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Racial Change, Neighborhoods,
and Whiteness

In January 2006, the *Chicago Tribune Magazine* ran a story commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the Chicago Freedom Movement's march through Gage Park and Marquette Park on Chicago's Southwest Side. The article chronicles a march in August 1966 led by Martin Luther King Jr. and roughly six hundred civil rights marchers. Racial tensions were running high in Chicago that year, and everywhere the Chicago Freedom Movement's nonviolent marchers went that summer they were met with "rocks and rage" (Terry 2006). The August march was no different, as hundreds of whites met the marchers. Early in the march, counterdemonstrators hurled a rock "as big as a fist" at King, hitting him in the head. Another threw a knife at King, narrowly missing (Ralph 1993). Undeterred, King and members of the Chicago Freedom Movement continued, heading north from Marquette Park to Halverson's Realty, where they held a prayer vigil. Hundreds of whites filled the street attempting to halt the march, tearing up an effigy of Dr. King, smashing windows of cars driven by blacks, and yelling, "We want Martin Luther Coon—kill those niggers—send them home" (Roberts 1966). Following the vigil, the marchers made their way back to Marquette Park, where they were met by a mob of four thousand hostile whites. The mob attacked the nonviolent marchers with rocks, fists, eggs, bottles, and cherry bombs. The presence of approximately 960 police officers prevented King and the marchers from being injured. The marchers made their way to their buses and cars with whites chasing after them, breaking windows

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and battling the policemen. White hostility to the marchers stunned even seasoned activists there. Andrew Young famously remarked that far from being a “rabble element,” hostile whites were “women and children and husbands and wives coming out of their homes [and] becoming a mob” (quoted in Ralph 1993: 123). A reporter on the scene noted that “men, women, and children sat on their front steps yelling ‘Cannibals’ and ‘Savages’ and ‘Go Home, niggers’” (Roberts 1966).

Clearly, many people recall the tumultuous 1960s as a time that the Civil Rights Movement and other groups pressed for social change. In the summer of 2006, as part of an event marking the anniversary of the Chicago Freedom Marches, we boarded a tour bus to visit important sites for the movement on the city’s Southwest and West sides. Given how much has been written about the Civil Rights Movement and the Chicago Freedom Movement, the tour provided context for those stories (see Garrow 1989; Ralph 1993; Anderson and Pickering 2008). For those new to the city, Chicago neighborhoods, particularly on the Southwest Side, are visually striking in appearance, with decidedly low-rise and residential landscape. It is difficult not to be impressed by the leafy and green streets of neatly packed, impressive bungalows, both solidly built and welcoming. The front stoops on each street recall a time that social life was more local and immediate, not spread over electronic devices. Visiting Marquette Park is particularly memorable, as its sheer size and activities (e.g., baseball games and people walking dogs) are a reprieve from the hustle and bustle of city life. Traveling east from the park, we pass several impressive Catholic churches that remain central to the fabric of the community. Finally, our tour ends along the faded commercial strips that connect the residential streets, reminding us that before large department stores one rarely found the need to leave the neighborhood.

The tour, albeit brief, covered only the story of the civil rights marchers. For us, however, another story lingered. It is the story of the lives of the lower middle-class and working-class whites who would have been most affected by the reforms that open housing marchers were seeking. Beyond the angry faces represented in pictures of the more violent clashes between marchers and whites, it seemed important to understand what was going on in the lives of those whites living in these neighborhoods. Lost in the headlines and stereotypes of white working-class communities were real people who went about the mundane aspects of their lives, going to work and church, tending to their homes, participating in their communities, and loving and caring for their children and families. The experience of whites living in segregated neighborhoods raises important questions. What did racial change represent to whites? What did it threaten? How did they make sense of the Civil Rights Movement vis-à-vis the potential for integration in their neighborhoods? How did whites organize themselves and their identities, roles, and emotions

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as racial change began to threaten their neighborhoods? Finding answers to these questions became the heart of our study.

Scholars have begun to answer some of these questions, focusing on why whites reacted so forcefully to the threat of integration and racial change. Although it was the marches that earned Marquette Park and the Southwest Side the reputation as an epicenter of northern racial hatred (Warren 2010; Pacyga 2010; Meyer 2000), there is ample evidence of white violence against blacks in the decades leading up to the marches of 1966 (Diamond 2009). Clearly, there were some hard-core racists fighting integration on the Southwest Side during the 1950s and 1960s, and for those whites the presence of blacks in their neighborhoods was too much to bear. For these and other whites, externalized anger toward blacks was a central response. Fear of integration seemed to permeate every conversation on the Southwest Side during the 1960s and early 1970s (McCourt 1977). For these whites, integration meant losing everything they had worked for: their home. The bungalow belt represented lower middle-class folks who “scrimped and saved and sacrificed” to own their own homes in “good” neighborhoods (Ralph 1993). Whites in these neighborhoods—labeled by some the “have-a-little-want-mores”—were working-class people striving for a better life for themselves and their children (Green 1988, 1990). Stock and retirement plans were not options for them; thus, a home was their principal investment. For this reason, property values were a frequent topic of discussion when referencing racial change. And given that property has always been racialized in the United States, a discussion of property values was inherently a racialized discussion (Harris 1993). Beyond the home, however, racial change also threatened their community or “turf,” as well as a significant element of their identity. Thus, economic concerns were only one part of what whites were fighting for; owning a home in a stable white neighborhood for many first- or second-generation individuals was symbolic of social achievement and becoming “white” and “respectable” (Hirsch 1983: 195; Guglielmo 2004; Sokol 2007).

