



**BROWN
IN THE
WINDY
CITY**

**MEXICANS
AND PUERTO
RICANS
IN POSTWAR
CHICAGO
LILIA FERNANDEZ**

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Postwar Chicago

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Pushing Puerto Ricans Around: Urban Renewal, Race, and Neighborhood Change

The spatial structure of the Chicago metropolitan region is not a spontaneous expression of natural forces, contrary to the theories of some ecologists. And residence is not just coincidentally related to race, ethnicity, and class distribution of populations in the metropolitan area. This spatial structure is the result of decisions made by key institutional actors about where various kinds of housing will be constructed. Banks and savings and loan institutions determine where mortgage money will be made available and which neighborhoods will be denied credit; municipal zoning regulations determine the kind of housing that can be constructed. . . . Government agencies make decisions about what kind of public housing will be built and where it will be located. . . . The federal government enforces or relaxes its guidelines about what housing projects will be funded under urban renewal. . . . The Chicago Housing Authority decides on locations for public housing.

—Squires et al., *Chicago: Race, Class and the Response to Urban Decline*¹

Our data show that there is no excessive juvenile or adult Puerto Rican crime incidence for Chicago. Many of their violations are slum-conditioned, related to their cultural background . . . or their inadequate command of the English language.

—Chicago Commission on Human Relations, *Mayor's Committee on New Residents*²

They do not treat us like human beings. The Americans, because they are white and speak English better, think they are superior to us. It was necessary to act even though I think that it may now be worse for us.

—Felix Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*³

When Puerto Ricans came to Chicago in the 1940s and 1950s, many of them settled in the neighborhoods closest to the city's downtown—the Near West Side and the Near North Side—areas with relatively cheap rents, racially mixed populations, and also the most aged real estate in the city. On the Near West Side, the Congress Expressway, the residential redevelopment precipitated by the construction of University of Illinois Circle Campus, and urban renewal made their stays there rather brief. By the early 1960s, many Puerto Ricans were relocating elsewhere. Many went to the Near North Side, where newly arrived families had settled in the fifties. Migrants formed an enclave in the area of Clark Street and Superior Avenue, close to downtown hotels and restaurants—which employed many of them as busboys, housekeepers, and janitors—and factories that hired others in the industrial corridor to the west.⁴ Apart from its convenient location, the area had little to offer. Tightly packed with crowded, multistory structures that had mixed commercial and residential uses, the district was in severe decline. Shops and stores occupied many first floors while transient hotels and kitchenette apartments filled upper floors, bursting at the seams with tenants. Families started in such buildings near Clark and Superior Streets, then moved farther north as budgets allowed for better housing, once conditions became intolerable, or when slum clearance forced them out. Migrants eventually dispersed across an area that covered Dearborn to Halsted Streets and Superior to North Avenues (see fig. 17).⁵

The midcentury in-migration of Puerto Ricans (as well as Mexicans and African Americans) to central city neighborhoods in the industrial north signaled a dramatic change in the urban social landscape. Their growing presence led to increasingly complex and multilayered racial and ethnic encounters between residents who contended with one another's social difference and sought to define the boundaries and limits of their "communities." Yet the interpersonal dynamics that occurred in the city's neighborhoods were not simply a human drama decided by individual actors. Capital interests and the state (as represented by federal and local urban planning policies) also played a role in determining those encounters—with whom people would come into contact, and under what circumstances—by reshaping the physical landscape. City planners and real estate developers were targeting the very neighborhoods where Puerto Rican migrants could afford to settle—some of the oldest and most dilapidated in the city. Puerto Ricans thus found themselves repeatedly displaced by urban renewal, highway construction, and public housing projects that

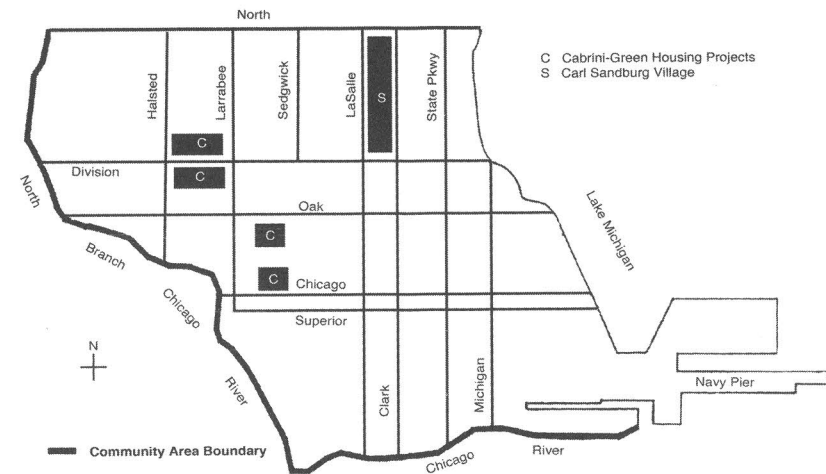


Figure 17. Near North Side Community Area map.

spurred them into neighboring white working-class areas. In contrast to the aggressive efforts at containment and segregation of African Americans, theirs was a story of constant mobility: the population continued to migrate farther north and west just steps ahead of the bulldozers. Puerto Ricans thus occupied simultaneous and constantly shifting settlements in a number of neighborhoods. As wrecking balls demolished the apartment buildings and hotels where they lived on the Near West Side, Near North Side, and later Lincoln Park, they fled to West Town, Humboldt Park, and Lakeview. Newly arriving migrants joined them.

When they moved into those blue-collar white neighborhoods, they initiated a process meant to assign them a place in the local social order. European immigrants and their children ("ethnic whites") had largely assimilated, become "American" and, more important, "white." While they retained some degree of ethnic differences (Polish, German, Italian, Russian), they held firmly to their highly coveted racial status.⁶ They had secured their whiteness in the context of dramatic European immigration restriction after 1924, which sharply reduced the number of recently immigrated, unassimilated coethnics who might tarnish their status.⁷ Yet ethnic whites also had constructed and won their whiteness in the midst of an influx of hundreds of thousands of southern African Americans. European immigrants and their children had attained whiteness by brazenly rejecting blackness.⁸ Puerto Ricans, however, were a new and unfamiliar group. They seemed like immigrants because of their foreign language and culture, yet

they brought with them US citizenship. Moreover, they presented tremendous phenotypical diversity, ranging from the fairest skin to the darkest complexions. When whites began encountering them in their neighborhoods, they tried to make sense of just exactly who they were. Were they black? Or a group closer to the Italians and Poles? White residents began making racial judgments about this new group, trying to discern the meaning of their social difference and what consequences it would have for their own social status.

White residents had mixed reactions to Puerto Ricans. They did not rebuff them as universally and unequivocally as they did African Americans. Nor did they abandon neighborhoods almost immediately where Puerto Ricans moved in. Instead, many remained among them for a more protracted form of racial succession, one that lasted as long as two decades. White residents seemed to be interpreting Puerto Ricans' social difference differently than they did that of African Americans. ~~That whites lived among them for longer periods of time, however, does not mean that they accepted the migrants as racial equals.~~ Most Puerto Ricans encountered tensions with white residents and often understood that they were not welcome.

City leaders, researchers, residents, and Puerto Ricans themselves all varied in their understandings of the group. In the late 1940s, anthropologist Elena Padilla contended that Puerto Ricans had high "color visibility": their physical features made them distinctive among white Americans, thus making them the target of prejudice at times.⁹ Twenty years later, a University of Chicago study claimed, "We recognize that Puerto Ricans are not a separate 'race' from all whites. But, the cultural lines drawn around this minority group are so well defined that we feel that it is important to discuss the plight of the Puerto Rican in the United States in terms of the problem of race relations."¹⁰ Indeed, the group's experience in the city's neighborhoods—marked by displacement; housing discrimination; racial hostility from neighbors; police brutality; high rates of unemployment; widespread poverty; and overcrowded, substandard housing—resembled that of urban African Americans more closely than that of their white neighbors. In turn, whites interpreted Puerto Rican deprivation, deplorable living conditions, and participation in the informal economy as innate cultural preferences, further heightening their disdain for the group.¹¹

Puerto Ricans' racial diversity and ambiguity made them even more conspicuous on neighborhood streets, and this was precisely where their social position was worked out most visibly—in public encounters with police. The events of the summer of 1966 made them hypervisible not only among their neighbors but throughout the entire city. On June 12,

hundreds of Puerto Rican residents took to the streets after police shot a Puerto Rican teenage boy. Law enforcement and area residents skirmished in the streets for several days. The 1966 Division Street riots marked a boiling point in police-community relations. Some scholars have documented the story as a turning point in the politicization of Chicago's Puerto Rican community. Indeed, the riots brought to light the conditions that Puerto Ricans were enduring in rapidly declining, neglected neighborhoods.¹² The standoff between a predominantly white police force and overwhelmingly Puerto Rican participants, moreover, magnified their racial difference. Although the city did not recognize them as a distinct group with legitimate grievances, their experiences in the city's working-class white neighborhoods suggested otherwise. Over the next several years, whites abandoned the increasingly undesirable neighborhood. By 1980, Puerto Ricans found themselves heirs to terribly impoverished, deteriorated, and economically marginalized communities. Although they included Mexicans, African Americans, and some remaining whites, West Town and especially Humboldt Park became known as Puerto Rican *barrios*. The area lost most of its white population not only through the actual departure of European American residents but through the more visible identification of Spanish-speaking residents as an "other" race. West Town and Humboldt Park were no longer "white" neighborhoods.

