

# **The Unexpected Consequence of Government Manipulation: Racial Disturbances at Chicago's Public Housing for Veterans in the 1940s**

( 統合政策の予期せぬ結果 :1940 年代シカゴの退役軍人向け公営住宅における人種暴動 )

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**SUMMARY IN JAPANESE:** 本論文は、第二次世界大戦後にシカゴの退役軍人向けの公営住宅で起きた二つの人種暴動の検証を通して、公営住宅が同市の黒人コミュニティに与えた影響を明らかにする。シカゴの公営住宅政策は導入当初より人種統合を目指していたが、実際に人種統合を試みた二つの公営住宅では、人種暴動が引き起こされた。1946年エアーポート・ホームズ暴動では、黒人の入居を抑止する手段としての暴力の有効性が近隣の白人住民によって証明され、暴力の使用は1947年ファーンウッド・パーク・ホームズ暴動へ継承された。これらの人種騒動で示された暴力は、黒人の入居に反対する人々の抵抗手段の雛型となっていく。同時に、シカゴの公営住宅政策は、戦後のシカゴにおける黒人の新たな居住パターンを生み出していた。暴動後のファーンウッド・パーク・ホームズは、近隣の分散していた黒人コミュニティを結びつける役割を果たし、その後の黒人コミュニティの拡大の礎を築いたのである。

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## Introduction

During the 1940s and 1950s, racial disturbances shook American cities. The Detroit Race Riot of 1943, in which a fight erupted between African Americans and white sailors, turned out to be a racial confrontation and exposed the fragility of race relations, shocking many Americans who thought that the United States had been maintaining peaceful race relations during World War II.<sup>1</sup> Like Detroit, Chicago, which had a large black population, experienced a large-scale race riot in 1919. Following the Detroit riots in 1943, with the great public concern, the Mayors' Committee on Race Relations (MCRR) was established to evaluate race relations in Chicago. During the interwar years, the municipal government of Chicago tried to reduce volatile racial tensions by addressing the social problems that emerged as a result of the population growth of African Americans. Most of them came from southern rural areas as the second wave of the Great Migration. In Chicago, these southern black migrants usually started their life in the overcrowded black community that gradually expanded its areas.<sup>2</sup> The black population growth stimulated white people's sensitivity about residential areas.

As African Americans struggled to find decent housing in the private market, they hoped to benefit from federal programs that eased the housing shortage. One of the most serious problems was a lack of affordable housing for African Americans.<sup>3</sup> Real estate brokers usually refused to rent or sell houses to African Americans in white neighborhoods. Even had there been no such pattern, the available number of housing units was small.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, African Americans desired to obtain some support from the federal government. In 1937 Congress passed the United States Housing Act of 1937, which provided financial support for state and local governments to improve the conditions of public housing for low-income families. The Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) was a municipal corporation established in 1937 to own and operate public housing that was built by the federal government within the city of Chicago. The CHA placed priority on public housing for wartime workers during World War II and provided temporary housing for veterans after the war.<sup>5</sup>

The racial tension in Chicago remained unresolved in postwar years, and was even worsened by governmental housing projects. After the war, many

veterans were able to purchase homes either in cities or in suburbs by using federal programs such as the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the Veterans Administration (VA) that encouraged veterans to buy a home in the private housing market.<sup>6</sup> Even though both public and private housing sectors had made an effort to provide affordable housing for veterans, the postwar housing shortage was not overcome immediately. In those circumstances, African Americans found it difficult to obtain a home loan or purchase a home through federal programs because of racial discrimination. Thus, they placed their hopes of living in a decent home in public housing. African-Americans' residential areas usually expanded along the line that divided black and white neighborhoods, but public housing could easily leap across this color line, because it was built on public land owned by the city of Chicago and was dispersed regardless of the racial color line. When African-American veterans moved into public housing, most of their white neighbors turned hostile toward them.<sup>7</sup>