For many whites in these neighborhoods, the challenge to segregation was an attack on their community that left them feeling victimized. A resident responding to an editorial to the *Southwest News Herald* captured this when she claimed that King and his followers were the aggressors, suggesting that King “had nothing but hatred and vengeance in his eyes” when he came into their community.¹ Residents were also quick to blame outsiders for explicit expressions of hatred and violence, often suggesting that whites who were protesting the King marches were “greasers” from other parts of Chicago or that outsiders seized on the marches to display their racism, and regular people were not involved. Southwest Side residents felt victimized and resentful of government, intellectuals, wealthier North Side residents,

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and suburbanites, who they felt were hypocritical in condemning white resistance to integration while wealthier whites were able to prevent integration by maintaining higher property values (Kefalas 2003). The populist rage that emerged on the Southwest Side focused on both civil rights organizations and their allegedly well-off white supporters, none of whom, to their mind, were from the neighborhood. Also, many whites had fled integration previously—usually one or two parishes to the east, an experience that cost them a great deal economically and emotionally. Thus, as Mike Royko noted, “When they see someone marching in their direction saying, ‘I want mine,’ they say: ‘You mean you want mine.’”² While there is likely some truth to these claims, there is no shortage of evidence to suggest that hostility toward blacks ran deep in working-class and lower middle-class communities in Chicago (Hirsch 1983; Ralph 1993; Seligman 2005). Some residents in the community were clearly loath to acknowledge the racism that was present.

The civil rights clashes happening in Chicago during the 1960s and those that people remember or visualize through press accounts, history, or media images were complex. For blacks, a history of containment, violence, and discriminatory housing practices that limited residential and social mobility options fueled the open housing movement. For whites, outside the more famous clashes, such as the one in Marquette Park, there was an everyday, block-by-block, intense tension with racial change. Our project documents white neighborhoods from the standpoint of the people who lived through these changes and experienced the loss of community, and their dreams for the future as a result. We seek to make sense of what it was like for whites growing up and living in racially changing—or, at least, racially charged—environments. Through this analysis we hope to illuminate and deepen the understanding of the ways in which race operates in everyday life. Thus, as we examine the stories whites tell of racial change and how it relates to their present lives, it is our aim to understand the changing contours of whiteness,³ white privilege, and efforts to maintain positive white racial identities. We wish to avoid reducing the attitudes and behavior of whites to simple racism. We likewise are not interested in serving as apologists for white racism or attempts to push white people to the center of race studies. Rather, we seek to capture the complexities of racism and whites while strengthening race scholarship through an erudite analysis of how race, whiteness, and privilege are understood and enacted over time.

We developed several general questions about the nature of their neighborhoods and the resulting change. What was it like to live in racially changing communities? How did whites interpret and act on the threat of or actual racial change that was occurring? What did children hear and learn in the community and from their parents about race, integration, and humanity? And importantly, how did living through the process of racial change affect

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their understanding of community and race? Answering these questions leads to a story, for whites, of loss, change, racism, and racial formation. Undoubtedly, racial change signaled a loss of a neighborhood, a shifting sense of community, and unraveling social networks many have yet to find again. The immediate threat was also tied to larger changes. The city that whites were living in was shifting from industrial to postindustrial, white to minority, and urban to suburban. The country was shifting economically, ideologically, and politically, buttressed by the Civil Rights Movement and a decade of intensive social and political upheaval. The aim of our book is to understand racial change by attending to not only the immediate concerns of families living in neighborhoods but also how whites understood themselves and discussed their place in a shifting social landscape. Thus, as we examine the stories whites tell of racial change, we not only learn how whites understand themselves and their neighborhoods racially; we also begin to see the changing contours of whiteness, white privilege, and efforts to maintain positive white racial identities.

Our analysis is situated at the intersection of urban studies and whiteness studies. Thus, we examine race as it is constructed through discourse and action and how race is a central organizing principle in social institutions, such as housing, education, and employment. We use the urban studies literature that examines the shifting racial structure and dynamics in urban areas starting around 1950, with particular attention to cities in the urban North. Several demographic and structural shifts altered the racial dynamics in almost all of the big cities in the North after World War II. White flight and resegregation often followed a block-by-block pattern in most cities. The foundation of such shifts is rooted in numerous overlapping and complex social processes, with ties to religion, the economy, housing policy and suburbanization, racial identity, and political party restructuring. And at the same time, the Civil Rights Movement was attempting to alter the racial hierarchy in the United States. Thus, when looking at white flight, it is important to bear in mind that these shifts cannot be reduced to individual predispositions and prejudice. Rather, they are the result of a larger set of struggles over space, resources, and ultimately, racial power. Understanding this context, then, serves as an important touchstone as we examine how race shapes the lives and experiences of whites and, in turn, how whites continue to bolster and shape white privilege.