Arriving on the Near North Side

When Puerto Ricans settled on the Near North Side (Community Area 8) in the late forties and early fifties, they came to a neighborhood much like the rest of the central city, layered with the residue of so many previous generations. Since the late nineteenth century, the Near North Side represented the epitome of urban contrasts and inequality. The eastern edge of the area, known as the Gold Coast, housed some of the city's wealthiest residents. Stately homes and well-appointed apartments accommodated Chicago's elite—doctors, bankers, industrialists, and real estate barons. By the mid-twentieth century, the Gold Coast had the highest concentration of wealth in the city. Only blocks away, impoverished southern and eastern European immigrants lived in the most squalid slums close to the North Branch of the Chicago River, where factories, railroads, and the shipping industry employed many of them. The Near North Side held a mix of residential, commercial, and industrial districts that spilled over onto one another. In the early twentieth century, the southern edge held rooming houses, "single room occupancy" hotels (SROs), and a vice district.¹³ The

area had a preponderance of such housing: 38 percent of all units were one-room apartments; over half had two rooms or fewer. Residents had a median of 2.3 rooms per housing unit, one of the lowest ratios in the city.¹⁴

By the 1950s, Puerto Rican families began settling along the southern edge, where Superior Avenue intersected with LaSalle and Clark Streets. Eugenia Rodríguez, mother of Young Lords leader José "Cha Cha" Jiménez, recalled how she first arrived with her family in 1951. She had reunited with her husband in Concord, Massachusetts, where he worked as a migrant farm laborer. The couple decided to try their luck in Chicago, where they had heard that higher-paying jobs abounded. They made the journey by train along with their four-month-old baby girl. Mrs. Rodríguez vividly remembered arriving on a Sunday to a one-room apartment she had secured for fifteen dollars a week. She recalled not sleeping at all that night after discovering the conditions of their accommodations. "I put the baby on the bed, but she kept crying. When I turned on the light, the bed was black [with bedbugs]." The very next morning she sent her husband out to look for another apartment. He found a two-room unit on the seventh floor of the nearby Water Hotel, a building like many others that had served as a transient hotel. Mrs. Rodríguez noted that they were the first Puerto Rican family on that floor, but shortly after they moved in, other migrants from their village of San Salvador joined them. Like immigrants of earlier generations, extended Puerto Rican families, including married couples and their brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, and cousins, crowded into small two- or three-room apartments in similar hotel buildings nearby.¹⁵

The Near North Side held an extremely heterogeneous population. During the 1950s, the black population had increased by 29.8 percent to twenty-three thousand people, approximately 31 percent of the community area's residents. Puerto Ricans constituted nearly twenty-seven hundred persons, ethnic Mexicans numbered about seven hundred persons, and whites made up the majority (over fifty thousand people). A number of Japanese Americans, resettlers after internment, also lived in the area.¹⁶ It was home as well to many rural southern white migrants who had left small Appalachian towns after "the mines [we]re all worked out" and to Native Americans who had migrated from reservations as part of federal urbanization programs.¹⁷ One young Native American woman in the neighborhood noted during this time, "It was a League of Nations. All my girlfriends were from different ethnic groups—Greek, Japanese, Spanish, Puerto Rican, Polish."¹⁸ A titillating guide to the city's nightlife and vice crassly described the district as home to "gambling houses, neighborhood gangsters, Negroes, Poles and prostitutes." East of Clark Street, wealthy

white residents worked assiduously to keep the "undesirable element" out of their neighborhood. They formed groups such as the Greater North Michigan Avenue Association and the Dearborn Improvement Association to ensure that the boundaries between their genteel community and the disorderly tenements of the poor held firm.¹⁹

With some of the most crowded and least expensive housing available, the Near North Side was home to the poorest Puerto Ricans in the city, whose yearly family income averaged \$3,475.²⁰ Still, they managed to establish a thriving community life in their humble, less-than-ideal quarters. By the late 1950s, island migrants opened small grocery stores that, in addition to being provisioners of food and other goods, served as neighborhood meeting centers, especially for men. Businesses like the "Spanish American Foods" grocery on the corner of Clark and Superior Streets provided a place where men gathered to play dominoes and discuss the politics and news of the day.²¹ In a neighborhood with few public parks, adults and children escaped the suffocating summer air of crowded walk-up apartments by congregating on front stoops and street corners (fig. 18).



Figure 18. "Puerto Rican residents on steps." These women were photographed in the area marked for redevelopment on the Near North Side in the 1950s. Apf2-09033, Mildred Mead Photographs, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Such public spaces provided refuge from unbearable conditions in the often condemnable apartments. In 1960, 34.8 percent of all housing units in the area were in substandard condition. Of the neighborhood's nearly seven hundred Puerto Rican households counted that year, 60 percent of their units were classified as either "deteriorating" or "dilapidated." Less than half occupied "sound" housing with at least *some* private plumbing facilities. Forty-one percent of Puerto Rican households had two rooms or fewer, although over 70 percent of them had three or more people. Puerto Ricans were relatively new in the area, but they were also experiencing high turnover: the 1960 census noted that 75 percent of households had been in their apartments two years or less.²²

Revitalizing the Near North Side

The very conditions that made the Near North Side affordable for recent migrants also precipitated its destruction. City leaders and business elites had long recognized that it was an eyesore and liability so close to the downtown business district, which was increasingly alienating middle-class white residents and shoppers. In the early 1940s, the Chicago Plan Commission (the city's planning body until 1959) mapped out the city, noting the "blighted" conditions of central neighborhoods like the Near West, North, and South Sides. The CPC sketched out plans for renovating and revitalizing the Near North area and improving its socioeconomic profile. By 1947, wealthy real estate developer Arthur Rubloff publicly stated his interest in making North Michigan Avenue a "Magnificent Mile," the nickname that has stuck with the boulevard ever since.²³ When federal funds for urban renewal became available, Chicago's leaders quickly sought to avail themselves of the monies. Within a few years, the city announced plans for the redevelopment of Clark to LaSalle Streets, and Division Street to North Avenue. The Greater North Michigan Avenue Association recommended that the easternmost edge of the area, the Gold Coast, be designated as "stable." It would not require much attention. Clark Street, from which Puerto Rican settlement extended west, was marked for redevelopment, while the area around the low-rise Cabrini Homes was identified as "High Priority Residential Redevelopment," foreshadowing the construction of the Cabrini-Green high-rise developments. Farther south, planners designated the heart of the Puerto Rican enclave (LaSalle and Superior Streets) as "Commercial Rehabilitation and Renovation," thus eliminating possibilities for future residential occupancy.²⁴

At the center of Near North Side renewal plans stood the North-LaSalle project, a middle- to upper-income residential development of thirteen hundred new units. The land designated for the project (almost thirty-four acres) was officially identified as a "slum" (fig. 19). It was home to various businesses but also to thousands of Puerto Ricans, Appalachians, and others. Arthur Rubloff acquired the prized deal to develop the project. It would eventually be named "Carl Sandburg Village," after the state's premier poet, a name meant to evoke small-town charm within the inner city.



Figure 19. "Overall view of the Department of Urban Renewal's North-LaSalle project on the Near North Side." This view looks north from Division Street on the area that would be razed for the Carl Sandburg Village project. ICHi-64808, Chicago History Museum.

The "Village" would span four square blocks, from Clark to LaSalle Streets and Division Street to North Avenue. Fourteen-story towers would contain smaller apartments for single residents or couples without children, while three-story town houses would be suitable for families. Carl Sandburg Village and similar private commercial and residential developments represented what Don Parson has called "corporate modernism."²⁵ In their structure, the dense collection of high-rise apartments would resemble the public housing towers rising elsewhere in the city to warehouse the displaced poor. Unlike those projects, however, these luxury apartments would have upscale amenities, attractive landscaping, and other accoutrements that sharply contrasted with the sparse, bare silos erected for low-income people. The "Village" was planned to have all the attractions of a small community, including a grocery store, dry cleaner, tennis courts, off-street parking, and other services (see fig. 20).²⁶

Such plans were made possible by federal and local legislation. Chicago received \$75 million in federal housing aid for the year ending May 1,



Figure 20. Carl Sandburg Village, looking south, over the same area shown in figure 19, after the towers were completed. Photograph by Calvin Hutchinson, 1964. ICHi37474, Chicago History Museum.

1957. City and state matching funds brought the total amount available for urban renewal to \$160 million. Of this amount, \$35 million was earmarked for slum clearance, \$50 million for public housing, and the largest amount, \$75 million, for private investors such as Rubloff. By 1958, the city had secured the federal government's approval, with passage of the 1957 Housing Act, to pay three-fourths of the project costs. The city estimated a total cost for the Carl Sandburg Village of \$7.5 million, of which the federal government was expected to pay \$5 million. The federal Urban Renewal Administration also agreed to offer the city an \$8.1 million loan in addition to the \$5 million capital grant. Plans thus moved ahead for the Carl Sandburg project. Five other projects had been completed in the area already, with a total of 854 units for middle- to upper-income residents. Two additional projects in progress would create another 322 units, for a total of over 2,400 luxury apartments.²⁷

The city anticipated that nearly nine hundred families would need to be relocated from the North-LaSalle site. By 1960, the Chicago Land Clearance Commission had taken charge of the project, meaning that current residents had been removed and acquisition and demolition were under way. The question of providing for those displaced proved problematic, however. The city prided itself on being a leader in urban renewal nationwide. It boasted that it had cleared seventy-five thousand dilapidated housing units from 1952 to 1962. It did not explain the fact that housing erected in its place was usually not affordable for previous occupants (unless it was public housing), nor did it explain where those previous residents went. The Chicago Plan Commission publicized its policy of providing *permanent* relocation housing for people displaced by urban renewal, in accordance with federal urban renewal guidelines.²⁸

Chicago, like other American cities, promoted "uneven development," the inequitable distribution of both public and private resources and capital along racial and class lines. The redevelopment of the Near North Side reflected the favored position that affluent areas enjoyed on the city's political agenda and the priority that downtown interests claimed in the distribution of public funds.²⁹ The federal Housing and Home Finance Agency's objective could not have been any clearer: "The intention is to combine conservation, rehabilitation, and clearance for redevelopment in a program calculated to arrest and reverse deterioration and to make the area a valuable asset, rather than a potential liability, to Chicago."³⁰ Indeed, Carl Sandburg Village would sit in a "buffer zone," meant to block the blight and deterioration farther west from creeping into the Gold Coast. City planners and developers in fact accomplished this goal. By 1980, the Gold

Coast was the second wealthiest urban neighborhood in the entire nation, with an astounding per capita income of \$27,000, compared to only \$7,200 for the nation and \$6,933 for the city as a whole. The area west of LaSalle Street, called the "Lower North Side" by some, continued to project back the city's socioeconomic inequalities: it became increasingly segregated, not only by class but by race. The population, which was 85 percent white in 1940, became 89 percent black by 1970. It remained extremely poor as it had always been, but now distinguished itself as well by the high concentration of poor African Americans in public housing, the notorious Cabrini-Green Housing Projects.³¹

Temporary Life in Public Housing

City plans for slum clearance did not usually call for rehousing current residents on the same land. Renovated buildings were designed to attract middle- and upper-income residents and upscale commercial tenants. The entire Puerto Rican enclave on the Near North Side would be completely displaced. When city officials came to board up and condemn buildings, many families packed their belongings and moved directly north or west in hopes of staying nearby.³² Their new homes, however, were often next on the planning board's agenda. Puerto Rican families thus began a continuous journey north and west in the city as the imperatives of urban redevelopment followed them from one neighborhood to another.

The Flores family represented a typical example of repeated dislocation: first settling along LaSalle and Superior Streets, the family of seven then moved farther north and west to Willow and Larrabee Streets before finding a more permanent home along Armitage Avenue. The Rodriguez family followed a similar path, starting first on Clark Street, then going to the area of North Avenue and Larrabee before settling for several years on Armitage Avenue and Clifton Street. Countless other residents had similar experiences.³³ Most families simply searched for alternate housing on their own. Some, however, particularly those who met income qualifications, took the option the city offered of relocating into public housing.

