for hope on Joseph's behalf, but the hope was fleeting. "He was convicted in the media, before we had a chance," Habib recalled.

He was not surprised. "A lot of my clients are South Siders," he noted.

> And the reaction from the community was intensely anti-Joseph White on the grounds that if no matter what else, the idea that he had brought a gun to school was just—I had clients telling me, "How can you take this case?"

This same view quickly emerged when jury selection began. "The reaction that he had brought the gun to school was looked at as, forget it, he's guilty, that's it." The feeling was that at least to that point, the gangs had done their shooting outside school, "but nobody had done a shooting in the schools." This clearly influenced Habib's approach to jury selection: "The sentiment in the community on the South Side was so severe that we made sure when we picked the jury we had a suburban, White middle-class jury."

For Karen White, however, Delondyn Lawson's mother, Linda, was a jury in her own right. Karen encountered Linda Lawson outside the courtroom.

> I apologized to her. . . . I knew there was nothing, absolutely zero, that I could say or do that could minimize her loss or bring her son back. I was trying to talk to her to let her know that in no way did I condone this action, . . . if I could do anything in the world to change things, I would. I also let her know that Joey would, because Joey told me, "Mamma, I didn't want to kill that boy, I killed somebody." . . . Not only did he take a life, he destroyed all our lives in that single miscalculation. . . . She wasn't mean to me or anything. We both have a terrible sense of loss and like I explained to her, . . . you are there because your son was a victim, he died, but I was there also because my son was a victim and he died, because he lost his innocence.

Karen White's son had already lost a year of his life and he was going to lose much more.

The jury finally returned at about 10 o'clock Friday evening. They had deliberated at length and come back with the maximum possible verdict: Joseph White was convicted of first-degree murder, two counts of aggravated battery, and one count of unlawful use of a weapon. The sentence exposure on the first-degree murder conviction was 20 to 60 years in prison.

Robert Habib conceded that his defense would have been stronger if he could have shown that the Blackstone gang members were also armed. Karen White remains convinced to this day that Joseph's attackers were well armed: "They had bats, they had car antennas, . . . and

they had weapons in the school. They were not coming to him for an old-fashioned fist fight, I think that went out years and years ago." Habib remarked in retrospect,

> Joseph, in one way, was really honest, all right. And had he testified that some of these boys coming after him had knives out, along those lines, his whole thing about self-defense, that he had a right to pull out the gun to shoot at this boy, would have been much stronger. But he never would say that. I asked him several times, "Did anybody pull a knife? Did you see any weapons or knives?" He never did say that.

Habib added that it was an indication of how violent times then were around Tilden that when Joseph sprinted away from the school with gun still in hand, his assailants ran right after him.

> That's how tough these kids were, you know, they'd just seen one dead. None of them at least had any guns on them themselves. And they just still took off running after him. So you were dealing with kids that could be very violent.

Habib's point was that it was not irrational, even though it was illegal, for White to resort to a gun to defend himself in this environment.

THE SENTENCE

Joseph White was sentenced in the early spring of 1994, nearly a year and a half after the fall, 1992, shooting at Tilden High. Karen White spoke to the court on behalf of her son, expressing her sorrow for the Lawson family and the loss of their son. She explained that her own family loved Joseph as well and pleaded for some understanding that "he acted under his perceived notion that he was in mortal danger for his life" and that "given the depressed ghetto area in which this situation took place, it is not at all unlikely or unimaginable that a teen would resort to violence with a weapon." This was the most direct reference to social context in the entire consideration of this case. Karen White concluded that her son had made a terrible mistake. "And myself, I have made some mistakes, and I know you have to pay consequences for them. But I don't see what his life or most of his life behind prison walls can serve" (March 14, 1994:34-36).

The sentencing judge returned to the central legal concept of the responsible individual, stressing the importance of personal responsibility and protection of the community. He observed that Joseph

White had engaged in earlier, minor thefts for which he had suffered few consequences because, "15-year-olds know that when they steal, nothing happens to them. They go back home" (March 14, 1994:52). He then noted that Joseph was also associated with the Mickey Cobras and that he apparently had decided "within the confines of that gang in his school, that allowed him certain leeway and rights regarding his conduct with other boys who belong to other gangs" (March 14, 1994:53). Finally, the judge noted that Joseph recently had fathered a child that he clearly could not financially support. The judge followed the logic of a "three strikes" analogy by concluding, "I think society is tired of people who are 15 who make these kinds of judgments" (March 14, 1994:53).

The judge retold the events leading up to the shooting and wondered why Joseph had not tried to find other ways of solving the gambling dispute. He wondered why Joseph failed to consider the police a source of assistance. He asked rhetorically, "Why didn't Joseph White go back to school and pay back the $40, go to the principal, apologize for what happened?" (March 14, 1994:55). This was too much for one member of the audience, who called out from the gallery: "Why didn't Joseph do those things?" (March 14, 1994:56).