We draw on the critical whiteness literature that focuses on understanding white identity as a racialized location of privilege, power, and property. The early whiteness literature was concerned, largely, with “outing” the invisible privilege and power of whites (McIntosh 1992) and flushing out the complexities of whiteness—for example, antiracist whites, white double consciousness (Winant 1997), whites living across the color line (Dalmage

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2000, 2004), and gay and poor whites (Hartigan 1999). By the late 1990s, whiteness studies had gone global. Some of the most interesting literature on whiteness has come out of post-apartheid South Africa, as whites have begun to think about themselves in a context in which they have lost political, if not economic, power (Steyn 2001; Dolby 2001; Ballard 2004). Each of these literatures informs our research as we explore a time that lower middle-class and working-class whites living in segregated Chicago neighborhoods faced the loss of political and social capital and the decline in the economic value of their largest asset: their home. Looking at the upheaval on Chicago's West and Southwest sides as a result of racialized battles provides an opportunity to examine how whites consciously do race work as their relatively stable identities have been shaken up. We explore institutional and ideological mechanisms that held racial borders in place before civil rights gains in the housing market. Thus, we track how racial borders were understood and transformed by whites in a way that allowed them to maintain a sense of white superiority, even as they experienced the end of what had been their way of life, their Eden.

Neighborhoods, Race, and Racial Identity

The emotion generated around the Marquette Park marches was emblematic of larger trends in urban neighborhoods throughout the country. In the post-World War II decades, patterns of racial residential settlement were altered and fortified through the dynamics of neighborhood change (Taub, Taylor, and Dunham 1984). In Chicago during this period, the tight boundaries of the so-called black belt expanded, and racial boundaries or borders on the South and West sides were destroyed; this was caused by a combination of forces that included remarkable black population growth, pent-up black demand for good housing, discriminatory actions by speculating realtors, redlining by banks, and white opposition to integration (Ellen 2000; Hirsch 1983; Jackson 1985; Levin and Harmon 1991; Massey and Denton 1993; Kruse 2005; Seligman 2005). In cities across the country in the 1950s and 1960s, neighborhoods experienced rapid and often total racial transition, leading to an almost block-by-block pattern of racial transition, with many neighborhoods experiencing 50–90 percent white flight in less than a decade (Duncan and Duncan 1957; Goodwin 1979; Soutner 1980; Oser 1994). The changes illuminated the tenuous ties and sense of solidarity that bound white communities together. In fact, without institutional protections for housing segregation, whites attempted to hold the racial border through intragroup pressure. The pressure was strong enough that if a white family sold their home, they needed to do so surreptitiously. One of our informants, Jim, from the Auburn Gresham community, provides such an example: “The

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first person on our block that moved out moved out in the middle of the night. The next day they just weren't there. You know: a moving van pulling up, and a black person moving in. I would say after the first person left, you probably didn't have to move out at night anymore. It was just expected that everyone was going to leave." Whites, fearful of blackness and feeling abandoned by politicians, police, and the government, began to search for ways to regain a sense of safety and security. Until this time, many whites had passively accepted institutional support for their privilege. Now they were forced to actively think about how they would claim, maintain, and struggle for white privilege. Without a history of active solidarity, but with a pervasive fear of blackness and an overwhelming cynicism toward integration, unsuccessful attempts were made to hold the racial border through intra-community pressure. White flight was rooted variously in deep-seated racism against blacks, fear of losing communities and newly achieved "white" identities, and a fear that property values would decline precipitously as blacks moved in.

When white flight did not immediately occur, resistance to racial change included efforts by various actors to mitigate the perceived negative effects of racial transition (Molotch 1972; Taub, Taylor, and Dunham 1984; DeSenna 1994; Keating 1994; Wiese 1995; Seligman 2005). Many residents organized to "defend" their communities from racial change, using a variety of tools to "stabilize" their communities and keep blacks from moving in. The defending organizations perceived themselves to be guarding investments that whites made in their homes and upholding the values of self-government to preserve segregated housing and communities. Neighborhood defense took various forms. The most prominent from the 1920s through the 1950s involved hostility, harassment, and violence directed at blacks who attempted to move into white neighborhoods (Hirsch 1983; Sugrue 1996; Kruse 2005; Seligman 2005). Another form that emerged in a small number of neighborhoods is best described as "managed integration" (Molotch 1972). Unlike the small number of communities that attempted to pursue integration (Saltman 1990; Maly 2005) actively, in these "managed" communities the first goal was to intervene in the process of racial change to stabilize communities, not welcome African American newcomers. For example, Seligman's account of Chicago's northwestern Austin community shows how whites employed the "language of stabilization" in its attempt to shut down panic-peddling real estate agents by banning for-sale signs (Seligman 2005: 184–185). Although the efforts varied, the common response involved residents focused on the institutional practices working against stable communities. On the whole, the defensive stabilizing efforts did not hold; in the three decades following World War II, millions of whites fled central city neighborhoods for the suburbs or neighborhoods on the central city's periphery.

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As scholars have analyzed the factors accounting for the rapidity of racial change in the urban North, the practices of religious institutions have received much attention. In the urban North, and particularly on Chicago's South Side, neighborhood boundaries were intimately tied, and almost equivalent, to the borders of Catholic parishes. In fact, the parish grounded residents' sense of place. "The one thing you always noticed about the South Side of Chicago," notes a member of the St. Sabina parish on Chicago's Southwest Side, is that "people always talked in terms of what parish do you belong to and not what street that you are from. Nobody would say, 'I live around so and so park,' or 'I'm a South Sider' even. They would just say, 'I'm from Sabina's' . . . because they were proud of it. Because it was something special to them" (quoted in McMahon 1995: 71). Family, neighborhood, and parish were tightly woven together in the lives of both adults and children. Strong ties between the local parish and the community were surely recognized even by those non-Catholic residents, if for no reason other than that friends organized their lives around parish activities. And while the Catholic church was important in its provision of religious functions, it also ensured cohesion of various white European ethnic groups. For the Irish, as one example, who were often not welcome in Anglo-Protestant communities, the church provided support as well as an anchor for their identity (McGreevy 1996). This strong communal tie was in part a function of Catholicism's traditional emphasis on the importance of community. Catholic devotionism stressed examining one's sins within a community setting, elevating the community (and the priest) and diminishing the individual (McMahon 1995).