The Near North Side had first welcomed public housing on the western edge of the neighborhood before World War II. In 1940, the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) had graded the community bordering the Chicago River along Chicago Avenue—one of the most deteriorated areas occupied primarily by impoverished Italian Americans and African Americans—with a "D" on its A-D scale. Authorities wrote, "The section

has no future and . . . is definitely blighted." The newly formed Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) thus decided to clear the local slums and build low-rise row houses. The Cabrini Homes opened in late 1942, at the height of the wartime housing shortage. CHA director Elizabeth Wood was sympathetic to racial integration and tried hard to maintain a balance between the local Italian population and nearby black residents. Wood assigned 20 percent of the Cabrini units to African Americans, but white tenants vocally objected. Nearby working-class white homeowners protested the integration as well, preferring that African Americans remain segregated in their own enclaves as far away as possible. As a result of such opposition, apartments assigned for white tenancy were left vacant by whites who refused to move in alongside African Americans, while black families languished on waiting lists desperately enduring the housing shortage.³⁴

After the war, public housing was meant to provide "permanent standard relocation housing" for those displaced by slum clearance. In the late 1950s, the CHA expanded the Cabrini projects dramatically to relieve nearby urban renewal displacement. It chose the area north of the original Cabrini Homes, close to the Chicago River and industrial sites, to expand public housing into vertical communities. The Cabrini Extension, fifteen high-rise buildings that held over nineteen hundred units, opened in 1958. Three years later, the agency erected the William Green Homes, another eight towers that added eleven hundred apartments. Altogether, the projects had more than thirty-five hundred units and housed over eighteen thousand people. The modern concrete towers that economized land and space with the design of "superblocks" symbolized the latest in urban architectural design, much like the high-rise luxury apartments for wealthier tenants farther east. Their similarities, however, ended there.³⁵

Families who first walked into the modern new buildings certainly felt overjoyed to secure such ideal low-cost housing. Indeed, many were relieved to leave behind dilapidated, unsafe apartments for brand-new, secure accommodations. But the sparkle of these buildings soon faded. Shoddy construction quickly led to mechanical failures in elevators and other maintenance problems. Buildings began to break down under the wear and tear of so many tenants, especially children.³⁶ Chicago's public housing projects were among the most expensive in the nation, with construction costs topping those in New York City. The high price tag had little to do with the quality of construction, however, and more to do with the excesses of corruption and greed so rampant in city politics.³⁷ In sharp contrast to the luxury towers of Carl Sandburg Village, public housing packed

residents in tightly, especially large families with many children. Moreover, the bleak and barren design of buildings and grounds, and geographically isolated location stretches of blocks away from "regular" neighborhood housing left residents feeling even more alienated in their "sterile silos" and stark environment.³⁸

Approximately one hundred Puerto Rican families lived in the low-rise Cabrini Homes by the mid-1950s. An estimated one thousand Puerto Ricans lived there and in the new high-rises by 1960, constituting 7 percent of the development's fourteen thousand residents. Many, like the Lucas family, came to the projects after being displaced by the Sandburg Village construction. Monse Lucas-Figueroa and her family lived in Cabrini-Green from 1960 to 1965. She described difficult living circumstances in the dense collection of high-rise buildings that packed so many poor into close quarters. She explains, "It was a very sad thing. They stuck everybody in a hole. And with the project [urban] renewal, there was no other way because they were moving people out of sections for them to build these apartments [Carl Sandburg Village] or renovate these apartments where the people [existing residents] could not afford to pay the [increased] rent. So they decided, 'Okay, we're gonna have to put these people somewhere!' . . . It was very, very bad."³⁹ Contrary to the view that public housing was initially "paradise," families like the Lucases recognized the social engineering flaws of housing developments, especially high-rise buildings, from the very beginning.

Parents soon realized that high-rise living did not suit families very well. Letting their children play outside became more precarious than it had been in smaller buildings. The narrow fenced walkways or "galleries" outside high-rise apartment doors hardly provided suitable play space, and neighbors frequently complained that children made too much noise. Instead, parents had to either accompany their children down multiple flights of stairs to outside playgrounds on the ground floor or let their children venture unsupervised all the way down on their own. The sheer number of children and the high youth-adult ratio, as historian Brad Hunt has shown, meant that children were not well supervised. Moreover, children and teens often discovered tense racial dynamics among themselves. As a young girl, Monse Lucas-Figueroa and her brother and sisters constantly fought with other (mainly African American) children and teens in the project. "We were always fighting," she explained. "People were always teasing my dad, 'You know, your girls are never gonna get married 'cuz they do nothing but fight!'"⁴⁰

Certainly the influx of new, unfamiliar tenants in restricted quarters created enough tensions, but Lucas-Figueroa noted that the CHA exacerbated racial conflict through its policy of segregating tenants within the housing developments. She recalls, "What they did . . . from the first to seventh floor were *familias Latinas*. From the seventh floor to the tenth floor belonged to the *blanquitos*, the hillbilly families. From there on up were all black families. That's why all the fights started!" She added:

The *prietos* [blacks] knew that they were being . . . they stuck them all on the [top floors]. . . . That was not correct. We used to say it was not correct. . . . [The CHA was segregating] within the housing projects. And the person that says, "Oh, that's [just] how it worked out," oh, please! Every project building that you went to, the first five or seven floors were all Latinos. In between you had your hillbillies, and the top floors was all *los negros* [the blacks]. So, *entre el círculo de los residenciales había racismo* [there was racism within the residential complex].

Even children clearly recognized the racial segregation policies under which they were forced to live. Such arrangements did not bode well for community life.⁴¹

The Puerto Rico Migration Division, which had a regional office in Chicago, tried to organize Puerto Rican residents in Cabrini-Green, assigning community workers to help integrate tenants into the projects and improve their living conditions. Community organizers worked with residents to develop social and recreational activities for youth, to address social needs, and to acculturate migrants. Still, many tenants complained. The fraternal group Caballeros de San Juan (Knights of Saint John) publicly denounced the "human slums" that public housing created and warned migrants about moving in.⁴² Within a matter of years, conditions and race relations worsened. Most Latino/a families, including the Lucas family, abandoned their subsidized apartments, citing poor race relations, lack of a sense of "community," and high crime.⁴³ White and black families who had the option moved out as well, leaving it a hypersegregated "ghetto" of only the most severely impoverished African American residents. Those who remained generally did not have the means to leave or refused to return to more expensive substandard private housing. The experiment in public housing was failing miserably. Though some placed blame exclusively on the poor themselves, more critical observers recognized the flaws in a policy that privileged private interests and capital imperatives over the hu-

mane provision of shelter for the city's poor and that obeyed the racial imperatives of segregation and exclusivity for white communities nearby. Lawrence Vale writes that "public housing projects became seen not as progressive enclaves of slum reform, but as discredited visions that carried many of the worst aspects of slum conditions to a new degree of degradation and isolation." Indeed, the Cabrini-Green housing complex gained nationwide notoriety in the following decades as a symbol of the worst in public housing—a toxic concentration of crime, danger, and chronically unemployed and disenfranchised African American residents who had little recourse to escape the miserable conditions. In 1981, in response to complaints about crime, Mayor Jane Byrne created a media spectacle by moving into the Cabrini-Green projects herself. She and her husband, the only white tenants in the entire complex, occupied an apartment for three weeks accompanied by a heavy police presence meant to curb the recent double-digit homicide rates. Her short stay did little to improve conditions, however, as the Chicago Housing Authority administration continued to be fraught with corruption, scandal, and mismanagement, and murders continued occurring on a regular basis after her departure.⁴⁴ Public housing of the kind built in Chicago in the 1950s and 1960s proved to be a terribly flawed urban policy. Families and children who had little option but to stay in developments like Cabrini-Green became human casualties of a massive urban planning mistake.

If life in public housing for Puerto Ricans was characterized by racial tensions with African Americans, private housing offered tense relations with white neighbors. As urban renewal refugees pressed into white neighborhoods, many ethnic white residents were outwardly hostile to the newcomers. European immigrants and their children, who only in recent decades had successfully become "white," continued to mold and shape that identity in the 1960s not only vis-à-vis African Americans but increasingly in relation to Puerto Ricans and Mexicans as well. This was evident across a number of encounters.⁴⁵

Housing discrimination provided one means of keeping groups that threatened the racial order out of a particular neighborhood. Puerto Ricans observed that "real estate agencies and private owners of buildings refuse to rent houses or apartments to Spanish speaking families."⁴⁶ Landlords often discriminated based on skin color, something that families of varying skin tones quickly discovered. Monse Lucas-Figueroa recalled a time when

her mother had found an apartment for the family but then lost it once her husband arrived at the building:

Lucas . . . sounds more Italian than Puerto Rican. So my mom went to look for an apartment, and they thought that her accent was due to an Italian accent. My mom was very white because her family was from Spain. . . . The guy was willing to give [her] the apartment, so [she] gave him the rent and the deposit. . . . When my mom took my dad—my dad is Puerto Rican, but *el es trigueño* [he is brown-skinned/mixed]—the guy said no. He gave my mother back her deposit, and we were without an apartment. . . . When he saw my father, [he must have thought] "Ahh! He's black!"⁴⁷

Another dark-skinned Puerto Rican man recounted a similar story of having trouble securing an apartment for his family. As soon as he appeared to answer an ad, the landlord would reject him. Finally, a friend recommended he send his wife instead of going himself, since "she looks more white [*sic*] than you." The man observed, "Do you know that the first time she went out to look for an apartment, she found one?"⁴⁸ For many white Chicagoans, deciphering Puerto Ricans' ethnoracial identity became an exercise in determining their "blackness." Gender certainly informed such racial determinations, as landlords objected most vociferously to dark-skinned men.

In cases where landlords did rent to Puerto Ricans, neighboring whites often resented and intimidated the new arrivals. One community worker clearly articulated neighborhood dynamics on the Near North and Northwest Sides: "As soon as they [Puerto Ricans] move to this particular neighborhoods [*sic*] they feel the old residents do not like and want them as neighbors."⁴⁹ This was common among European immigrants in the early twentieth century, who often encountered tension with other existing European residents. But Dominic Pacyga and other historians have dispelled the "myth of ethnic succession." As Pacyga notes, European nationals did not move out en masse when new European ethnics arrived. Instead, they lived "spatially integrated, but socially segregated."⁵⁰ It is difficult to determine just how rapidly existing ethnic white residents moved out when Puerto Ricans moved in because Appalachian whites were often an incoming group as well. Thus, Appalachians may have replaced some ethnic whites who abandoned the neighborhoods. As recent (and relatively poor) newcomers to the city as well, Appalachians were limited in their options for seeking affordable housing. Many followed the same paths that Puerto Ricans did

to declining neighborhoods. This helps explain why they might have lived among them for longer periods of time.