This article examines African-American residential expansion and its impact on race relations in postwar Chicago by exploring two consecutive racial disturbances that were caused by controversies over public housing for veterans. In the late 1940s, the CHA sponsored two veterans' public housing projects, the Airport Homes and the Fernwood Park Homes, to promote racial integration.<sup>8</sup> Many white ethnic homeowners in these neighborhoods, who were Southern and Eastern European immigrants or their descendants, opposed the construction of public housing. They believed it would invite an influx of blacks into their community and bring down property values in their neighborhoods. Once African Americans moved into the public housing, white neighbors expelled them from the white community violently and it escalated into a riot. Thus, the veterans' public housing that expanded African-American residential areas provoke violence from neighboring white ethnics, facilitating racial conflict in Chicago during the 1950s and 1960s. The later riots learned from the earlier one how to protest black veterans and to distribute information to community residents.

These riots were significant in twentieth-century American urban history in two ways. The CHA's housing policy in the 1940s led to the rearrangement of racial residential distribution in Chicago after World War II, while its policy orientation simultaneously escalated communal violence among white neighbors in the city. Because of urban decay and inner-city poverty after

the 1960s, historians and sociologists criticized public housing as a symbol of the urban ghetto that was associated with drug trafficking and gang-related crimes.<sup>9</sup> However, recent scholars have explored housing and race issues from broader perspectives such as the idea of racial disparities in wealth, the importance of local public housing policy which alleviated the overcrowded black community in urban areas, and African-Americans' dynamic activities in demanding jobs and better housing in the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>10</sup> According to in-depth oral research by J. S. Fuerst, African Americans were satisfied to live in clean and commodious public housing in the 1940s.<sup>11</sup> This affirmative notion of public housing reconsidered the previous studies which described public housing as a social problem. Some scholars, such as Arnold R. Hirsch and D. Bradford Hunt, have analyzed the CHA's housing policy and racial riots in public housing. Hirsch examined racial incidents from the 1940s to 1950s that had not been reported in the mainstream media in Chicago, and he called them "communal violence." He demonstrated that the distinct form of segregation in Chicago emerged as the "second ghetto" with the coalition of a local government, real estate brokers, and white ethnics' resistance to African Americans. Hunt considered the history of the CHA's housing policy and, in his words, "what went wrong with the CHA."<sup>12</sup> But both excellent studies on public housing rarely referred to the relationship between public housing and the possibility of black residential expansion. This article reveals the CHA policy's unexpected consequence that because of public housing construction in white neighborhoods, African-American residential space extended by connecting with nearby black communities. In sum, public housing worked as a conjunction among dispersed African-American communities. In addition to black residential expansion, white neighbors' violence toward African-American veterans shows the fear of racial mixing and fragile race relations in the urban north. Considering the nature of white neighbors' violence helps our understanding of why civil rights organizations in the urban north had a hard time tackling housing discrimination in the 1960s. Thus, this article analyzes the impact of local housing policy on African-American residential patterns and the progression of white ethnics' violence in mid-century Chicago.

The article starts by examining the activities of Elizabeth Wood, who played a central role in the formation of the CHA's racial integration policy. The CHA's racial integration policy did not mean that both white

and black residents lived together with equal numbers in the same public housing, but the CHA tried to integrate them gradually in public housing. The CHA's basic stance on race issues took to providing public housing to people regardless of race, color, creed, and national origin. The article then examines the difficulty African-American veterans faced in acquiring housing and traces the process of the CHA's decision to build public housing for veterans. The focal point of this analysis is the Airport Homes riot in 1946 and the Fernwood Park Homes riot in 1947. Both riots took place when African-American veterans moved into public housing. The article examines the different outcomes for the African-American residential landscape after the two riots. The Fernwood Park Homes ended up expanding African-American residential areas while the other kept African Americans away from a white-dominated community. After the riots, the CHA had to obtain the City Council's approval for public housing site selection and it meant that the CHA lost its control of the site selection. Because City Council members usually opposed building public housing in white-majority areas, the CHA's racial integration policy became difficult from then on. The article concludes that the CHA's public housing policy in the 1940s brought two intertwined outcomes. It resulted in some unintended effects in creating a new way of expansion for African-American living space after World War II, but same time it made it more difficult to carry out the CHA's integration policy after 1947. Through an analysis of the two riots, this article illustrates the turning point in the CHA's housing policy after World War II.