The church's accent on community, however, was tested when it came to race. As John McGreevy (1996: 177) notes, the Catholic church in the 1960s had two cultures, or two "Catholic worlds"—one working toward integration and one opposed to it. The former included Catholic liberals seeking to integrate church institutions and organizing programs to deal with the issue of race. In the late 1950s in Chicago, the church formed the Organization for a Southwest Community (OSC) to confront the issue of integration on Chicago's South Side. The OSC was born in part out of an effort to stem demographic change in heavily Catholic parishes and prevent parish decline (Frisbie 2002). Joining in anti-blockbusting campaigns, the OSC implemented an ambitious plan for building a stable integrated neighborhood on the Southwest Side. As redlining prevented young white couples who wanted to live in the St. Sabina community from obtaining long-term mortgages with low down payments, the OSC responded by creating a home loan program. The OSC worked with three banks to provide low-down-payment loans on the Southwest Side, leading to almost five hundred loans. The OSC also initiated an anti-blockbusting campaign aimed at uncovering and prosecuting real estate speculators who spread rumors and fear with the aim of profiting

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from massive turnover of property. St. Sabina parish also turned to Friendship House, a movement aimed at creating interracial understanding, to help deal with the race issue (McGreevy 1996). With the guidance of Friendship House, the parish sponsored a program that encouraged white and black parishioners to meet and socialize with the hope that this would discourage racial stereotypes. These programs did appear to calm whites' fears of racial change as more whites took their homes off the market and pledged to "stick it out" (McMahon 1995: 151–152). However, the OSC began to decline, due in part to a lack of a strong organizer (Frisbie 2002). Another aspect was the shooting of Frank Kelly, who was white, by a black youth, across the street from St. Sabina. According to the late journalist Robert McClory, this event more than anything else tipped the community. Within the span of a few years, two thousand white parishioners had left (McClory 2010).

Such efforts at interracial interaction stand in contrast to the substantial numbers of Catholics who were opposed. Survey data show that in the 1960s, white Catholics were the American group least likely to see integration as acceptable; for many, integration meant losing their communities and churches (McGreevy 1996). For whites who were veterans of racial transition (i.e., having fled from one or two parishes to the east), experience suggested to parishioners and some priests that integration was not possible. This "world" in the Catholic community included bitter parishioners who were becoming increasingly hostile to any sermons that contained the theme of "love thy neighbor," not wanting to be lectured on racial tolerance (McGreevy 1996). Many white Catholics felt abandoned by the church's stand on integration, while others rejected priests and nuns who supported the Civil Rights Movement. Within the church itself there were priests who were openly opposed to integration, even working to keep whites in the neighborhood and maintain the status quo, with little actual concern for integration (McMahon 1995: 145).⁴ A clear example of this sentiment was Father Francis X. Lawlor, a Catholic priest and science teacher at St. Rita High School. Lawlor believed that without intervention, racial transition would result in the loss of Catholic schools and churches on Chicago's South Side. His plan was to "hold the line at Ashland Avenue" by creating a network of 186 block clubs to "promote the cultural, social and economic cohesiveness of the community" (in McCourt 1977). Lawlor generated a significant following in Chicago largely because he tapped into the fears and frustration of whites living in the path of racial change.⁵ Invoking solidarity among white ethnic groups, Lawlor gave voice to whites who felt they were a "forgotten minority" without any programs "sponsored on their behalf by the government or the churches or civil rights groups" (McGreevy 1996: 232). In doing so, Lawlor echoed a sentiment that would form the basis of the white reaction to the Civil Rights Movement, one that parallels the language of rights.

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Compared with other religious groups, members of the Catholic church historically have remained in their neighborhoods and resisted integration and racial change. White Protestants and Jews were more likely than white Catholics to flee their neighborhoods. For example, in 1950 the solidly Jewish area of North Lawndale was home to 87,000 whites, as well as forty-eight synagogues. By 1960, all but 11,000 whites had left, and all forty-eight synagogues had closed (fifteen in one year), while the more Catholic South Lawndale remained white during this period (McGreevy 1996). As Gerald Gamm (1999: 55) notes, "Arson, banking programs, and blockbusting targeted Jewish and Catholic neighborhoods without discrimination, but Jewish neighborhoods succumbed to the urban exodus more easily, more rapidly, and more thoroughly than Catholic neighborhoods." Looking only at the response of individual members of programs sponsored by the Catholic church, however, obscures the structural reasons that white Catholics resisted integration and did not flee as readily as their Jewish neighbors. Comparing the structure of Jewish synagogues and the Catholic church reveals different institutional rules surrounding membership, rootedness, and governance of each church. The Catholic parish system defines membership geographically. Churches are viewed as permanent structures that root parishioners in that place. Jewish synagogue membership is seen as voluntary and tied more to the Torah than to a geographic location. In addition, the Catholic church's rules on authority follow a hierarchical structure of governance, where the parish "does not exist apart from a priest and a hierarchy" (Gamm 1999: 19). In comparison, the Jewish synagogue is structured around congregational authority, within which the rabbi and religious hierarchy are subordinated. Understanding this structure provides a deeper understanding of the serious commitment white Catholics had for their neighborhoods, as well as their fear of integration.