Puerto Ricans found ways to develop a sense of community among themselves and provide for their own social needs despite experiences with prejudice and discrimination. They initiated traditional hometown clubs and societies, and groups such as the Puerto Rican Congress of Mutual Aid; the Latin American Association of Mutual Aid; and the Borinquen Health Club, a men's group dedicated to recreation and exercise. These groups often sponsored social events such as boxing shows, domino tournaments, beauty pageants, dances, and family activities. Throughout their various efforts, emerging community leaders believed that personal self-improvement and acculturation to American ways would promise better lives for Puerto Rican migrants and their children.⁵¹

The Catholic Church, settlement houses, and the Puerto Rico Migration Division tried to assimilate the islanders and facilitate more organized contact with whites (*norteamericanos*) to break down racial barriers. The Migration Division, in fact, made strenuous efforts to manage and control Puerto Rican migrants' image among continental Americans, publishing educational pamphlets meant to convince whites that Puerto Ricans were "Americans" just like them. While some local newspaper accounts praised Puerto Ricans' assimilation and success as new migrants, the radical activities of nationalist groups sullied their reputation. The assassination attempt by a Puerto Rican man on President Harry S. Truman in 1950 and the shootings at the US House of Representatives by Puerto Rican Nationalists four years later alarmed many.⁵² The Migration Division vigorously fought to counter the negative portrayals of Puerto Ricans in the media.

The church often initiated efforts out of its own evangelical concerns. Priests discovered that Puerto Ricans, especially men, did not attend church regularly or observe Catholic sacraments. This may have been a result of laxer religious standards of devotion on the island that did not stress regular attendance at mass or the result of Puerto Ricans' exclusion from many white Catholic parishes. The traditional national or ethnic parishes established for European immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries generally did not welcome Puerto Rican worshippers, only begrudgingly permitting them to hold services in church basements, for example.⁵³ To address their pastoral concerns, the archdiocese sponsored the creation of fraternal clubs—Los Caballeros de San Juan—throughout Puerto Rican settlements. Through the Cardinal's Committee for the Span-

ish Speaking, the archdiocese took the lead on integrating the migrants, educating and indoctrinating them, and as a result, making them more devoted and active Catholics. Puerto Rican men on the Near North Side established two local councils and organized social and recreational activities for adults and children, held fund-raising events, and operated much like a traditional ethnic and religious social club. In an unexpected reversal of traditional gender expectations, men rather than women became the target of evangelization. While in some cases churches, especially Protestant ones, pursued women as the purveyors of a family's spirituality, the Catholic Church focused on Puerto Rican men as heads of households to direct the family's religious engagement and provide its moral leadership. Still, the male-centered Caballeros depended upon women, particularly the labor of members' wives and relatives, in preparing food, organizing events, doing clerical tasks, and sustaining social networks.⁵⁴

West on Division Street: West Town and Humboldt Park

The Puerto Rican population on the Near North Side declined nearly 58 percent to fewer than fifteen hundred people between 1960 and 1970. Many families who had been displaced by urban renewal began migrating north and west to join a large and growing enclave in the West Town and Humboldt Park community areas, and to a lesser extent in neighboring Logan Square.⁵⁵ West Town (Community Area 24) and Humboldt Park (Community Area 23) lay directly west of the Near North Side and Lincoln Park, separated from those community areas by the Chicago River and the industrial corridor that flanked it on both sides. Much like the rest of the central city, West Town had been a port of entry for European immigrants and was layered by established families and waves of newer arrivals. Germans and Scandinavians began their settlement in Wicker Park, a small neighborhood in West Town anchored by a tiny park of the same name. At the turn of the twentieth century, the fashionable district was home to business families whose elegant homes stood as a testament to their wealth. Polish, Italian, Ukrainian, and Russian Jewish immigrants soon crowded into the area (one section became known as "Ukrainian Village"). Better-heeled Germans and Scandinavians continued moving farther west into neighboring Humboldt Park, which became the reserve of those who had ascended to the upper-middle class. As southern and eastern Europeans improved their lot, many, especially Russian Jews, also followed the migration westward to Humboldt Park, with its more substantial brick and limestone homes. Most homes in the area, however, were much more modest

frame houses, two- and three-flats, and larger apartment buildings. By the 1950s and 1960s, these neighborhoods still maintained a large European immigrant population, though most of their children and grandchildren had joined the exodus for the city outskirts and suburbs. Whites who remained in these neighborhoods were generally the older immigrant generation, those who had fewer means to pursue better living, or those who simply preferred to stay in longtime residences.⁵⁶

Economic changes began to affect these West Side neighborhoods even before Puerto Ricans began moving in. Declining property values and rising taxes in the city were both cause and symptom of urban disinvestment and the shift of the regional economic base to the suburbs. As the city lost revenue with the flight of industry and homeowners and as property values sank, the Daley administration responded by raising taxes for remaining residents. According to one newspaper, taxes had increased 116 percent from 1952 to 1962. One building in the nearby Garfield Park neighborhood, for example, was assessed a property tax bill of \$1,800 in 1948; by 1962, the yearly bill had increased to \$4,400. Rising taxes and the growing exodus of whites to the suburbs compounded the effect of sinking property values. Another building in that same neighborhood, which reportedly sold for \$390,000 in 1955, was not worth half that amount seven years later when African Americans had begun moving in. Racially biased property appraisals valued black-occupied housing lower than that of whites. In the midst of these economic changes, the boom of expanding suburbs continued to lure away many young white families.⁵⁷ The demographics of these neighborhoods changed dramatically over the next two decades.

West Town began receiving Puerto Rican migrants as early as 1953 but by 1960 counted more than seventy-nine hundred islanders and their children, constituting a full 25 percent of the city's entire Puerto Rican population and making it their largest settlement in the city. A smaller group of first- and second-generation Mexicans (over twenty-two hundred) and an equal number of African Americans resided in the neighborhood. All together, the three groups were less than 10 percent of the area's total population (see table 8).⁵⁸ By 1970, "Spanish-language" people constituted more than 39 percent of area residents; by 1980, they made up 57 percent. More significant, Spanish-speaking people were concentrated in particular enclaves: they were the majority in at least two-thirds of area census tracts and numbered over 62 percent of the population in nearly half of all tracts.⁵⁹

Humboldt Park experienced similar change (see table 8). In 1960, it was home to fewer than three hundred Puerto Ricans and fewer than seven hundred Mexicans, and 99 percent of its population was classified as white.

Table 8 Population changes by race, West Town and Humboldt Park, 1960–80

	West Town		
	1960	1970	1980
Total population	139,657	124,800	96,428
White (may include Spanish origin)	136,445	114,941	53,132
% of population	97.7	92.1	55.1
Black	2,374	5,491	8,679
% of population	1.7	4.4	9.0
Other nonwhite races*	838	4,368	34,617
% of population	0.6	3.5	35.9
Spanish language / Spanish origin†	n/a	48,900	54,675
Puerto Rican	7,948	33,166	28,469
Mexican	2,232	n/a	23,477
% of population	7.3	39.1	56.7
	Humboldt Park		
	1960	1970	1980
Total population	71,609	71,726	70,866
White (may include Spanish origin)	70,964	56,807	24,803
% of population	99.1	79.2	35.0
Black	430	13,915	25,228
% of population	0.6	19.4	35.6
Other nonwhite races*	215	1,004	20,835
% of population	0.3	1.4	29.4
Spanish language / Spanish origin†	n/a	11,189	28,848
Puerto Rican	286	7,153	17,769
Mexican	683	n/a	8,876
% of population	1.3	15.6	40.7

Sources: Kitagawa and Taueber, *Local Community Fact Book*, 1960; and Chicago Fact Book Consortium, *Local Community Fact Book*, 1970 and 1980.

*The dramatic increase in "other nonwhite races" in 1980 reflects a shift in that year's census procedure. See the following note. The drop in "white" population reflects not only the departure of ethnic whites but the shift of many Latinas/os from "white" to "other" racial status.

†The term *Spanish language* was used in 1960 and 1970, while the term *Spanish origin* was used in 1980. The label "of Spanish origin" was assigned independently of race, under the assumption that Spanish-speaking people could be of any race. Most Spanish-origin people were counted as "white" in 1960 and 1970, though a small number who self-identified as "black" are enumerated as such. By 1980, a dramatically larger number of Spanish-origin people chose to identify as "other race." Still, Spanish-origin people continued to make up a significant number of those enumerated in the "white" population.

A decade later, 15.6 percent of its population was Spanish-speaking. African Americans, who were segregated in the southern part of the community area close to racially transitioning West Garfield Park, numbered nearly 20 percent of residents. By 1980, however, whites had declined to less than 24 percent. African Americans made up 36 percent, and the Spanish-speaking were nearly 41 percent. Again, Latinos/as concentrated in particular enclaves, constituting over 60 percent of the population in over half of census tracts. Although Puerto Ricans were not necessarily the majority of the population, in the span of two decades, West Town and Humboldt Park became identified as Latino/a, and more specifically, Puerto Rican *barrios*.⁶⁰

In the face of these demographic changes, policing the boundaries of one's imagined and physical community took on paramount significance for white residents. They imparted the lesson of "the exclusive quality of urban space" to the newcomers.⁶¹ The threat of Puerto Ricans, African Americans, and Mexicans, whose numbers were rapidly growing, prompted many to express their disdain for the foreigners and their encroachment on their territory. Conjuring up images of white settlers under siege, one Italian resident of West Town complained about Puerto Ricans, "They are making a circle around us." Some residents lamented their presence almost as much as they did the sighting of the first African Americans on the block. Yet, ironically, a declining white population and the vacancies they left meant that increasingly "landlords . . . reluctantly rented to Puerto Ricans."⁶² As much as some residents may have tried to keep them out, others, especially absentee landlords and those selling their properties, abandoned their commitment to the neighborhood's racial exclusivity. Humboldt Park and West Town neighborhoods continued emptying out their white populations.

Puerto Ricans (and Mexicans) were not segregated or discriminated against in housing as fiercely and unequivocally as African Americans were. Still, their accommodation in white areas was hardly harmonious. To a certain extent, the racially ambiguous Spanish-speaking served as a "buffer" of sorts against what whites perceived to be the more objectionable threat of growing numbers of African Americans on the southern edge of their communities, next to racially shifting East Garfield Park and West Garfield Park.⁶³ Resigning oneself to accepting Puerto Rican neighbors meant not having to accept black ones perhaps. The fact that racial succession in areas of Puerto Rican settlement proceeded more slowly than in areas penetrated by African Americans suggests that white residents were willing to tolerate Puerto Ricans longer. Some whites actually may have been Appalachian

migrants who had also been displaced with Puerto Ricans from other neighborhoods and now relocated in these communities alongside them.⁶⁴ Regardless of whether they were European immigrants or Appalachian migrants, white residents maintained an uneasy *détente* with their Spanish-speaking neighbors that sometimes lasted well over a decade.