### **The Unfinished Task of Racial Integration in Public Housing**

The racial tension over public housing in Chicago had some of its roots in New Deal reform policies. The massive construction of public housing began with federal funding before World War II. The Public Works Administration (PWA), a federal agency that was established during the New Deal reform, built fifty-one public housing facilities across the country.<sup>13</sup> In 1938, the city of Chicago had three of them: the Jane Addams Homes, the Julia C. Lathrop Homes, and the Trumbull Park Homes.<sup>14</sup> After the passage of the United States Housing Act of 1937, also known as the Wagner-Steagall Act, local housing authorities across the nation promoted the construction of

public housing with federal grants.<sup>15</sup> The CHA was a non-profit municipal corporation using federal grants to operate public housing within the city of Chicago. From the beginning, the CHA had a vision “to provide decent housing with lower rent for low-income people.” Many City Council members and real estate brokers criticized public housing as “socialistic” and opposed its construction. They were also concerned that public housing would slow down economic growth in the private housing market.<sup>16</sup> If potential home buyers and renters chose to live in public housing, real estate brokers would face considerable drawback. Therefore, the CHA’s activities had to emphasize that public housing would not have a harmful impact on the private sector, since they would ensure the availability of public housing only for low-income families.<sup>17</sup>

Among CHA officials, executive director Elizabeth Wood was a strong proponent of providing public housing for low-income families. She had worked as the executive director of the Metropolitan Housing Council, which was founded in 1934 as a citizen group to improve tenements without electricity or running water and tackle rat infestations in Chicago. During this time, she also served on the Illinois State Housing Board. She was a New Dealer housing specialist of this era. The biggest reason why she made a vigorous effort to deal with the housing shortage came from her belief that decent housing could make families happy and united during the Great Depression era:<sup>18</sup>

I saw the impact in one family. There were nine children and two parents living in three rooms. I found them a great, big, sunny apartment, with enough bedrooms for a decent sleeping arrangement. And a dining room table for the first time. And enough chairs for the first time. I saw the magic that house performed. The family bloomed.<sup>19</sup>

Convinced in the power of housing to enrich family life, Wood was determined to provide housing for low-income families in the CHA program, and regarded providing public housing for African Americans, who needed it most, as a vital task for the CHA.

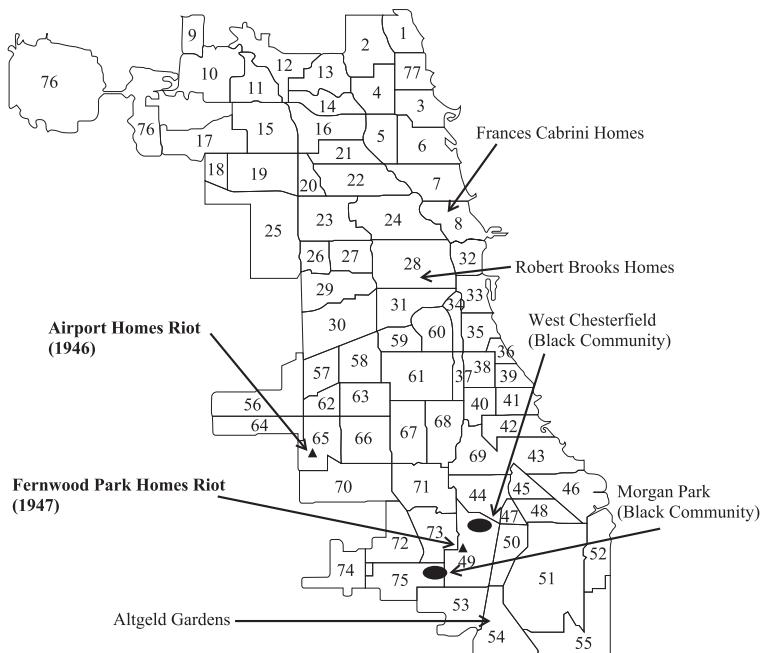
The African-American population growth spurred the deficiency of housing available for them in the 1940s. Robert C. Weaver, the chairman

of the MCRR in the late 1940s, pointed out that the rapid black population growth led to additional overcrowding in African Americans' already limited residential areas. The South Side Black Belt, a traditional African-American community in Chicago, was gradually expanding its boundary southward, and the overcrowded community spilled over in that direction.<sup>20</sup> Because of racially restrictive covenants, contractual agreements among property owners that prohibited the purchase, lease, or occupation of their premises by African Americans, even middle-class African Americans, who possessed sufficient money to buy a new home or lease a more decent house, were confined to the Black Belt.<sup>21</sup>