Beyond individual and institutional structures, racial change and white flight were tied to the broader structural shifts that began in the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, the popular narrative about racial change in northern cities involves a small number of blacks moving into the neighborhood, concerned whites beginning to panic about housing values or the prospect of black neighbors, and moving within a few years. While this did occur in numerous northern neighborhoods, complex changes occurring in urban America were also at play. A generalized urban crisis emerged during this time that originated not just in white antipathy toward black neighbors or the wave of black mobilization and uprisings of the late 1960s. Instead, urban historians point to long-simmering issues surrounding deindustrialization, racial segregation, and declining housing that entangled to set the stage for urban crisis (Sugrue 1996). Beginning in the late 1940s and 1950s, manufacturing industries started to automate production and relocate plants to suburban

and rural locales. Thus, the once dependable urban jobs that helped thousands gain a foothold in the middle class started to become less plentiful. Also, the lines of racial segregation were formed and shored up in these decades, as migrating blacks from the American South came to northern cities (Massey and Denton 1993). In Chicago, incoming blacks were packed into a narrow band of streets in the black belt, creating pressure on the borders of white neighborhoods, as well as an economic incentive for blockbusters to exploit white fears of integration (Hirsch 1983). As the formerly tight racial lines began to break up, whites who had previously given little thought to how institutional racism protected their segregated white spaces began to feel abandoned. Finally, decline of urban neighborhoods did not occur simply when blacks moved in. Cities across the country suffered a blight problem after decades of untouched deterioration during the Great Depression and World War II. In her research on Chicago's West Side, Amanda Seligman (2005) notes that concern over blight dates to the 1950s, with the city enforcement of building codes making it very difficult for new black families to afford or maintain their houses.

As whites began to flee their neighborhoods, federal intervention created pathways for flight by placing a high value on suburban housing while devaluing much of the older city stock of housing (Lassiter 2006). With the onset of the Great Depression and, in particular, the collapse of the home finance sector, the federal government intervened by creating the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) to revive financial institutions, stimulate the market for homes, and reform the mortgage process. The HOLC also used a color-coded ranking system for neighborhoods that favored new, white, and middle-class areas and marked in red (for least desirable) older and minority neighborhoods.⁶ Accepting existing racial segregation and prejudices, the HOLC applied notions of ethnic and racial worth, perpetuating segregation and generating a new market that discriminated against nonwhites (Jackson 1985). Assessing the intervention of the federal government in the housing industry, David Freund (2007: 133) notes, "The new federal presence in housing markets did not merely institutionalize segregation by putting state authority and state resources behind the impulse. It codified and then administered a racially exclusionary system of housing economics." These institutional practices, seemingly designed to protect property rights for whites, ended up creating chaos and disadvantage for whites who lived on the racial borders. In fact, this social location is one that many of our respondents look back on and describe as "traumatic."

The HOLC's appraisal logic had a lasting impact on the housing industry. Private lending institutions and other government programs adopted the agency's residential security maps, its appraisal system, and the definition of "minority homeownership as an actuarial risk to white people"

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(Freund 2007: 118). The HOLC's impact was greatest on the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). The FHA was designed to stimulate private investment in home mortgages by insuring them against losses. Between 1934 and 1968, the FHA revolutionized the home finance industry by reducing down payments, extending the repayment period, establishing minimum construction standards, and shrinking interest rates by reducing risk to lenders (Jackson 1985). Yet because of the underlying logic, the FHA also invested in segregation and suburbia over integration and cities. For example, the FHA favored single-family homes over multifamily units. Also, in establishing construction standards, the FHA established minimum requirements for lot size, how far the house was set back from the street, and separation from adjacent structures, all of which favored the suburbs. Finally, the "unbiased professional estimate that was a prerequisite for any loan" was often biased against diverse environments, dense areas, and "inharmonious racial or nationality groups" (Jackson 1980: 435–436). Thus, the estimated \$119 trillion provided by the FHA in its first four decades went largely to white, middle-class residents who chose to live in the suburbs. Suburbanization furthered the urban crisis, deepening the problems of cities and encouraging decline in many neighborhoods. Robert Beauregard (2002:94–95) notes, "The departure of the white middle class left the cities with lower property assessments and lower tax revenues, increased crime, poorer health, greater social and economic dependency, more family instability, and larger governmental expenditures." As middle-class families fled, cities felt the effects of fewer individuals paying property taxes, the speed-up of deindustrialization, and the beginning of widespread neighborhood deterioration. For many whites, these factors remained invisible, while blackness was seen as the cause of the deterioration. In short, while these institutions created the context in which integration was undermined through economic practices, most whites blamed blacks for declining property values. Between 1950 and 1970, large numbers of whites began to leave their old neighborhoods for the suburbs.