The presence of Puerto Ricans challenged working-class ethnic whites in unprecedented ways. Puerto Ricans faced the harsh socioeconomic conditions of most recent migrants, but their cultural particularities, phenotypical diversity, and American citizenship were perplexing. The bevy of voices speaking Spanish on neighborhood streets seemed foreign to "Americans" who quickly forgot their own immigrant origins and insisted the newcomers "speak English." The pungent aromas of Caribbean cooking (*arroz con gandules*, *alcapurrias*, *pasteles*) wafting out of kitchen windows sharply contrasted with the olfactory and culinary predilections of Russians, Germans, and Poles. And the contemporary Latin rhythms of popular bugalú, cha-cha, mambo, and rumba music emanating from apartments and automobiles jarred white residents' aural sensibilities and musical consumption standards. Newcomers unsettled blue-collar communities that had established cultural accords, if not social harmony, among their ethnically diverse European American residents. Historical ethnic tensions and national conflicts that divided European Americans in the past diminished as they increasingly identified with one another in their opposition to newcomers.⁶⁵

White residents and Puerto Ricans experienced cultural tensions with each other, but age disparities in the two populations fostered intergenerational conflict as well. Many white residents who stayed on were often elderly people who refused to leave their long-standing homes or were unable to sell or improve them because of depressed real estate markets and redlining. "Old-timers" resented the new migrant population that was changing their neighborhood. Incoming Latino/a families were much younger and frequently included many children. In 1960, 33.9 percent of West Town was under eighteen years old. Among Puerto Ricans, however, over 50 percent were in that age range. In that year, only twenty-five hundred Puerto Rican children and youth (both boys and girls) aged five to nineteen lived in the area along with more than seventeen thousand white adults over the age of sixty.⁶⁶ In contrast to the preponderance of children in predominantly African American public housing—where there was a shortage of adults to supervise youngsters—in West Town and Humboldt Park, there was an overabundance of older white residents who policed Puerto Rican children on neighborhood streets at a ratio of nearly seven to one. Scholar Marixsa Alicea remembers vividly, "As a child I was constantly

being yelled at by white Anglo-Americans and European immigrants for sitting on their front steps, walking on their grass, or just simply coming too close to their house."⁶⁷

The number of Latino/a children in West Town and especially Humboldt Park saw a dramatic increase over that decade. A community summer program documented the changes in public school enrollments:

The great increase in the Latin-American population is indicated most dramatically in the school statistics. Whereas in 1960 Puerto Ricans accounted for only 14 percent of the population in our intensive service area and Mexicans another 2 percent[,] by November 1967, the eleven public schools serving our area indicated the following ethnic composition: Latin American—50.0 percent, White—42.7 percent, Negro—4.9 percent, Other—2.4 percent.

Latin American students went from constituting 53 to 74 percent of the population at Von Humboldt Elementary School in the 1966–67 school years. Latin American children made up 72 percent of Sabin Elementary, 70 percent at Wicker Park Primary and Intermediate Schools, and 34 percent at Tuley High School.⁶⁸ The proportional growth of Latino/a students in local schools occurred in part because so many white children were vacating classroom seats. Many white families who remained in the area chose to send their children to local parochial schools, abandoning the crumbling public school system as more Latina/o and African American children moved in.

Intergenerational dynamics changed within a decade. Though Puerto Rican children initially found themselves in a community of elderly white residents, by 1970 seniors found themselves outnumbered. Puerto Rican children and youth numbered over eighteen thousand while whites over sixty had decreased to eleven thousand. In 1960, 34 percent of West Town's population was under the age of twenty. By 1980, children and youth made up 41 percent of the area's population (see table 9). In census tracts where the Spanish-speaking concentrated (numbering over 60 percent of residents), children and youth were nearly 50 percent of the population.⁶⁹

The growing number of Puerto Rican and other Spanish-speaking youngsters provoked hostile reactions from white adults who increasingly saw the neighborhoods' demographic changes in racial terms. The community summer program noted, "There are many Puerto Rican children who live on the south side of Armitage between Hoyne and Damen. Some of these come to this caravan. An old Polish lady who lives near the caravan site complained vehemently [about] our causing the Puerto Rican kids

Table 9 Population changes by age, poverty, and unemployment, 1960–80

	West Town		
	1960 (%)	1970 (%)	1980 (%)
Under 20 years old*	33.9	42.0	40.8
Overall poverty rate [†]	14.4	19.4	27.2
White poverty rate	n/a	16.6	26.4
Puerto Rican / Spanish-speaking poverty rate	n/a	28.4	37.7
Overall unemployment rate [‡]	6.1	6.0	10.9
White unemployment rate [§]	6.1	5.9	9.1
Puerto Rican / Spanish-speaking unemployment rate	9.2	8.0	12.4
	Humboldt Park		
	1960 (%)	1970 (%)	1980 (%)
Under 20 years old*	30.2	40.8	44.6
Overall poverty rate [†]	9.8	13.0	25.9
White poverty rate	n/a	9.3	21.4
Puerto Rican / Spanish-speaking poverty rate	n/a	18.2	30.6
Overall unemployment rate [‡]	4.6	4.8	12.9
White unemployment rate [§]	4.5	4.4	10.5
Puerto Rican / Spanish-speaking unemployment rate	12.9	7.8	13.0

Sources: Kitagawa and Taueber, *Local Community Fact Book*, 1960; Chicago Fact Book Consortium, *Local Community Fact Book*, 1970 and 1980; and 1960, 1970, and 1980 census data tables at <http://www.socialexplorer.com>.

*In 1960, the figure represents those under the age of 18.

[†]In 1960, the census measured the number of people with a median family income of less than \$3,000.

[‡]In 1960, unemployment rate represents only the male labor force.

[§]"White" unemployment rate includes Puerto Rican / Spanish-speaking people, as most were classified under that category in 1960 and 1970. The unemployment rate for non-Hispanic whites, then, is presumably even lower.

to come down 'white' Homer St."⁷⁰ White residents attacked Puerto Rican children because of the social change they represented and the disorder that they felt such children were bringing to the neighborhood. The distinction the Polish woman made between the children and her "white" street clearly expressed the view that Puerto Ricans were unquestionably *not* white.

White residents often judged Puerto Ricans' racial identity in relation to African Americans, sometimes collapsing the two under the same racial slurs and revealing their suspicions that Puerto Ricans were in fact black

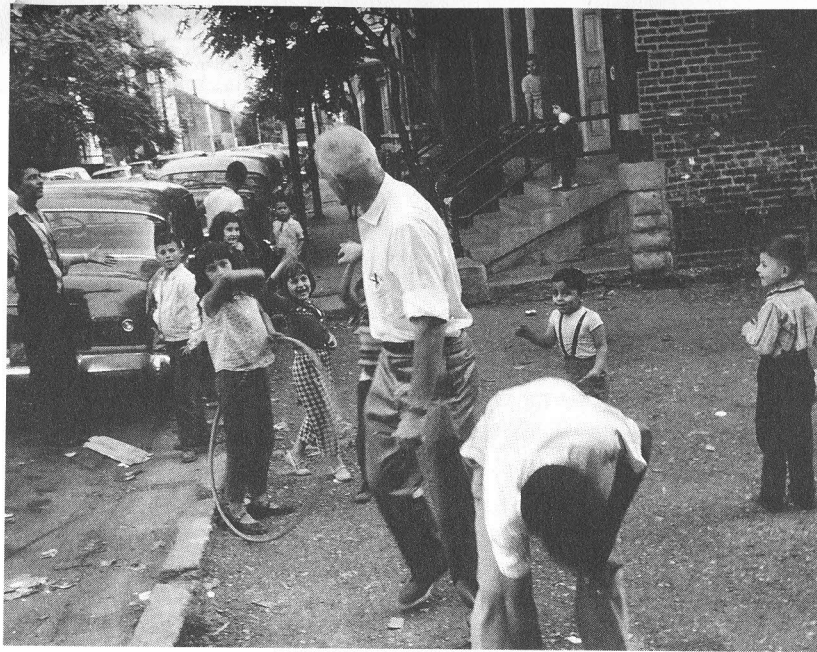


Figure 21. Children with social worker John Russell from the Chicago Commons Association. This photo, whose original caption reads, "All Puerto Rican children except boy by car," captures a typical street scene in the West Town or Humboldt Park neighborhood in the mid-1960s. Note the conditions of area buildings, sidewalks, and the empty lot where children are playing. ICHI-36255aa, Chicago History Museum.

or at least stood very close to blackness. One man recalled entering a white tavern in the area during the 1950s: "We were always considered black. I remember this one time, I went to a tavern with a friend and the owner of the bar refused to serve us. I said to the guy, 'We want two beers,' and he said, 'We don't serve niggers here.' I replied that we were Puerto Ricans and he just said, 'That's the same shit.'"⁷¹ The carelessness of using slurs normally targeted at African Americans to denigrate Puerto Ricans did not reflect racial ignorance on the part of whites as much as it revealed the limited vocabulary they had at hand and the fact that they were locating Puerto Ricans closer to blackness.⁷²

Racial objections to Puerto Ricans were not limited to verbal assaults or insults but could become violent just as they did for African Americans and some Mexicans who were the first to breach white neighborhood boundaries. Male youths often became the protagonists in these physical conflicts. In 1960, Puerto Rican male youths were clearly outnumbered by white

male youths by nearly eighteen to one, making them easy targets for white attacks.⁷³ The most extreme forms of resistance, however, included the fire-bombing of automobiles and homes by white youth gangs who sometimes were commissioned by neighborhood residents to scare nonwhite interlopers away.⁷⁴ Community activist Obed López explained that because of such violence, "some [Puerto Rican] families at one point or another would rent an apartment in the buildings where they were living for the[ir own] gangs to come and be there as a defense, a counter force to the people that were harassing them or using violence against them." While it is difficult to confirm evidence of this, López's comment suggests that some Puerto Rican adults may have condoned or at least tolerated Puerto Rican youth gangs in the neighborhood. Apart from the fact that the teenagers were their own children and kin, they served an important function of defending the community against white attacks. Just as white male youths served as the physical enforcers of community boundaries for white families, Puerto Rican youth gangs often originated or initially served as a defensive body to protect

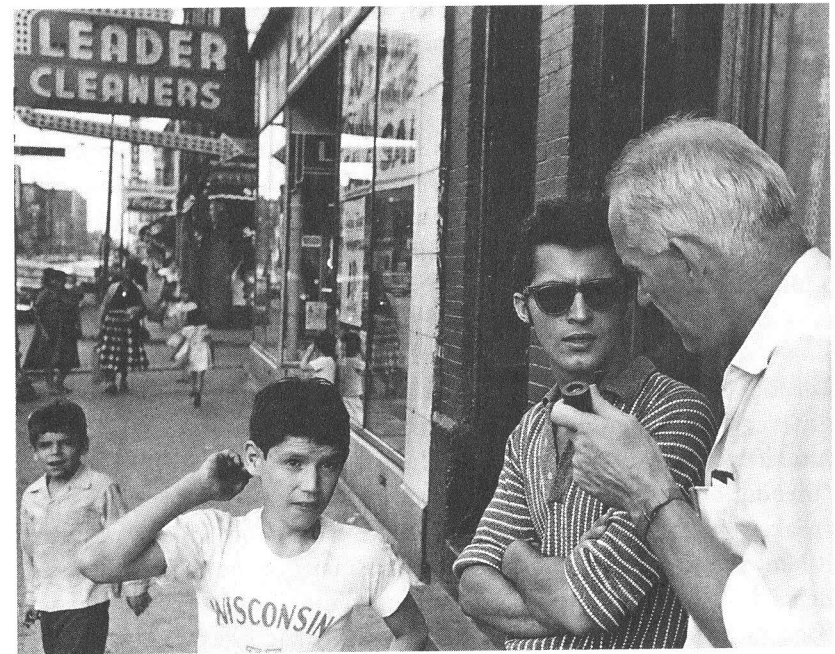


Figure 22. "One of Viceroy's who had been attacked by older whites telling story to Russell." The scene captured regular neighborhood dynamics in the 1960s and the formation of Puerto Rican gangs. ICHI-61163, Chicago History Museum.