The judge asked the speaker to identify himself, saying, "I don't know who you are. You need to tell us."

Mr. Wright:	My name is Kenneth Wright, and I am Joseph White's uncle. I don't condone his wrong. I have one thing to say. The teacher did take the money. If she had came forth with that money . . .
The Court:	She who?
Mr. Wright:	His teacher. They were in the hallway shooting dice; the police came; they broke and ran. They left the money on the floor. She took it. They thought he had it.
The Court:	A teacher from the school?
Mr. Wright:	Yes, sir, and she was fired.

Joseph's uncle obviously wanted the judge to have a better sense of why this young man felt so trapped in his situation and unable to turn to his parents, the school, or the police for help. Without condoning Joseph's violent solution, his uncle wanted the judge to consider the circumstances that could mitigate his sentence. "I wanted you to get

that part," his uncle pleaded and then conceded, "he had no business with a gun, good enough" (March 14, 1994:57-58).

This did not sway the judge. The judge continued by dismissing the self-defense claim, explaining, "Self-defense does not allow you to go to school with a loaded revolver and then claim later that unarmed people are threatening you and that you are defending your own life." He again noted of Joseph that "he did not seek help from authorities" (March 14, 1994:56-57).

For the sentencing judge, the gun and the resulting killing in a school were everything. He explicitly dismissed the youth or social circumstances of Joseph White as mitigating factors. He was not interested in considering the possibility that a teacher was at fault. "It is time for everyone to understand," the judge concluded, "that those people who choose to take guns to settle disputes are accountable for what they do, be they 12 years old, or 15 years old, or 50 years old" (March 14, 1994:58-59). Joseph was sentenced to 45 years in the Illinois Department of Corrections on the charge of first-degree murder, with sentences on the other charges to be served concurrently.

ADDING SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Case study evidence from historical sources, interviews, observations, and census and crime statistics can broaden our understanding of the social context that swept Joseph White into the Tilden High shooting. The following account explains in sociological terms why and how gangs and guns became accepted among adolescents as a normal part of everyday life on the economically declining, territorial, racially segregated, and often brutally policed South Side of Chicago. The point is that the abnormal social environment in which Joseph moved made his adaptation normative if not necessary, albeit ill advised as well as illegal.

We need to understand the social and racial history of the area, the less than benign role of the police, and the geography of gang territories to place Joseph White in context. Tilden High School is located at the intersection of 47th Street and Union Street in the South Side area of Chicago known historically for the Union Stock Yards. The gates to the Yards were opened in 1865 and stayed open for more than 100 years.

The area surrounding is still called New City, the name given to it by sociologists in the 1920s.

New City contains two historic neighborhoods that emerged to the east and west of the Yards. The area to the east that includes Tilden High School is known as Canaryville. The area to the west and south is known as Back of the Yards. This is the area that gained notoriety as a desolate industrial slum in Upton Sinclair's 1905 novel, *The Jungle*, which was published just after the major packinghouse strikes of 1904.

The end of World War II brought major changes to the New City area. The packinghouses of the area steadily declined, and by the early 1970s, the Union Stock Yards had closed its gates, and the economic underpinning of this area was permanently altered. There have been various efforts to revive the economic life of the area, but the results are still more promise than reality, and the New City area remains economically troubled.

When Joseph White's family moved in the spring of 1971 to their home at 324 West 51st Street, about a mile from Tilden High, the surrounding area was still overwhelmingly White and only 4 percent African American. However, as indicated in Figure 1, by the time Joseph was approaching kindergarten in 1980, the area was less than two thirds White, nearly one quarter African American, and about one fifth "other," most prominently Mexican American. As Joseph approached high school in 1990, New City was less than one third White, nearly half African American, and about one quarter Mexican American.

The White family was experiencing this era of rapid social change firsthand, and this involved more than changing numbers on a graph can tell. As African Americans arrived in increasing numbers from the southern United States, they settled in the South Side of Chicago, and low-cost public-housing projects began to emerge. Real estate operators steered African Americans who could afford to buy homes into South Side neighborhoods and simultaneously scared Whites into leaving, profiting on the rapid turnover. The resulting plunge in real estate values contributed to the impoverishment of the new residents. Banks redlined neighborhood areas for loans, businesses began to leave, and city services declined. A cycle of disinvestment contributed to the ongoing process of decline. Chicago was emerging in the latter