Whites fleeing central cities left not only their old neighborhoods and religious institutions but also their political identity. From the 1930s to the mid-1960s, a liberal governing coalition united disparate groups of working-class citizens (e.g., urban northerners, rural southerners, and blacks) by promising that the state would protect their economic interests and social security. The New Deal coalition, as it is known, stretched from Washington to the Deep South and to big cities in the North. As Thomas Sugrue (1996: 10) notes, "White and black Americans took the promise of liberalism seriously and mobilized in the 1940s and 1950s to assert their rights as citizens." Whites centered their organizing on the expansion of unions and workers' rights, but it also included mobilizing around protecting their class positions

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and racial identities. The New Deal coalition, however, began to seriously fray in the 1960s around issues of race. Jonathan Rieder (1989: 244) notes, if there was one “single source of displeasure that shook the New Deal Coalition to its core, it was the civil rights revolution.” Working-class urban ethnics, Catholics, and northern whites, who were loyal to the Democratic Party, felt threatened by the “broad array of social and cultural changes” occurring during this period (Formisano 1991: 236). Such feelings are understandable, given that working white men and women were the main beneficiaries of this coalition. Thomas and Mary Edsall (1991: 30) note, “By the 1960s, . . . liberalism had begun to press an agenda that increasingly targeted benefits to minorities and provoked often divisive reactions—including cultural and racial antagonisms, anger over reverse discrimination as well as over threatened white hegemony, fear of crime, and distress at continued family dissolution. The struggle to expand and enforce citizenship and constitutional rights became, by the late 1960s, a source of bitter, often subterranean, conflict, dividing rather than strengthening the once-powerful political coalition dominated by those at the bottom.” Race became a wedge issue as whites interpreted civil rights gains—from fair housing to school desegregation, busing, and affirmative action—as having gone too far. Whites began to see themselves as negatively affected by race and race politics, choosing then to flee their neighborhoods and abandon the Democratic Party to be “re-born right” (Nicolaides 2002: 285).

The Democratic Party struggled to find answers to white discontent, while politicians attempted to exploit the concerns and fears of the white lower middle class. The emergence of the white ethnic voting bloc in the late 1960s was one part of this story. White ethnic politics during this time centered on fighting off perceived threats to group status, complete with resentment toward government programs favoring blacks and a concern over crime. Rather than joining blacks in their struggle, whites began to claim that as white ethnics they were also victims (Sugrue and Skrentny 2008). The Republican Party, for its part, sought to build a new coalition around taxes and race in an attempt to break up the liberal coalition that had unified the economic interest of the poor. Edsall and Edsall argue that the GOP attempted to divide this coalition by drawing in disaffected whites through a divisive rhetoric of loss and victimization. For example, the GOP framed the issue of taxes in terms of what government takes from whites, not what it provides to various groups. This focus on the costs of liberalism resonated with whites who experienced “loss of control of school selection, union apprenticeship programs, hiring, promotions, neighborhoods, public safety, and even sexual morals and a stable social order” (Edsall and Edsall 1991: 11). The GOP also framed the emergence of black power and the urban riots that occurred in cities across the country in the late 1960s as the failure of

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liberal social policies (e.g., school desegregation and busing) and embraced law-and-order rhetoric (Formisano 1991; Sugrue and Skrentny 2008). By the late 1960s, what has been termed the “white backlash” had picked up steam as many northern urban whites were drawn into the Republican Party, whose leaders capitalized on white fears of crime, busing, housing integration, and a loss of rights.

As whites pushed back on the Civil Rights Movement, the language of rights became a powerful organizing tool. For many whites living in urban neighborhoods, homeowners’ rights were counterpoised to the Civil Rights Movement, as it was perceived that civil rights were helping blacks by eroding the privileges whites had worked so hard to attain. As whites pushed back on the Civil Rights Movement, the language of rights became a powerful organizing tool. In the 1950s and 1960s whites began to move away from an old narrative that centered on race toward one that centered on “a person’s relationship to place and to property” (Freund 2007: 18). This narrative, complete with racial codes, suggested that whites had consistently shown superiority in owning, maintaining, and protecting their property; thus, they had the right to secure their houses and neighborhoods from threats. Sugrue explored this notion when looking at the rise of the homeowners’ rights movement, in which whites began to couch their claims in terms of entitlement and victimization. He notes, “Some defined homeowner’s rights as an extension of their constitutional right to freedom of assembly. They had a right to choose their associates. That right would be infringed if their neighborhoods were racially mixed” (Sugrue 1996: 219). Undoubtedly, class resentment fueled white mobilization during this period, as whites expressed a populist rage not only against civil rights groups but also against wealthy, and liberal, whites. Often on the front lines of the black struggle for social justice, lower middle-class and working-class whites viewed calls for integration as hypocritical and dismissive (Podair 2004). In the 1970s, whites in Boston complained bitterly that busing was singling out working-class communities and avoiding wealthier and suburban areas (Formisano 1991). In Los Angeles, suburban whites evoked the rights language to claim their right to control their community, property, and schools (Nicolaidis 2002). In most cases, whites portrayed themselves as victims of the media, politicians, and “knee-jerk” liberals who were playing “race politics” with their legitimate concerns, dismissed as just a “bunch of mindless, unfeeling racists.”⁷ In evoking these rights, whites often positioned themselves not as whites, but as victims of a government that had “elevated minority rights over the rights of the majority” (Sugrue 1996: 227).