themselves from white hostility (see chapter 5). Escalating violence between white and Puerto Rican youth increased residents' anxieties about newcomers and the effect they were having on the neighborhood. Moreover, for Puerto Ricans, just as for African Americans, "Years of harassment by 'white' youths had created a tradition of antiwhite sentiment on the streets."⁷⁵

The media fueled such antagonisms and perpetuated the idea that Puerto Ricans were a dangerous racial group. The *Saturday Evening Post* prominently featured a lurid story in 1960 that grabbed national attention. In a one-sided account of racial hostility, the magazine recounted the tale of two Puerto Ricans who killed an Italian American in the West Town neighborhood. The article explained that the Puerto Ricans "had never met Guido Garro; they murdered him only because he happened to be an Italian." The author described the two suspects as vicious and depraved (one was a philanderer who regularly beat his wife, the other drifted aimlessly, committing senseless crimes). The story presented an extremely disparaging image of Puerto Ricans as a whole.⁷⁶ On the heels of the successful Broadway musical *West Side Story*, such sensational media accounts circulated the image of Puerto Ricans as violent, bloodthirsty, immoral people and depicted whites as their helpless victims. This narrative oversimplified and distorted the complex racial dynamics of rapidly changing urban neighborhoods. It failed to acknowledge that racial attacks often originated with whites (in particular, male youths) who directed it at much smaller numbers of newcomers. Such media stories reinforced negative stereotypes of Puerto Ricans and depicted them alone as the perpetrators of violence. The highly publicized shooting of Guido Garro and the threat of danger motivated even more white residents to leave the neighborhood. Many white homeowners sold out as quickly as they could.

The long sojourn of those who chose not to leave the area, however, sometimes reflected more tolerant social attitudes. Edward Stefaniak, a Polish American resident, for example, had lived for over twenty years next to "friendly blacks."⁷⁷ Stefaniak apparently tolerated the influx of Spanish speakers "with bland acceptance." Unlike most other Poles, "he found it hard to understand the fear and hatred many of the other Polish residents of Wicker Park expressed from time to time." As far as Stefaniak was concerned, "A neighboring Puerto Rican family had proven to be pleasant and solid." Puerto Rican homeowners, perhaps because of their perceived higher class status, seemed to enjoy better relations with white neighbors than did renters.⁷⁸

Responses to neighborhood change could be colored by unrealistic nostalgia. The Reverend Henry Murray, director of Wicker Park's local settlement, Association House, explained, "As these people [European immigrants and their children] move on, they think of Wicker Park as the neighborhood they remember from the old days, and they forget that it was pretty well used up by the time they abandoned it to the Puerto Ricans."⁷⁹ To be sure, earlier generations of immigrants romanticized the neighborhood of their childhoods. They seldom considered that they had exhausted the aged housing supply, leaving it dilapidated and in dire need of repairs.

Residents like Stefaniak and members of the Northwest Community Organization, which he led, seemed to understand the larger structural dynamics that were reshaping their neighborhoods. They realized that urban renewal on the Near North Side had pushed so many Spanish-speaking migrants into the area. They recognized that their community would be next on the chopping block for urban renewal initiatives. Some even capitalized on that renewal. But most white residents failed to understand that the privileging of private interests, public disinvestment, an uneven distribution of political power in the city's wards, and shifts in the economy all contributed to the decline of their neighborhoods and the racial change. They failed to recognize that public expenditures on private development (in the form of tax breaks and direct funding to developers and corporations) left less money for the improvement of streets, trash removal, and other public services, thus causing their communities to deteriorate. Few were aware of the practice of "redlining," lending discrimination by banks that accepted neighborhood people's deposits but denied them home improvement loans or mortgages if their communities were threatened by or already experiencing racial change. Real estate brokers profited enormously by selling decaying buildings at inflated prices to Puerto Rican, Mexican, and African American buyers, many of whom could not buy elsewhere. Instead of blaming "banks, corporate interests, and the political machine," many white residents focused their ire on "the blacks," "the Spanish," or "the Puerto Ricans." In reality, their neighborhoods were already being propelled into decline by growth-driven urban planning initiatives.⁸⁰

Relations with Police and the Division Street Uprising

If relations between Puerto Ricans and white neighbors were tense, local law enforcement generally offered state sanction for most white residents' response to neighborhood change. This was the result of the racial composition of the police force, which was almost exclusively white, the age gap

between white residents and incoming Puerto Ricans, and the impunity with which officers committed misconduct. In the 1960s, the Chicago Police Department (CPD) was an agency fraught with corruption and abuse. *Life* magazine declared that Chicago "probably has the worst police department of any sizable city."⁸¹ In 1960, local newspapers ran an exposé on pervasive police collusion with the organized crime syndicate, links to corrupt machine politicians, and widespread police criminal activity. Police had close ties to the city's mob bosses, who paid off numerous captains and other officers for protection. Police often received a cut from the city's gambling parlors, taverns, prostitution rings, drug trade, and burglars. At least two separate burglary rings confessed to being shaken down by officers for jewelry, electronics, furs, golf clubs, and other stolen goods. One young burglar described in detail how officers from one North Side district actually helped commission burglaries of liquor stores and butcher shops, taking home thousands of dollars in alcohol and meat. The CPD was actually contributing to increased rates of burglary in some neighborhoods rather than reducing them.⁸²

Corruption and lack of integrity coursed through the department's ranks. The *Chicago Tribune* revealed how local politicians often pulled strings on department promotions and plum assignments. Officers seeking to advance in rank often had to endorse machine candidates or do other political favors, thus making them beholden to machine politicians and Democratic Party leaders rather than their supervising officers. In other cases, those who had to take written exams for promotion could purchase answer sheets for a fee, thus revealing the fraud behind an ostensibly meritocratic system. Police were even accused of taking bribes to stand in place of suspects for lineups when witnesses came to identify suspected criminals.⁸³ All told, police corruption, misconduct, and malfeasance ran rampant through the department and stretched all the way to Richard Daley's city hall and the Cook County Democratic Party. Rather than fighting crime, many of Chicago's men in blue frequently aided and abetted or perpetrated it themselves.⁸⁴

In a climate of widespread corruption and wrongdoing, then, it would not be hard to imagine that such a police force carried its bad behavior to neighborhood streets, particularly in relation to people perceived to be intruders in white neighborhoods. As political theorist Susan Bickford notes, "The presence of police . . . signals safety for some and danger for others."⁸⁵ For Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and African Americans, the CPD had a long history of regularly harassing and brutalizing them with impunity over the

years. Officers had reportedly killed several young men of color in the mid-sixties. Andrew Diamond notes that "youths hanging out on the streets in the late 1950s and early 1960s found themselves increasingly running up against antagonistic police officers."⁸⁶ Conflicts between police and young men of color were fueled in part by the fact that Puerto Ricans and African Americans were generally much younger than whites. (The median age of Puerto Rican men in West Town in 1960 was 20.9 years old.)⁸⁷ Over the next two decades, the Puerto Rican population remained significantly younger than white residents. As young people became increasingly alienated from school and dropped out in high numbers, and increasingly found themselves unemployed, they filled neighborhood streets, where they clashed with law enforcement.

Police-community conflicts, however, were also an extension of the racial antagonism in changing neighborhoods and the racial affinities of a predominantly white police force. Rather than assuaging racial tensions, local law enforcement perpetuated such conflict. Obed López observes, "The police in a real sense reflected the prejudices of the communities they came from." Police, after all, often shared ethnoracial and class backgrounds with the communities they worked in, communities that resented the newcomers and wanted them out of their neighborhoods. Like many residents, they harbored enmity against people they viewed as unwelcome outsiders. And they abused and harassed them with fervor.⁸⁸

Community worker José Muñiz reported regularly that Puerto Ricans complained of problems with authorities. According to many, police routinely harassed them, often for innocuous behaviors such as congregating on public streets, a social practice whose cultural and class underpinnings clearly disrupted bourgeois ideals of more privatized leisure pursuits. Families organized to discuss police abuse and mistreatment. In 1960, a survey of Puerto Ricans in a section of West Town revealed that the majority of them felt discriminated against, particularly by police.⁸⁹ But the responses to address such tense relations surprisingly put the burden on the Puerto Rican community. That summer, after informally surveying members of a fraternal group (likely the Caballeros de San Juan), Muñiz reported, "I found out that at least 90% of this group had the idea that the police and the other neighbors hate and persecute the Spanish-Speaking people, especially the Puerto Ricans. I gave a long talk to them about the law and ways of living in this city. After the meeting was over, I can say that at least 75 or 80% of them agreed with me and will try to adjust themselves to the way of living in their community." Like some in the Puerto Rican community

and in the social service professions, Muñiz seemed to believe that cultural differences and ignorance of American laws and way of life (*not* prejudice) caused poor relations with police. Muñiz tried to educate migrants and their children on what kinds of behaviors were unlawful. Working from another angle, the Migration Division helped establish Spanish classes and other programs for police officers and other public employees to familiarize them with Puerto Rican culture and language. They created an exchange program for Chicago policemen, funding trips to the island so they could visit with law enforcement there. Such efforts did not seem to stymie police mistreatment, however.⁹⁰

Even when they walked alone, Puerto Rican men became targeted as suspects. Carlos Alvarez related to the famed oral historian Studs Terkel that he was unjustly arrested while leaving work one day. In the early-morning hours as he came off his shift as night watchman at a local museum, Alvarez was stopped and eventually surrounded by as many as fourteen squad cars. Officers refused to believe that he worked at the museum (though they allegedly did not bother to verify either) and instead mocked and mistreated him, fracturing his arm before taking him to jail. Although he tried to explain himself to a judge, he was found guilty of charges he did not understand (he did not speak English fluently) and lost his job as a result of the incident. Other young men likewise complained that police harassed them when they walked through neighborhood parks.⁹¹ Relations with police revealed the gendered dynamics of race relations: white policemen made assumptions about Puerto Rican men's criminality and regularly persecuted them for even the smallest offenses.