During World War II, the CHA started to act for racial integration in public housing, but its activities met hardship from the beginning. The CHA built two public housing facilities, the Frances Cabrini Homes in 1942 and the Robert Brooks Homes in 1943 (see map 1). While the CHA officials were selecting public housing sites, they turned down the City Council's proposed sites, and relations between the CHA and the City Council worsened thereafter. When the CHA built a new public housing facility, it had to conform to the neighborhood composition rule, originally formulated by Interior Secretary Harold Ickes, that a public housing development should not alter the existing racial composition of the neighborhood.<sup>22</sup> Considering the racial understanding that it was difficult to enforce the same numbers of whites and blacks to move into housing in the urban north at the time, it was important for the CHA that African Americans gradually moved into public housing at a constant rate. The CHA hoped that African-American residents in both the Cabrini and Brooks projects would constitute 20 percent of all residents. The CHA's actual accomplishment, however, was very modest due to a furious backlash from the Italian community near the Frances Cabrini Homes. The CHA was only able to build 584 units, which was half the number it had planned. Brooks Homes' proximity to the Black Belt minimized its attraction for white applicants. It was therefore impossible to secure a sufficient number of white tenants in Brooks Homes from its opening day.<sup>23</sup> Although the CHA considered the racial balance carefully, its steady effort toward gradual racial integration in public housing did not achieve its goal.

World War II brought about mixed impacts on African-Americans residence. Because of the War Manpower Commission, the CHA had to ensure

**Map 1 The Main Public Housings in the 1940s and Two Race Riots**



Source : Devereux Bowly, Jr., *The Poorhouse: Subsidized Housing Chicago, 1895-1976* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978); Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (1983; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 6-8.

that wartime workers took priority over other applicants for public housing.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, the CHA officials retreated from their racial integration policy, building separate public housing facilities—one for whites and the other for blacks. Regarding the policy change, Robert Tylor, the first African-American chairman of the CHA, decided to build racially separate public housing. Taylor took advantage of the fact that it was possible to build public housing with federal grants only for the wartime workers. He chose not to integrate public

housing, but to reduce housing shortage conditions for African Americans. After the introduction of the CHA's new policy, the Altgeld Gardens was built for African-American wartime workers in the southern part of Chicago. The Altgeld Gardens was the biggest public housing facility, with 1,500 units and room for 7,000 people (see map 1).<sup>25</sup> Thus, the CHA made an effort to ease the housing shortage for African Americans during the war while delaying racial integration.

### **Public Housing for Veterans**

After the war, the housing condition was poor in most cities, and it was particularly difficult for veterans to find a home in the city. According to the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) survey in 1946, one third of married veterans lived with other family members in the same house.<sup>26</sup> The Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA) stated that African-American veterans were more eager than white veterans to find better housing either by renting or through purchase after World War II.<sup>27</sup> The survey, for example, showed that 18 percent of white veterans and 30 percent of black veterans, both living in the urban north, planned to change from the current deteriorated housing environment to more decent housing. In the urban south, 16 percent of white veterans and 23 percent of black veterans planned to move. Many black veterans wanted to rent, rather than purchase, a house because of financial reasons.<sup>28</sup> Because African Americans' housing remained dirty, crowded, and deficient in heat and water supply, this survey revealed that black veterans wanted to change their residential environment more than white veterans.