For hardworking whites in lower middle-class and working-class neighborhoods, social and racial changes, fueled by the HOLC practices, must have felt like a bait and switch. Having worked hard, scrimped and saved, and

endured doubling up in houses, they had finally made it; now they found the rules were changing. Segregated white spaces were being threatened by real estate firms, lending institutions, and government—that is, the very institutions that once supported these neighborhoods. As the Civil Rights Movement pressed the state for change and the state responded, whites living in segregated working-class communities felt abandoned (Hirsch 1983; Sugrue 1996; Nicolaides 2002; Kefalas 2003). Writing about Chicago neighborhoods in the 1950s and 1960s, Andrew Diamond (2009: 226) posits that “many whites in the Bungalow Belt perceived” the building of public housing near white working-class neighborhoods “as a state-driven integration initiative, [and] the *Brown* decision struck working-class whites as further proof that the government, federal or local, was clearly not looking out for their interests.” Once their segregated white neighborhoods were no longer “protected” by the state (see also the Fair Housing Act of 1968), whites felt they had few choices if they wanted to continue their way of life. Becky Nicolaides (2002: 6) notes that from the 1950s through the 1970s, “Property relations became the primary mediator of class and racial power.” Thus, one’s home and, by extension, one’s neighborhood represented much more than housing; they represented social power. And importantly, the social, cultural, and economic struggles behind the Civil Rights Movement led to several significant shifts in the U.S. racial landscape, altering the foundation of how whites understood themselves.

The varied social, religious, economic, political, and racial factors that engendered racial change and reshaped urban areas throughout the United States are well documented. We know less about the legacy of racial change.⁸ In this study, we focus on this legacy, building on the well-documented research on the events, processes, and institutions involved as whites defended their communities, fled, and reconstructed new ones. To understand this legacy, however, it is important to attend to the complexity and shifting meaning of race and racial identity. As we examine the experience of growing up in racially changing neighborhoods on Chicago’s Southwest and West sides from the 1950s through the 1970s, we focus on a time and space that offers a lens to understand how whiteness shifts over time. Whites born in Chicago during this time grew up in a city in which race was explicitly lived and openly talked about. In response to Civil Rights Movement victories, the state began moving toward color-blindness in legislation, actions, and words (Omi and Winant 1994). Thus, whites’ experiences were grounded in particular spaces and an understanding of race that shifted over time. Such changes allow us to explore the ways in which racial privilege, or whiteness, shifts across different eras and maintains itself as a powerful force in the lives of people. Our focus is on investigating these shifting understandings, demonstrating how whiteness works to remain strong and powerful,

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protecting the privileges afforded to whites and working to frame whites as good, moral, and righteous.

To understand the nature of race and racial identity, it is important to clarify the meaning and landscape of race. We start with the assumption that race is a social and cultural construct, not an essence that is fixed or grounded in biology. And while race is socially constructed, what race means and the importance of the various categories are fluid, shaped by social, economic, and political forces. Within this context of shifting racial meanings, individuals learn to interpret those meanings through their daily interactions. As Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994: 60) argue, we learn “some combination, some version, of the rules of racial classification, and of [our] own racial identity, often without obvious teaching or conscious inculcation.” Through socialization, then, race becomes a common sense or a manner of knowing, explaining, or operating in the world. Part of this common sense relates to social hierarchies. Patricia Hill Collins (2000: 284) argues that we create hierarchies based on values and power so that one group is dominant and other groups are subordinate. The dominant group also creates a system of “common sense” that justifies its “right to rule.” Given the presence of such a hierarchy, it is best to see race as a social fact, something that is indeed constructed (rather than inherent) but real in its consequences (Anderson 2003). Thus, while race may be an idea that is constructed by people, it is grounded in material, political, and social realities (Guglielmo 2004; Lipsitz 2006). In short, race may be in our heads, but it has measurable effects in the world.

Being on top of the racial hierarchy is tied to access to valued resources. Folks defined as white receive privilege and power for no reason other than being part of the group defined as white. Whiteness is not simply about the lack of melanin. It is about the way in which power and privilege operate in the world and is clearly linked to a struggle over desired resources (Steyn 2001). Maintaining access to resources often requires that subordinate groups be excluded. Margaret Anderson (2003: 33) has noted that race both can be constructed and “[result] in a specific distribution of differential resources.” This unequal distribution of resources is not natural. It requires effort—or, to quote George Lipsitz (2006), a “possessive investment in whiteness.” Lipsitz argues that conscious, deliberate, and systematic attempts to institutionalize group identity and power have provided whites with structural advantages that affect individual and group life chances and opportunities (e.g., FHA/Veterans Administration appraisal and lending practices, urban renewal efforts, lending and real estate discrimination, segregated education, and tax policy). In this way, whiteness can be understood as a process of asset accumulation for whites (Leonardo 2004). Racial identity is thus inextricably linked to a form of political behavior that is achieved through everyday processes (Boyd 2010).