Of course police responded to actual crimes, especially those committed by young men, who as a demographic commit the highest proportion of crimes. Male participation in certain activities, such as alcohol consumption, gambling, street fights, and gang feuds, certainly prompted many arrests. Still, as researchers noted, "The general public, including law enforcement authorities, have an exaggerated view as to the involvement of Puerto Ricans in crime and law violations."⁹² Officers' encounters with actual offenders quickly colored their judgment and biased their views against the larger community. At the same time, given the violence from white male youths, deplorable living conditions, and shrinking employment opportunities, young men joined street gangs in growing numbers during these decades. Still, as a predominantly white police force encountered growing numbers of brown and black men, their clashes became contests over masculinity and manhood. Andrew Diamond notes that Chicagoans witnessed

a campaign of gratuitous harassment waged by police against youths hanging out on the streets. According to one West Side youth worker, police repeatedly roughed up youths, forced them to remove scarves they wore on their heads, tore up their cigarettes, confiscated their money, and subjected them to verbal abuse. Such tactics clearly went beyond law enforcement: they indicate that the police had entered into the logic of a struggle for dominance predicated on emasculating their young rivals.⁹³

Puerto Ricans were acutely aware of the abrasive relationship they had with local law enforcement. As Felix Padilla notes, "Residents of the Division Street area shared a pervasive belief that policemen were physically brutal, harsh, and discourteous to them because they were Puerto Ricans."⁹⁴ Over more than a decade, many Puerto Ricans grew to mistrust police.

In 1966, Mayor Richard J. Daley designated the first week in June "Puerto Rican Week." Community leaders cheered the gesture of ethnic inclusion, and planned enthusiastically for the weeklong celebration. Islanders from throughout the city gathered to celebrate and publicly show their cultural pride, culminating in a gathering of ten thousand people along the famous downtown State Street. The event's location on the prominent boulevard held great significance: it symbolized the mayor's and the city's public acknowledgment of this newest ethnic minority group.⁹⁵ The celebration culminated Sunday evening, June 12, in Humboldt Park. That night police allegedly answered a call about youths fighting in the street. As they approached a group of young men, they proceeded to chase two of them down an alley. In the pursuit, Officer Thomas Munyon shot a twenty-year-old man, Arcelis Cruz, claiming that he had drawn a gun. Witnesses disputed the accusation.

Since many people were out on the streets because of the festival, they soon began gathering to see what had happened and eventually to protest Cruz's shooting. Growing numbers of officers began arriving on the scene, and they brought police dogs to control the crowds. As they used the dogs to keep people back, one of them reportedly bit a young man, incensing the crowd further and escalating the hostilities. A local Spanish-language radio personality, Carlos Agrelot ("*El Argentino Boricua*," or "The Puerto Rican Argentine"), had been broadcasting live from the events throughout the day. When the tension and violence began, Agrelot continued coverage, providing regular updates on the police-community standoff. The radio broadcast attracted still more people into the streets, drawing listeners

from neighborhoods even farther away. Word spread quickly throughout the community, and soon hundreds of people (newspapers claimed it was a thousand) took to the streets expressing outrage against this latest episode of police abuse. Women and children were among the crowd, which began pelting authorities with rocks and bottles. Police armed themselves with riot helmets and batons. Some rioters began turning over squad cars, setting property on fire, and looting stores. Between thirty-five and forty-four people, including the wounded Arcelis Cruz and four women, were arrested. Community leaders tried to quell the outburst and send people home, but the riot continued long after midnight until heavy rain finally dispersed the crowd. Chicago's Puerto Rican population had erupted in one of the growing "civil disturbances" spreading through impoverished inner-city, minority communities around the country.⁹⁶

Residents had witnessed several incidents of police injustice in the previous summer. In June and July of 1965, officers savagely beat several Puerto Rican men over neighborhood use of fire hydrants. In a third case, the community accused police of inciting interracial violence between Puerto Ricans and African Americans and then refusing to intervene. While such cases often went unnoticed by the mainstream and more conservative press (like the *Chicago Tribune*), incidents of police brutality were more frequently reported in more liberal papers and the Spanish-language press.⁹⁷ The case of Celestino Gonzalez and Silvano Burgos, for example, appeared in *El Puertorriqueño* in August of 1965. Officers had reportedly responded to a call on West Division Street about an open fire hydrant. When they arrived, Gonzalez and Burgos, who stood near the hydrant, ran into a nearby building where they both lived. Police pursued and arrested them both in their homes. Gonzalez described the following:

They handcuffed me in my room and took me to their car by pushing me and threatening my life. They took me to a hospital . . . where the policeman who broke the glass of my door was going to be treated. They pulled us out of the car and took us to a washroom in the hospital. There we were beaten savagely. The next stop was a park near the hospital where I was, once again, beaten up. Finally, I was taken to a police district where several policemen hit me like crazy; I fell to the floor and everyone that passed by hit me. I was bleeding terribly and I lost my consciousness, when I woke up, I was in Cook County Hospital with my hands and feet tied to a bed.⁹⁸

Community leaders tried to bring the matter to the attention of the mayor and his relevant commissions, but the city seemed reluctant to acknowl-

edge that the police department had a community relations problem with the city's Puerto Ricans.

The night after Arcelis Cruz's shooting, a crowd of people marched to the local police station to demand his release and that of thirty others who had been jailed. Looters and rioters continued breaking storefront windows and taking merchandise, especially from white-owned businesses. Authorities reported approximately ten thousand people in the streets defying "hundreds of police who attempted to restore order." That night officers shot seven more Puerto Rican men, most of whom were local residents, including one man who was fifty-six years old. A photograph taken during the evening's events captured the violence that police visited upon local residents: a lone youth stood in the street surrounded by at least six officers, several of whom wielded their clubs, and one of whom fiercely shouted at the boy. All told, thirty-seven individuals were arrested on the second night. The city's leading newspapers focused on the minor injuries that several officers suffered, as they frequently did when police faced off with civilians or protesters.⁹⁹

On Tuesday, police officials met with church leaders, including Father Don Headley of the Cardinal's Committee on the Spanish-Speaking, and Puerto Rican ministers and lay leaders, to discuss the turmoil. Mayor Daley, who also attended, allegedly reported that "he had heard of no grievances from the Puerto Rican community that could have accounted for the violence. The problem seems to be mainly one of communication." Indeed, city officials seemed caught completely by surprise in responding to the riots because police had conducted intelligence operations to identify potential riot "hot spots" the month prior and reportedly had not anticipated any problems among Mexicans or Puerto Ricans. City leaders and social service providers claimed to be completely unaware of the high concentration of Puerto Ricans in the neighborhood. City officials, and indeed some Puerto Rican leaders, began blaming "outsiders" (Communists and gang members from other neighborhoods) for agitating the crowds and inciting the violence. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) had come to the city that year to help lead the Chicago Freedom Movement. As King was organizing peaceful marches for open housing and reaching African Americans on the West Side, his movement was having a tremendous impact, including among Latinos/as. Obed López recalls inviting acquaintances from the SCLC to serve as observers and witnesses to the uprising. Although the SCLC espoused nonviolence, some community leaders and the Daley administration began blaming them as the outside agitators.¹⁰⁰

On the third night, five hundred officers patrolled the streets to maintain the peace. Perhaps in light of the accusations of police abuse, the acting deputy chief of patrol who led the officers ordered his men, "We'll lock up anyone we have to in order to clear the streets. But do it with a smile." They proceeded to arrest twenty-five adults and fifteen teenagers.¹⁰¹ Over the course of the three days, some observers noted that undercover police (provocateurs) had incited some of the destruction themselves. Father Headley, who worked closely with the Caballeros de San Juan, recalled standing on top of a police car trying to dissuade an angry crowd from setting it on fire. He noted, "I was pointing out to them the fact that I knew this was a plot. 'There is something going on here because the two guys that are telling you to burn this car are cops.' I knew them from the Monroe Street district, I had been at St. Patrick's [parish] for five years and I knew that they were policemen." Once he stepped down from the car, he recalled, "Out of the gangways, police poured out. They were everywhere, they had dogs, they had helmets and they were beating the hell out of everybody on the street." The violence finally died down by June 15, with official reports citing dozens arrested, various injured, over fifty buildings destroyed, and millions of dollars in damages. While the mainstream press had barely noticed the festivities of Puerto Rican Week, the Division Street riots were featured in front-page headlines for several days.¹⁰²

Observers soon tried to analyze the psychology and sociology of the riots. The nation had witnessed a number of black riots in Harlem, Watts, Detroit, and Philadelphia the year before. Some interpreted the uprisings as an enraged reaction from a frustrated, marginalized, and oppressed population.¹⁰³ Others vehemently disagreed. The *Chicago Tribune* denounced the Division Street rioters and opined, "The usual sentimental drivel is coming forth in an effort to excuse the rioters who for two successive nights engaged in shooting, looting, burning, and fighting with the police on the near northwest side. . . . Apologists for the rioters also have been looking for reasons to blame unemployment, interracial friction, and 'the ghetto.'" The editors incorrectly claimed that unemployment was not very high in the community and falsely asserted that "there has been little friction between Puerto Ricans and older residents." In another editorial, they staunchly defended police, stating they "had provocation to use force." They wrote, "The evidence has been overwhelming that the police in northern cities bend over backward to be gentle with members of minority groups." Despite the fact that police had shot seven people, the editors applauded: "It is greatly to their credit that they managed to disperse the mob and restore order without causing serious injury to any of the rioters."¹⁰⁴ A letter to the

editor praised the *Tribune's* response: "The Puerto Rican coming to our city presumably comes here to improve his lot in life (and judging by the thousands flocking here he does improve his standard of living) and to make his home. If this is so, then he should be prepared to adopt our customs and our language, the same as other immigrants have done in the past."¹⁰⁵ Another reprinted commentary remarked, "When these were Polish and German communities they weren't riot breeders. They were simply neighborhoods where these people felt at home while they and their children were becoming a *real* part of America" (emphasis in original).¹⁰⁶ Such critics were entirely unsympathetic to the plight of Puerto Ricans and denounced their behavior. The letters revealed the distinctions local white residents made between violent Puerto Ricans and earlier peaceful European immigrants. They failed to remember the mob violence that some of their own had committed against African Americans since the early 1900s, and especially since the Great Migration of World War II. According to these letter writers and others, Puerto Ricans were deficient "immigrants" who were failing to assimilate and become "Americans" as they had.

Making sense of the riots became a thorny issue for the community itself. The Migration Division's Chicago office repeatedly referred to the four days of rioting as a "disturbance," minimizing the extent of the violence and unrest in its communications with New York headquarters. Indeed, the Chicago office's annual report that year made no mention of the uprising at all.¹⁰⁷ Some in the Puerto Rican community expressed shame and embarrassment that so many had taken to the streets in such an unrestrained manner. Many lamented the violence and destruction and felt that the riots achieved nothing politically and instead worsened relations with police. Others, like Obed López, a Mexican immigrant who witnessed the riots firsthand, believed that they "were a spontaneous reaction to the police brutality and to discrimination of the residents of the area, [from] the Polish, Ukrainians, Italians. . . . I think . . . the riots took place . . . because . . . over the years, the pattern of attacks against Puerto Rican families had existed."¹⁰⁸ The most strident community leaders in the neighborhood used the riots as a starting point from which to demand greater attention to the poverty of Puerto Ricans and the need for culturally sensitive community services.