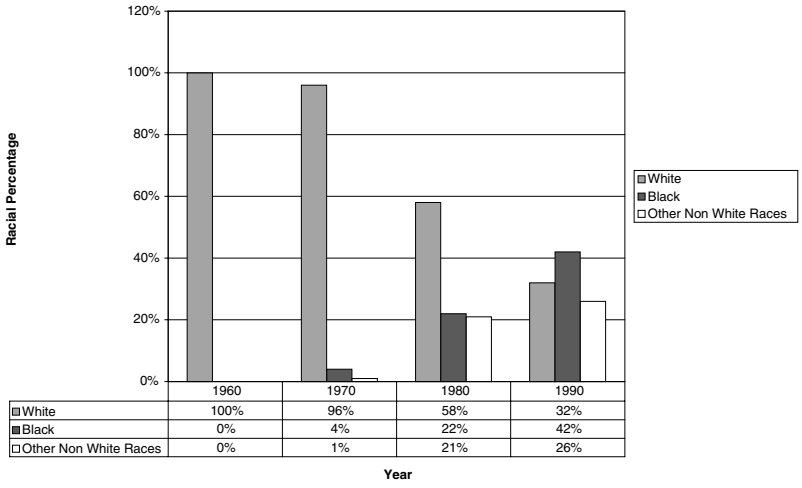

Figure 1: New City Population

half of this century as one of the most racially segregated cities in America.

Figure 2, using 1990 census figures, indicates that the earlier numbers actually do not reveal the full extent to which New City is racially segregated. There are census tracts within New City that are almost entirely White as well as tracts that are almost entirely African American. For example, the tract around Tilden retained a large White population, even though the majority of youth attending the school were already African American.

The White family moved into a low-income housing development of new homes on 51st Street, about a mile from Tilden High School, when Joseph's mother was only 21 years old. Her grandparents had joined in the northern migration that led from Tennessee to Chicago, where Karen White was born. All the families moving into the adjoining new houses with the Whites were also African American. Karen had recently married Joseph's father, and they felt the area offered the advantages of a new community where they would be accepted and could successfully raise a family. There was a nearby church and elementary school. They raised several children in this home and were married for more than 30 years. Karen's husband died recently of a

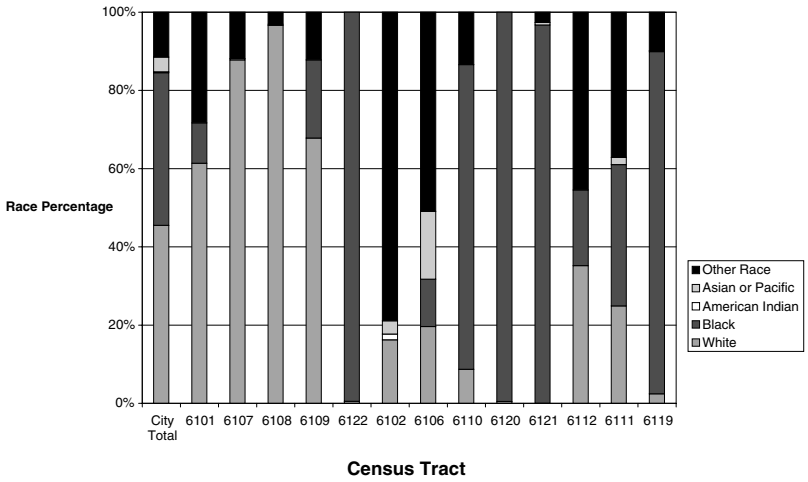

Figure 2: 1990 New City Census Data

heart attack, and she now lives mostly in Texas to be closer to their daughter and her children. Joseph describes his family as loving and supportive, and he remains in frequent phone contact with them, to the extent that his imprisonment allows.

The historical and social changes we have described brought inevitable racial tension to the New City area and to Tilden High School. Tilden opened in 1889 and once ranked as an advantaged institution in the educational hierarchy of south Chicago. At the turn of the century, "The students were special, out of the ordinary, and they knew it. Their chances to succeed were better than most of the friends they grew up with, and they would soon move on to a different rank in society" (Slayton, 1986:86). However, Tilden changed as the community around it experienced an economic and social transformation over the following century. The Canaryville neighborhood made news when in the winter of 1982 the then mayor of Chicago, Jane Byrne, ordered the dismantling of four heavy iron gates erected during the 1960s to separate White from Black areas.

Karen White was already a supervisor in the accounts department of a large Chicago newspaper when Joseph entered high school. Joseph remembered that his mother left for work at five in the morning and

returned home about four in the afternoon. His father worked from nine to nine, six days a week. They had achieved a measure of success, and Joseph's parents felt hopeful for their family. Soon after moving into their new home, however, Karen White learned about gang problems in the community:

> It was the Mickey Cobras that were in the area. I didn't know a lot about gangs; I was never affiliated, but moving into that area and through my kids and their friends, we found out the area we lived in was the Mickey Cobra area.