Foreseeing the end of the war, the federal government prepared housing policies as a part of social-readjustment support for veterans. Congress enacted the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the G.I. Bill of Rights. The G.I. Bill provided a range of benefits, including vocational rehabilitation, educational benefits, unemployment insurance, and a home loan guarantee.<sup>29</sup> In addition to the VA home loan guarantee, veterans were able to receive financial assistance from the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) and the FHA. According to a VA report in 1957, the homeownership rate among World War II veterans was 57.1 percent. One fourth of them were taking advantage of both VA and FHA loans.<sup>30</sup> With

great support from the government and private agencies, many veterans bought a house during the end of the 1940s and in the 1950s. Although the shortage of affordable housing plagued veterans regardless of their race, most white veterans had access to veterans' privileges. Black veterans were technically entitled to the same benefits, but many black veterans experienced insidious discrimination when they came to VA and state offices in the South.<sup>31</sup> Thus, black veterans, excluded from private loans and government aid, had to turn to public housing.

After the war, the CHA had to provide housing for veterans instead of wartime workers. The federal and local governments asked local housing authorities to build temporary housing for veterans as quickly as possible. The popular dwelling type was a simple flame house, such as a trailer house or a row house. By using trailer houses that were easy to set up and remove, the CHA provided 1,000 dwelling units by 1947. Although this public housing for veterans was offered under the condition that residents had to move out within two years as of July 1947, some veterans actually lived there until the mid-1950s.<sup>32</sup> In order to meet the demand quickly and economically, the CHA utilized vacant land in the public domain, which was owned by the Chicago Park District, the Board of Education, and the Cook County Forest Preserve District, for these public housing facilities.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, most public housing for veterans was built in the north and the south areas, far from the Chicago urban center. Most suburban whites kept away from urban life including those who refused to live with African Americans. When public housing for veterans was built across the previous color line dividing Chicago's residential areas, white-majority community residents became extremely angry at the CHA.

The CHA regarded public housing for veterans as "representative of a new era" and began racial integration there. During the war years, the CHA had to retreat from racial integration in public housing, but it did not mean that it abandoned the policy. The CHA had just waited for the right time to implement its housing policy and members of the CHA thought that public housing for World War II veterans was an appropriate time. Therefore, Elizabeth Wood advanced public housing projects for veterans in the direction of racial integration more assertively than ever. Because Wood enlisted strong support from Mayor Edward J. Kelly, she took a strong position on integration. Now, the CHA did not take account of the

neighborhood composition rule.<sup>34</sup> In this process, the Airport Homes riots occurred at the West Lawn community in Chicago.

## Airport Homes Riots

White neighbors' hostility toward black veterans was expressed fiercely from the beginning. On November 16, 1946, a racial disturbance occurred at the Airport Homes, a veterans' emergency housing project, in the West Lawn community (see map 1). The Airport Homes was located in the southwest part of Chicago at 60th Street and Karlov Avenue. The project covered two square blocks and was located on property formerly owned by the Board of Education. When Theodore Turner, a black veteran, tried to move into the apartment that he had already contracted, a considerable number of white people, including about eight to ten police officers, gathered in front of the apartment. In a very short time the crowd had increased, and shouts and vicious insults were hurled at Turner. The police officers got him to their car and he was driven out of the area. When additional police reinforcements arrived, it started raining heavily and most of the people who had been in the crowd left for their homes. Their act of shouting and throwing stones at Turner and police officers provoked a riot. The act of turning over a car belonging to Homer Jack, who was a member of the Chicago Council against Racial and Religious Discrimination (CCARD) and supported black veterans in the Airport Homes, got the media's attention, and it became a symbolic scene of the riot.<sup>35</sup> From the perspective of the residents of West Lawn, the CHA was a "stranger" that had put black veterans into their living space.

The Airport Homes riot was an accident that was destined to happen. The Airport Homes was a small project of 185 dwelling units. When the Turners moved in, white veterans had already occupied 125 units. Before Turner made a rental agreement with the CHA on November 9, the neighbors had already spread the rumor that black veterans might move into the project. Some white veteran residents expressed anti-black sentiments first. White veterans thought that if whites and blacks lived together, both of them would develop hostile feelings toward each other. They circulated petitions saying that black veterans should be kept out of the project in the neighborhood on November 14, and the Airport Homes' tenants held an emergency meeting

on November 15, the day before the Turners moved in.<sup>36</sup> Both the CHA and the anti-black neighbors anticipated that there might be some turmoil on their moving day.