One month after the Division Street uprising, the city's black West Side erupted in response to police brutality. When black teens opened a neighborhood fire hydrant for local black children who were barred from three

of the area's four public swimming pools, police responded with force and, in the ensuing struggle, "clubbed five youths bloody." The following day, the community broke out in violence, which the CPD reportedly could not suppress. The National Guard ultimately stepped in to restore order. After the guard had established peace, however, local police came back into the community and "shot up several homes in retaliation." This was the second riot among Chicago's black residents since 1965. Mayor Daley's notorious "shoot to kill" order against rioters hardly calmed community anger.¹⁰⁹

Just three days after the black West Side uprising, the Chicago Commission on Human Relations (CCHR) began open hearings to address the Puerto Rican community's issues and concerns. The CCHR had originally formed in 1943 in response to the race riots that rocked Detroit and Los Angeles. Hoping to pacify the community now, Mayor Daley appointed Claudio Flores, publisher of the Spanish-language newspaper *El Puertorriqueño*, as the first Puerto Rican on the commission. The CCHR hearing was attended by over 250 people. Leaders and other community members testified to the conditions of police brutality, high rents and substandard housing, racial discrepancies in union wages, and credit schemes that defrauded consumers. They complained that city hall and the political structure were out of touch with the community and that the city fostered "apartheid, Chicago-style." Juan Díaz of the local Boys Club, one of the more vocal and militant leaders on Division Street, blasted city antipoverty programs for failing to reach Puerto Ricans. A local clergyman pointed out the fact that the hearings could not truly capture the opinions of most Puerto Ricans because they were held at a time and place that working people could not easily attend. Various speakers offered potential solutions for a number of problems, citing the need for greater political representation at the precinct level, and more parks and recreation facilities.¹¹⁰ None of the suggestions offered, however, thoroughly examined two key underlying factors: the decline of well-paid manufacturing jobs was leading to growing unemployment, and working-class whites and the police who protected them resented Puerto Ricans in their communities.

Over the summer, residents, including some active in the Caballeros de San Juan, continued to hold meetings to address police abuse and submit grievances to the mayor and to the police internal affairs department. Their efforts at mending police-community relations, however, did not stop policemen's use of excessive force. In August, police killed Ismael Laboy at his home in front of his wife and eight children. Nearly fifteen hundred people reportedly gathered and began stoning squad cars before heavy rain

dispersed the crowd. During that call, officers also shot seventeen-year-old Rigoberto Acosta in the back. Acosta had reportedly gone to see the gathering crowd with other youths and was fleeing the scene when police took aim at him, leaving him paralyzed for the rest of his life. The next month, an officer fatally shot a fourteen-year-old boy, Nelson Rivera, for stealing a car. Two hundred people gathered in the Woodlawn neighborhood immediately after the incident to protest. Community leaders managed to defuse the tension, just barely averting another violent face-off with authorities.¹¹¹ In another case, Ismael Solano Nieves died as a result of burns suffered while in custody at Cook County Jail. Community leader Carlos "Caribe" Ruiz noted, "Ever since the Division St. disorders of 1966, we've been preaching to our people that they should submit to arrest and then defend themselves according to law in court. But if this is the kind of thing that happens in the jail, then it is useless for us to go into the streets and try to talk about obeying the law."¹¹²

The year after the riots, University of Chicago researchers conducted a study on Puerto Ricans and race relations in West Town. Although almost 90 percent of the people surveyed believed that the riots did not help Puerto Ricans improve their situation, many respondents continued to have misgivings about police. An astonishing 71.4 percent agreed that Puerto Ricans had problems with law enforcement. Asked to choose from a list of topics which was the most important problem affecting the group, respondents ranked employment first followed by police relations.¹¹³ More extensive verbal responses revealed that the longer Puerto Ricans lived in the city, the more likely they were to believe that police discriminated against their population and treated them unjustly. One fifty-four-year-old woman who had lived in Chicago twelve years and responded in Spanish explained, "The police abuse the Puerto Ricans. They are always looking and searching and, when they catch one, they strike him." A thirty-five-year-old male skilled worker, who had lived in Chicago over seventeen years and spoke English fluently, echoed this: "Police discriminate against Latins. You have to avoid them because, if they catch you, you will be in trouble."¹¹⁴

Five months after the CCHR public hearings, the commission produced an official report, which concluded that the problems of the Puerto Rican community stemmed from cultural causes—the language barriers of rural migrants coming to an urban society. To put it bluntly, Chicago, like other East Coast cities, had a "Puerto Rican problem." The report recommended bridging this cultural divide by offering more Spanish-language classes for local police and printing traffic laws and other publications in Spanish,

among other things. The entire uprising and community protests had been reduced to a matter of cultural difference. The burden fell on Puerto Ricans to assimilate and change their behavior. This would ensure better relations with law enforcement and better conditions in their neighborhoods.¹¹⁵

Conclusion

Little has been written about the urban uprisings of Puerto Ricans in the 1960s. Still, the analysis of Chicago's black riots points to some parallels that are useful for understanding the Division Street uprising. In the case of African Americans, the Chicago Urban League, for example, noted how the influx of recent migrants, the city's urban renewal policies, and racial succession had fomented social unrest.

The West Side was the newer of Chicago's two [black] ghettos, comprised of neighborhoods that had been white not long ago. Compared to the South Side, it had fewer community organizations, less-established churches, and fewer black-run businesses and institutions. Its residents were also different from blacks on the South Side. More of them had personally made the Great Migration from the rural South. They were more likely to be poor and under-educated, to have loose ties to the city, and to still be experiencing the disappointment of the gap between what they expected when they moved north to Chicago and what they found there.

The assessment captured the phenomenon of recent migration, but the league also noted the simultaneous impact of urban renewal displacement:

Another large group of West Side residents were uprooted migrants from closer by. West Side neighborhoods were home to many blacks forcibly displaced by Daley's urban renewal programs—a Chicago Urban League report called them “dumping grounds for relocated families.” In a 1958 series on urban renewal, the *Chicago Daily News* compared “Chicago's DP”—for the most part poor blacks pushed out by urban renewal—to European “displaced persons” uprooted by world war. Chicago's DP's were “made homeless not by war or communism or disaster but by wreckers,” the *Daily News* reported, and were “refugees of the relocation that inevitably accompanies redevelopment. They are people, angry, indifferent, resentful, resigned.” It was the kind of alienation, the Chicago Urban League's report concluded, that made an area a likely site for civil unrest.¹¹⁶

Much of what observers noted about the conditions of African Americans accurately applied to Puerto Ricans as well.

Omar López, a community activist and former member of the Young Lords, explained that as Puerto Ricans were displaced from the Near North Side and moved to West Town and Humboldt Park, the resistance and hostility they encountered from whites were reinforced by the police and civil institutions (schools, welfare department, etc.). As a result, López explained, “there was a lot of discontent building up in the community because the structures were not responding.”¹¹⁷ That so many women and children participated in the riots suggests that these dynamics had a direct impact on them as well. Women and girls came out on the streets, vocally defending their husbands, sons, boyfriends, and brothers, hoping to protect them from abuse, incarceration, or deadly violence. They were also expressing their own frustrations with local institutions and the inhospitable treatment they repeatedly faced.

In the following years, economic conditions in West Town and Humboldt Park remained bleak. Growing deindustrialization devastated Puerto Rican workers who felt the brunt of this in manufacturing layoffs. Unemployment statistics gathered by the Cardinal's Committee for the Spanish-Speaking revealed that 18 percent of the labor force in the Association House service area was unemployed. Puerto Ricans constituted two-thirds of those individuals. The Cardinal's Committee further reported that 76 percent of Puerto Rican heads of households were employed, but 13 percent earned below the poverty level of three thousand dollars a year. The study noted that “among the Spanish-Speaking persons employed, 44% work in factories, 15% are machine operators, 12% are engaged in general service type jobs (restaurants, bus boy, etc.), and 3½% are engaged in small business.” Even among those employed, however, “21% received additional aid through welfare.”¹¹⁸ As the population became younger, it also became poorer. The decline of the city's industrial sector was increasingly manifested in growing unemployment rates, especially among the working class. In 1970, local labor markets were still relatively strong, but by 1980, 10.9 percent of West Town's workforce was unemployed, while Humboldt Park measured 12.9 percent unemployment. Poverty rates followed the upward trend, reaching 27.2 percent in West Town and 25.9 percent in Humboldt Park by 1980.¹¹⁹ Spanish-speaking residents experienced significantly higher poverty and unemployment rates than whites, reinforcing growing ideas about their dependency, inadequacy as workers, and inability to assimilate and integrate economically.

Conditions continued to decline in West Town and Humboldt Park as

absentee landlords extracted rents from poor tenants but let buildings fall into disrepair. The number of vacant housing units in Humboldt Park increased nearly tenfold from 1950 to 1980, going from only 1 percent of all units to nearly 10 percent. In West Town, the vacancy rate went from less than 2 percent to nearly 13 percent during the same period.¹²⁰ In a community of declining property values, buildings in disrepair or with severe code violations mysteriously burned down at high rates. The Northwest Community Organization counted thirty-five buildings razed by fire in Wicker Park and twenty-six in adjoining East Humboldt Park between 1969 and 1971. These fires cost the community approximately 198 apartments previously occupied largely by Spanish-speaking families. Throughout the 1970s, fires continued to claim dozens of buildings. In eleven months of 1978, there were three thousand fires in the area, over one-third of them officially determined to be arson. It is unclear how many lives such fires claimed. Whether these fires were caused by the faulty conditions of aged buildings, by negligent tenants, or by premeditated arson, a surprisingly high number of property owners disposed of real estate by collecting insurance claims.¹²¹ The Near Northwest Side became riddled with vacant lots and boarded, charred, or hollowed-out buildings. Although it had sizable Mexican and African American populations, it became known as a "Puerto Rican ghetto."

Puerto Ricans initially found themselves unintelligible as an ethnic/national, racially heterogeneous, US-citizen, migrant group. Despite finding themselves in a social context that could not accommodate for their difference, they were unwilling initially to identify themselves as a distinct racial group, as this might mark them as socially inferior to whites and thus incapable of attaining equality. They did recognize, however, that they experienced prejudice and discrimination from whites as well as conflict and tensions with African Americans. Eventually, many realized they were being assigned a nonwhite identity that carried negative consequences. As a result of these experiences, the second generation began shifting its own self-perceptions, taking the racial lesson to heart and embracing a nonwhite identity, a *Puerto Rican* one. In the aftermath of the riots and in the context of late-sixties social movements, Puerto Ricans formed a new ethnoracial identity, one that allowed for nationalism, encouraged cultural pride, reconciled the racial diversity of the population, and was intersected by class. Their political awakening is the subject of the next chapter.