The transformation of New City and Tilden High is well summarized, in terms of its racial implications for young people, by the classic work of Gerald Suttles in another South Side Chicago neighborhood. Suttles (1968) observed that racial and ethnic groups become identified with socio-spatial locations in urban areas and that these identifications have strong implications for interactions between and within these groups. Racially homogeneous gangs that more often entered into conflict with one another than across racial lines were a reflection in New City of the social order described by Suttles (1968:31).

Tilden's low-income "feeder neighborhoods" were each dominated by a different gang. At the time of the shooting, at least six gangs had a significant presence in neighborhoods around Tilden: the Black Gangster Disciples, Mickey Cobras, Black Stones, Vicelords, Latin Kings, and Satan's Disciples. White students also belonged to neighborhood gangs. Tilden High School was a place where gang members could freely assemble and carry out recruitment and money-making activities. More generally, schools provide a setting where rival gangs interact and compete for shares of various illegal markets. In the early 1990s, Tilden was an extremely volatile environment, and fights were a nearly daily occurrence. Joseph White said he had hoped to avoid the dangers of Tilden by attending South Shore or Carver High Schools, but his family was unable to arrange this.

As Suttles (1968) would predict, most of the clashes at Tilden occurred between gangs of the same race. An exception, according to the school police officer, was a clash that occurred shortly before the shooting. One of the members of a Black gang reportedly slapped the girlfriend of the leader of Tilden's Latin Kings. Outnumbered by the rival Black gang, the leader solicited the help of adult Latin Kings from the Latino feeder neighborhood. Soon after, these adult gang

members arrived at the school with shotguns and prepared to seek revenge against the various Black gangs. We interviewed the school police officer about his recollection of this incident:

Q: What did you do?
A: I pleaded with the gang leader to call them off.
Q: Did you call other cops?
A: If I put out a request for assistance, I could expect one car at the most. If I put out a 10-1, which is a serious officer distress call, I might get two cars. So I had to handle it myself.

The Latin Kings' leader heeded the officer's pleas and called off the rival gang. This experience, the school police officer surmised, nonetheless indicated to the Black gangs that in the face of a serious deadly threat, they should not rely on authorities and instead rely on each other. This experience of a common enemy may have briefly fostered an atmosphere of relative peace among gangs from the same Gang Nation, which for the purpose of this analysis most notably included the Mickey Cobras and Blackstones. Race may in this way have been a factor in explaining why putative members of two rival gangs could be found gambling with each other in the Tilden High School bathroom (Yablonsky 1997). In the overarching organizational structure of the Gang Nation, the Blackstones and the Mickey Cobras were sometimes friendly affiliates who fell under the branch of the "Peoples." In times of war with the rival branch, the "Folks," these gangs would come together. A gang officer at the 51st Street police station confirmed that such alliances still occur today.

The school police officer who worked at Tilden in the early 1990s concluded that the gambling episode that precipitated the shooting may have been borne out of this tentative truce between Black gangs. He nonetheless recalled his own surprise when he witnessed youth who he thought to be members of the different Black gangs gambling together in the bathroom. Although Joseph White did not identify himself as a Mickey Cobra, he was emphatic that his adversaries were Blackstones. He observed that,

> They were trying to show how strong they were, trying to make an example out of me. . . . The Black P. Stones were the largest gang in the school and they wanted to show that they were in control.

This was the complicated, gang-dominated, and dangerous world of young people who attended Tilden High School. Students like Joseph had to negotiate the boundaries of gangs and neighborhoods in their movements to and from as well as within the school. The "ordered segmentation" of different groups, which was simultaneously spatial and social in nature, was negotiated by these youth in their neighborhoods on a daily basis. George Knox (1992) made this point in noting that the "school environment brings rival gang members in close proximity to one another and blurs haphazard turf lines, which leads to confrontations and challenges within school, on school property and on the streets surrounding the schools" (p. 134). This is a potentially fast-paced and complicated world in which today's enemies may be tomorrow's allies. It was difficult if not impossible for most youth at Tilden to completely avoid these gang entanglements. As he moved into high school, Joseph White had to come to terms with this rapidly changing world of gangs.

Karen White was aware that although much of the open racial conflict that had earlier characterized New City and its ongoing transition had subsided by the time Joseph was ready to attend high school, the gang problems within the African American community had become an equal or greater threat. She recalled,

> I knew that Tilden was a racially mixed school but, . . . by the time Joseph was coming along the racial tension was not as great. . . . We had learned to co-exist together. . . . The gang activities were the problem, that's what my concern was because in our area there were the Mickey Cobras on that end, but in Tilden there was a whole other faction.

The other faction, the Blackstone Rangers, was the largest and oldest gang in Chicago, who the father figure of American gang research, Frederick Thrasher (1927:278-79), once called "a moral lesion on the life of the city" (cited in Barrett, 1987:219). Karen White worried that "Tilden was riddled with gang conflict, so that was more of the parents' concern than the racial part of it."