Nevertheless, many whites do not recognize this privilege. Undoubtedly, as Amanda Lewis (2004: 626) notes, in a racialized social system all “actors are racialized, including whites.” Most whites, however, tend not to see themselves as being racialized, having shared race-based concerns, or acting in racially motivated ways. Thus, many scholars have concluded that white racial identity or whiteness is “invisible,” even an “unacknowledged norm,” a “hidden identity,” or an “unmarked category,” masking the privileges of being on top of the racial hierarchy (Frankenberg 1993; Dyer 1997; Doane 2003; McIntosh 1992). The cultural hegemony of whiteness is maintained by making whiteness appear normal, thereby mystifying or not calling into question the racial order. In fact, most whites appear relatively unaware of the role race plays in shaping their lives or the advantages that come with white racial identity. One reason for this is that most of us see social life as a “sum total of conscious and deliberate individual activities” (Lipsitz 2006: 21). As a result, “discourse on privilege” leads many whites to view racism as individual in origin (e.g., a few bad apples) rather than exploring the structural nature of race or the systemic nature of racial privilege and disadvantage (Leonardo 2004: 140). The power of whiteness, then, results not so much from individual animus as from individualistic notions that preclude apprehension of the collective efforts made to sustain white privilege. The fact that the legal system has formally equalized individual access to resources (e.g., housing) furthers this dodging of the structural nature of race, as any “unequal group results” can be explained by individual or cultural factors (Collins 2000: 279).

White identity is more than an individualized process. It “involves the formation of social groups organized around material interests with their roots in social structure, not just individual consciousness” (Anderson 2003: 29–30). Whites may not see themselves as racial actors; however, they are racially interested and do act in racially motivated ways that serve to protect their racial interests (Hartigan 1999; Lewis 2004). This becomes clear when white interests and power are threatened. Whites claim that they are now an aggrieved group that has suffered disadvantage from “reverse” racial discrimination (Gallagher 1997; Bonilla-Silva, Lewis, and Embrick 2006). Whites explain or defend social relationships and social practices using a racialized language (Bonilla-Silva 2001b; Doane 2006). Scholars have looked at such racialized language in various ways, examining “discursive repertoires,” racialized storytelling, race talk, “sincere fictions,” testimonies, frames of understanding, and cultural practices (Frankenberg 1993; Delgado 1999; Myers 2005; Bonilla-Silva, Lewis, and Embrick 2006; Lipsitz 2006; Vera, Feagin, and Gordon 1995). Underlying these disparate examinations is a focus on how racial discourse shapes our common-sense understandings of the world and thus reinforces “ways of knowing” that support the racial

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hierarchy. As Ashley Doane (2006: 256) notes, it is through racial discourse that individuals or groups frame “racial issues as they strive for ideological and political advantage.” In other words, rhetorical strategies allow whites to make racial claims that promote a particular, and privileged, position.

Examining these strategies is particularly important, given relatively recent and substantial changes in the racial structure. The Civil Rights Movement, other social movements, and legislation reframed racial politics in the United States, altering how race operated, challenging white dominance and racial exclusion (e.g., housing and schools), providing legal protection for basic civil rights, and challenging white hegemony surrounding culture and national identity. Woody Doane (2003: 15) has argued that “implicit in this process was a challenge to the historical foundations of whiteness; that is, an attack on the legitimization of white identity grounded in claims to white supremacy and the casting of whiteness as a positive and normalized alternative to a negatively defined ‘racial other.’” In short, the gains of the Civil Rights Movement made it more difficult for whites to claim they were the unexamined core of U.S. culture. Yet the movements in the 1960s did not overturn racial supremacy. While the civil rights struggles challenged legalized segregation and widely held beliefs about the innate biological inferiority of blacks, a new racial democracy failed to emerge (Omi and Winant 1994; Bonilla-Silva 2001a; Forman and Lewis 2006). In fact, equality was “reinterpreted, rearticulated, reinserted in the business-as-usual framework of U.S. politics and culture” (Winant 1997). Starting in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a racial reaction movement rearticulated the meaning of race in the United States, creating a new racial common sense (Omi and Winant 1994). A new sensibility emerged that reproduces racial inequalities and protects white privilege through an alternative set of discursive strategies (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick 2004).

These discursive strategies have altered how we talk about race, particularly how racial antipathy is expressed. The shift in racial discourse is generally described as the “color-blind era.” However, the moniker should be understood as the prevalent form of racial discourse rather than as an indication that a state of racial equality has been achieved. Unlike previous periods in which racial prejudice was more overt, today whites are more likely to express such sentiments in covert, contradictory, and subtle ways (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997; Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000; Sears and Henry 2003; Myers 2005). In a color-blind era, white stories often extol “non-racial” positive virtues of white residents and neighborhoods, with little acknowledgment of how institutions have supported whites and ignoring or discriminating against others (Feagin 2010). Other themes of color-blind discourse involve naturalizing segregation and expressing the interconnected themes of racial resentment and white victimhood (Bonilla-Silva 2009). The rise

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of color-blind discourse is intimately tied to the period from the late 1960s through the 1980s, when the United States experienced the rise of the “new right,” an authoritarian, resentment-fueled, and right-wing populism that sought to curtail the progressive civil rights gains of the 1960s (Kazin 1995). The new right “rearticulated” such gains through a façade of racial neutrality while using racial coding or “phrases and symbols which refer indirectly to racial themes, but do not directly challenge popular and democratic or egalitarian ideals” (Omi and Winant 1994: 123). Coded terms, including “busing,” “welfare,” and “affirmative action,” suggest that blacks do not try hard enough to overcome difficulties; that they take what they have not earned; and that the playing field is tilting away from whites (Kinder and Sanders 1996: 105–106; Wellman 1997). By the early 1980s, at the national level, the Reagan administration was borrowing from the new right, arguing that racial discrimination had been eliminated and, as a result, civil rights remedies were now working against whites and group-based rights should be challenged.