Why were the police not a source of support in the midst of this maelstrom? For years, it was known that on some occasions when Chicago police in White neighborhoods like Canaryville picked up African American youth who they suspected but could not charge with crimes, they would drop them off in a location in the neighborhood where they knew they were likely to be beaten by local residents (see

Suttles 1968). The year of the Tilden shooting, the Chicago Police Board fired several police officers who had left two African American youth in the Canaryville neighborhood, where they subsequently were assaulted by a gang of White youths (March 21, 1992:4). This kind of incident confirmed the worst fears of young African American males and their parents about the potential role of the police in their lives.

Finally, it is important to add to this discussion of the context of the Tilden shooting that the early 1990s was a period of economic recession and historically high rates of violent crime in America that especially affected young African American males, and particularly in areas like New City and schools like Tilden High (Hagan and Foster 2000). Seasonally adjusted unemployment rates reached their contemporary peak at 7.8 percent in June of 1992. The recession had technically ended, but the "jobless recovery" left unemployment unabated, especially in places like south Chicago. A teacher described the situation for many youth at Tilden starkly: "a lot of these kids from blue-collar families, it didn't look like they had much of a future. You know, they had seen their parents laid off left and right." It shouldn't have come as a complete surprise, then, that the latter half of the twentieth century brought a significant increase in American drug crime, gun homicides, and gang violence that peaked along with unemployment in the early 1990s.

Blumstein and Rosenfeld (1998) pointed out that the aggregate U.S. homicide rate moved to its near term peak from 1985 to 1993 and then began to decline to mid-1960s levels. The peaking levels of homicide for young African American males were devastating, rising among 18-year-olds from about 20 to 60 per hundred thousand population between 1985 and 1993. Handgun homicides alone accounted for all the growth in homicides in the United States after 1985 (Blumstein and Rosenfeld 1998). The youthful wave of male African American homicide in the late 1980s and early 1990s prompted warnings of a coming "blood bath" (Fox 1995) in which "super predators" would be terrorizing American cities for years to come (Bennett, Dilulio, and Walters 1996). Subsequent declines proved these predictions alarmingly mistaken, but the source of the apprehension is nonetheless clear.

Americans, Black and White, became extremely apprehensive about the movement of guns and gang violence into public schools in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Chicago was no exception, although the peak

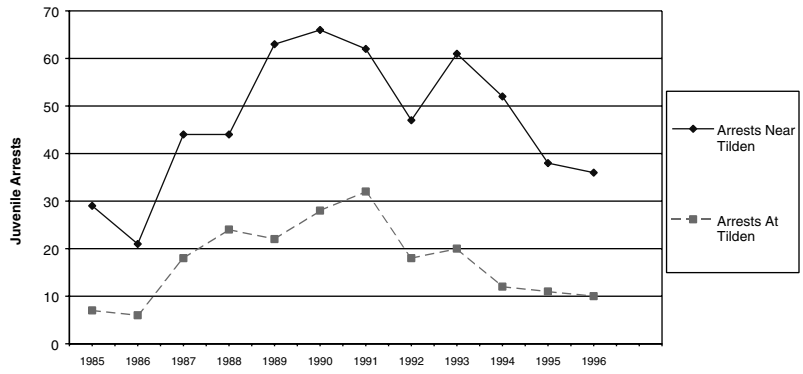

Figure 3: Juvenile Arrests at or Near Tilden High School (1985-1996)

in gang violence may have occurred a year or two later than in large eastern U.S. cities. This may have reflected the rate of the movement of the crack cocaine epidemic across the country and into the Midwest. Chicago street-gang homicides with male African American victims moved steadily upward in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Figure 3 shows that there was also an increase in arrests in or near Tilden High School from the mid-1980s to the early to mid-1990s.

Hence, by almost any measure, the time of the Tilden shooting was a high point in criminal violence among African American youth. The special concern was that this violence was coming into the schools. The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority published results from two surveys conducted in 31 public high schools in 1990 (Stephens 1992). The results indicated that 1 in 12 public high school students in Illinois reported in the past year being the victim of a physical attack while in or going to and from school, and about the same proportion—1 in 12—reported sometimes staying home from school for fear that someone would hurt or bother them. These proportions would certainly have been higher among Tilden High School students when the shooting occurred in November of 1992.

This was the world that Joseph White and the three victims of his shooting confronted. The gangs and guns left few untouched, and the impact often was swift and severe. The year before the shooting, Joseph was receiving good marks in school and had won a trophy as the most valuable player on his basketball team; but by the spring of 1992, he

was already at least a passing part of the gang scene, and Karen White felt increasingly powerless to keep him out of this scene. He was taken into custody and charged with 22 other youth by the Chicago police on an evening in May at a South Side park where approximately 50 youth associated with the Mickey Cobras street gang had gathered. The officer reported that "they were throwing bricks and stones and bottles at other people that weren't dressed like they were, and they were trying to keep them out of the park." This case was not taken to court, but the month before the fall school shooting, Joseph was suspected with another youth of having taken cartons containing stereos from a railroad car. The stereos were later recovered from Joseph's home, and he pled guilty in juvenile court. The two surviving victims of this incident also came into conflict with the law after the shooting. One was convicted and received a prison sentence for armed robbery, while the other came into contact with the police for drug activities.

Meanwhile, Tilden High School was besieged with gang activity and hallway violence. A teacher who was at Tilden prior to the shooting recalled that gang-connected fights were common in the hallways, "the kind of fights that would empty classrooms out, you know, you've got your kids in the classroom and all of a sudden something goes on in the hall and then the whole class just runs out." The principal of Tilden, Hazel Steward, reported that gang members were conspicuous by their presence: "They roamed the halls; there were gang fights every day, teachers constantly going to lock the doors." A school policy was adopted of locking students into the classrooms during class time: "The teachers went in and were supposed to lock their doors, to close out the chaos in the halls."

A teacher at Tilden emphasized the within-group nature of this rising tide of violence that matches the more abstract description provided earlier by Suttles (1968). He observed,

> From what I could tell, it was two separate Black gangs that were fighting each other, and then two separate Hispanic gangs that were fighting each other. . . . It was more amongst, kind of fighting for dominance, you know, within the racial groups.

The violence that was sweeping through South Side neighborhoods in Chicago was not random in the way implied by the initial news reports of the November shooting at Tilden High. Joseph White was

engulfed in a pattern of group-based violent conflicts that proved difficult to escape and from which authorities could or would provide little protection.

Joseph reported that he was outsized and outnumbered by his adversaries from the time of the initial incident in the locker room. "This one boy asked me for the money. But he didn't just want the money. He wanted my jacket and a bunch of other stuff. And you got to remember, I was only 5' 7" and 140 pounds." The intervention of the school security officer and Joseph's suspension from school only delayed his dilemma. He bought the handgun as a source of protection that could help him get back and forth to school safely. He had received threats to himself and his family, and a cousin had been roughed up as a means of sending the message that the Blackstones were after him.

At school on the day of the shooting, he found himself in the hallway between periods, surrounded and under attack. He still remembers the scene vividly:

A: There were 7 to 15 guys who were all trying to get a piece of me.
Q: So were you aiming at anyone in particular?
A: No. I fired the gun to get them up off me. And for the gun being an automatic, you squeeze off several shots at one time.
Q: Why didn't you fire the gun at the ground or in the air?
A: Because I was on the ground. And fire into the ceiling or fire into the ground, I wasn't sure. I didn't have time to think.
Q: So you were just shooting and just happened to hit them?
A: Right. I didn't even have time to consider firing into the floor or firing into the ceiling because, contrary to what a lot of people believe, it wasn't where, you know, they were over, they're over there and I'm right here. It wasn't like that. . . . It was literally me being grabbed, held, punched, kicked, ruffled. . . . So that entire time I was getting assaulted. That entire time I was getting pummeled, I was getting beaten . . . it seemed like forever in my mind, but in real time it . . . [was] playing out, snap, snap, snap.

When Jospeh realized the seriousness of what had happened, he bolted from the school and hid under the porch of the house across the street.

Karen White was off work on the day of the shooting. Because Joseph White was identified so quickly by other youths as the shooter, the police were at her doorstep within the hour. "I was washing my

hair when somebody was beating on the door. When I went downstairs and opened the door, there was just like police everywhere." She was told of the shooting and that Joseph was at large and armed with a gun.

> The only thought that I was thinking was that my son was going to be killed. They said he had a gun and that if he came back, I needed to let them know because he was in danger of being killed if they saw him with that gun.

These comments underlined fears common among African American parents for the safety of their sons in police hands in the best of circumstances, and these were likely the worst of circumstances. Karen could not reach her husband at work but was able to get her sister-in-law to drive her to the school.

She was terrified. "Over in that area there have been a lot of police shootings and there were so many boys that had gotten killed, you know, so I was thinking that Joey was going to get killed." When Karen White arrived at the school, the police had apprehended Joseph across the street. "They were laying him up against a car and they were handcuffing him. . . . My first thought was just being thankful to God that he was alive." They took him to the 51st Street police station.

Karen followed, and when she arrived, "everything was just pandemonium." Joseph was already locked in a cell when she was allowed to join him.

> When I saw him he was scared, he just looked wild-eyed because he didn't know, you know, he did that (the shooting) but he did not know the full ramifications of his actions. Joey, when I saw him, I saw that my baby was scared out of his brain and confused looking, you know, he was just hysterical.

There was little she could do.

> We really didn't have a chance to talk, they were trying to ask him questions, they read him his rights and then told him that he had a right to an attorney and that if he didn't want to speak about anything that he didn't have to.

Karen contacted attorney Habib through a friend and then stayed with Joseph. "We stayed there until maybe eleven or twelve o-clock at night, and finally the District Attorney came down and they told me that they

were indicting him for murder." Joseph White had lost the potential protections of his juvenile status virtually before the legal case began. Karen returned home after what she still recalls as "the worst day of my life."

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This case study suggests aspects of school violence that merit further consideration. The early news coverage of this 1992 school shooting on the South Side of Chicago offered an individualized depiction of an apparent random and senseless rampage, implying a situation similar in key respects to contemporary reports of White, rural and suburban shootings. On one hand, the effect of this depiction was to mistakenly equate this fatal urban shooting with nonurban school shootings, along lines that made urban Black school violence seem as psychologically pathological as suburban and rural White school violence. On the other hand, this media portrayal simultaneously missed an underlying correspondence between urban and nonurban school shootings that involves their common grounding in threats to status, respect, and personal security. Like the White shooters in rural and suburban settings, Joseph White perceived a threat to himself and his status.

Yet the perceived status threat in White's Chicago school was linked neither to individual psychological problems nor to a dysfunctional family. The actions of Joseph White were less random and senseless than they were a reflection of a rational concern for his safety, his inexperience with guns, and the urban, African American reality of his Chicago neighborhood and school. He was caught up in the kind of gang-connected status conflict that was endemic to South Side Chicago in the early 1990s. This study highlights the difference between the more targeted and collectivized status conflicts that characterized this urban school shooting and the individualized status conflicts associated with school shootings in rural and suburban settings. Both kinds of status conflicts need to be incorporated into our understanding of fatal school shootings.

Michael Schudson's (1992) analysis of *Watergate: How We Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past*, offered insights into how and why media and legal depictions of urban school shootings can be

so misleading. An important lesson of Schudson's analysis is that "versions of Watergate" were not drawn from a common pool "but are handed down through particular cultural forms and transmitted in particular cultural vehicles" (p. 5). Both in Watergate and in the Tilden school shooting, journalism and the law were the two main vehicles of socially constructed perception and memory.

Through the backward lens of early studies and media and trial narratives of the Tilden shooting, it is difficult to recognize that fatal urban school shootings are actually much more common than nonurban school shootings and that Joseph White was as much or more than anything else a victim of fatally poor judgment in historically extreme circumstances. The media account erred in the direction of a pathologized sensationalism, portraying Joseph White as an apparently deranged and random shooter gone berserk in a city school hallway. The trial account erred in the direction of a simplified dichotomy of youthful evil and innocence, representing Joseph White as a cold-hearted gang figure venting lethal rage on innocent student bystanders in the everyday pursuit of their schooling. These are the ways in which Joseph White's act is remembered, as "individual memory piggybacks on the resources social institutions provide" (Schudson 1992:51). Yet there was logic to Joseph White's acts in his social, economic, and historical context that makes his crime more commonplace and understandable than the media and trial accounts allow collective memory to comprehend.

Schudson (1992) argued that there is a moral imperative to contest constructed memories of the past by restudying important events with additional information and perspectives that a diversification of resources can provide. He then concluded that,

> If a moral imperative to remember is to make any sense, it is necessary to accept a view of memory as a constructive act, not a neurological or documentary reflex. Yet it also requires acknowledging that there are limits to the pasts that can be reconstructed, that there is an integrity to the past that deserves respect. Only then is an imperative to study the past, to think and rethink it, to debate it, coherent. Only then is there a foundation for urging people to care about and care for fallible human truths, no matter how fragile or contestable. It is, indeed, the fragility of human truths that makes the duty of remembering so vital. (p. 221)

Fortunately, there are numerous further resources that provide the opportunity to construct a broader case study of Joseph White's fatal shooting of Delondyn Lawson and his wounding of two other students.

The combination of census and justice system data with the more than 30 interviews we conducted over the past year underline the racial, economic, and historical context of this shooting and provide a socially structured background for understanding the group-based status conflict this shooting involved. The impoverishment and racial segregation of South Side Chicago neighborhoods in the middle part of the past century set the foundation for the formation of racially stratified gang membership and conflict in the neighborhood where Joseph White entered adolescence. Both White and his shooting victims were directly and indirectly buffeted by the actions of the resulting neighborhood gangs.

In urban settings, gang-connected shootings most often occur outside of school, but at the peak of the contemporary epidemic of youth violence in African American communities, this violence seeped into South Side Chicago schools. White's school shooting could not be justified as self-defense, but it also could not be meaningfully understood without recognizing its roots in the economic and racial tensions of the declining community in which it occurred. Social change is another element that likely must be added to our understanding of school shootings in urban areas, and it may prove important to consider how social change operates in rural and suburban areas as well, even if the changes take different forms.

The court transcripts from this case and our interviews with the defense lawyers further revealed a trial that obscured the structural understanding of this school shooting. The decision to try Joseph White as an adult, the prejudicial pretrial publicity, and the refusal of prosecutors to plea-bargain left little alternative than for Joseph White to claim self-defense. This was followed by a first-degree murder conviction and a lengthy prison sentence. The testimony in the case brought out the nature of the gang conflict but in a way that was likely prejudicial to White, portraying him as a hardened "Micky Cobra" gang member, while his self-defense claim was by legal necessity argued more in terms of his physical location and movements in the school hallway than in terms of the social dynamics of the conflicts that surrounded him in his community.

A more probable picture of Joseph White remembers him as a threatened young man who was too marginally involved in the gang life of the impoverished community that surrounded him to summon defenders when he came into conflict with members of a powerful and well-organized gang and whose inexperience with the gun the he misguidedly acquired to defend himself resulted in him squeezing off three semiautomatic shots in a lethal, unaimed volley that to the misfortune of him and his victims all found human targets. The media image of the shooting imposed the kind of random, rampage description that was at this time emerging from suburban and rural shootings, even though urban school shootings were more commonplace and connected in straightforward ways to the circumstances of their economically disadvantaged and racially segregated surroundings. Although the trial brought some of the community context into the picture, the legal facts presented were at best a subset of the social facts (and perhaps more likely a biased version of these facts) that led to this school shooting. The legal treatment of the case misconstrued the role of social context to the point that it became a misleading explanatory factor in the understanding of this school shooting.

The practical significance of the elimination of social context from a mitigated understanding of this school shooting is that 10 years after it occurred, Joseph White is today still serving the first quarter of his 45-year sentence at Menard State Prison in southern Illinois, 300 miles removed from his South Side Chicago neighborhood. The severity of this sentence is at least in part a consequence of the initial media depiction of this urban shooting in the exclusive terms of individualized responsibility for a random and senseless act. Alternatively, the triangulation of the case study method ensures a broader collection of information that, in this case, sees a history of urban racial turnover and capital disinvestment, followed by destabilizing gang conflict, as added social and developmental factors without which this shooting cannot be understood. Neither our theoretical nor our practical understanding of fatal school shootings benefits from a neglect of the group and gang-connected aspects of urban school shootings that joins acknowledgment of individual responsibility with a consideration of the influence of social context.

An unusual and in this sense cruel implication of this case study is that Joseph White's 45-year sentence for this urban shooting is likely

more severe than the typical treatment received by youthful assailants in rural and suburban settings where individualized accounts are more consistent with the fact situations. It is likely that the characterization of White was a gang member, in a time when gangs were destabilizing schools and neighborhoods, increased the severity of his sentence. The hypothesis that urban school shooters receive more severe sentences than their nonurban counterparts is a disturbing possibility worthy of wider study.

APPENDIX

MEDIA CHRONOLOGY

July 12, 1985. "Attack on 2 Blacks Barely Draws Notice." *Chicago Tribune*, p. 5.
March 21, 1992. "Police Fire Two Police Officers Over Incident With Teens." *Chicago Sun-Times*, p. 4.
November 20, 1992. "Boy Killed in Shooting at Tilden High School." *Chicago Tribune*, p. 1.
November 21, 1992. "Even Safety of Schools Shattered, Student Slain, 2 Others Wounded in Hallway at Tilden." *Chicago Tribune*, p. 1.
November 22, 1992. "Student Was in Wrong Place at Wrong Time." *Chicago Tribune*, p. 1.
November 23, 1992. "Teen Charged as Adult in Killing." *Chicago Defender*, p. 1.
November 24, 1992. "Body Count Rises in the Public Schools." *Chicago Tribune*, p. 18.
November 24, 1992. "Tilden Tries to Heal Wounds, Counselors Help Students Cope With Fatal Shooting." *Chicago Tribune*, p. 7.
November 27, 1992. "Metal Detectors in School Set Off Alarms." *Chicago Tribune*, p. 1.
December 1, 1992. "It May be Too Late to Sound an Alarm." *Chicago Tribune*, Bob Green Editorial.
December 5, 1992. "Bullets Rip School's Illusion of Safety." *Chicago Tribune*, p. 1.
June 14, 1993. "Death of an Innocent Bystander: The Peacekeeper in his Family, Delondyn Lawson is Cut Down at Random by a Classmate Firing Wildly." *People*, pp. 48-49.
January 20, 1994. "Trial Opens in Killing at Tilden." *Chicago Tribune*, p. 5.
January 22, 1994. "Teen Guilty of Slaying in Tilden Hallway." *Chicago Tribune*, p. 5.
March 15, 1994. "Prison Term in School Shooting." *Chicago Tribune*, p. 3.

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