Anti-black sentiment in the West Lawn community was situated in the area's history as a white residential area. By the 1920s, West Lawn had become an industrial district with immigrants from Ireland, Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Italy. Most of them were skilled factory workers. As the Chicago Municipal Airport expanded during World War II, a factory in West Lawn produced bomber engines.<sup>37</sup> Many skilled factory laborers and white, middle-class workers lived nearby. Most of them were "white ethnics" and few African Americans lived there.<sup>38</sup> Facing the whites' outrage, Turner told the CHA that he would leave the Airport Homes on November 17.<sup>39</sup>

Even after the Turners had left, the CHA did not compromise its policy of providing public housing to people regardless of race, color, creed, and national origin. The Chicago Commission on Human Relations (CCHR) discussed the Airport Homes situation with police officers repeatedly, and asked them to reinforce protection for black residents. The CCHR also demanded that officers have more training to overcome their own racial prejudice.<sup>40</sup> The CHA and the United Negro and Allied Veterans of America (UNAVA), a black veterans' organization, obtained the support of Mayor Kelly, who had a progressive view on race relations and actively cultivated African-American voters into the Democratic Party. In a public statement on November 20, Kelly denounced the violence at the Airport Homes and, once again, affirmed the CHA.<sup>41</sup>

After the disturbance, the Housing Committee of the City Council held a public hearing with the Airport Homes neighbors who were against black veterans moving in and the CHA officials. In the hearing, Michael Hogan, a City Council member, represented the West Lawn district and a few community leaders testified about the situation in the Airport Homes. Statements by the community organizations in public hearings exposed their anti-black hostility clearly. They demanded Elizabeth Wood's resignation from the CHA and that she would be replaced by a white veteran. The discussion and questions were focused on the way the CHA selected residents. A community leader expressed his opinion that only former West Lawn inhabitants could live in the Airport Homes.<sup>42</sup> When Homer Jack of the CCARD, George Murphy of the UNAVA, Sidney Jones of the Chicago

branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Chicago NAACP), and Charles Stewart of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) declared their support for the CHA, people from West Lawn castigated them aloud.<sup>43</sup> Although the confrontation between the CHA and the West Lawn residents intensified, the CHA officials did not change the policy. The CHA's determination was based on pro-integration Mayor Kelly's protection for its activity. He minimized the City Council's pressure on the CHA and appointed liberal persons as housing board members.<sup>44</sup> This strong stance of the CHA on the race issue obviously differed from the war era when it had retreated from racial integration. With the mayor's support, it took a more adversarial stand against the anti-CHA aldermen and people around the Airport Homes.

As the CHA continued to promote integration, white neighbors also resisted black veterans and anti-black sentiment was extended to an adjacent community. When two black veterans, John Fort and Letholian Waddles, moved into the Airport Homes, the West Lawn community demonstrated against them. The demonstrators also rushed into the CHA office at the Airport Homes. Stones and large clods of dirt were thrown at their truck and at police officers. In order to protect the lives of the black veterans and tenants, a group of white ministers volunteered to carry the furniture from the truck to the apartments. The crowd continued to cast vicious epithets at the ministers and also continued trying to break through the police lines. Encountering these violent circumstances around their housing, some white veterans in the Airport Homes supported the black veterans, but most white veterans did not want black veterans moving in. This time, not only the residents of West Lawn but also people in the West Elsdon community, next to West Lawn, participated in the protest. The West Elsdon Civic Association (WECA), in particular, showed strong hostility toward the CHA and loudly objected to the construction of public housing in the white community.<sup>45</sup> The WECA feared that once black veterans started to live in West Lawn, they would invite an influx of other black newcomers.

White neighbors' escalating violence finally forced black veteran families to leave the Airport Homes. Violence against black veterans had not stopped and fierce protests against the two families continued almost daily. The black veterans and their families were harassed by the neighborhood whenever they went shopping or to church. Although, thanks to the CCHR's

efforts, police protection for the two families had improved, they became sick of living such a life. In one incident, someone fired four gunshots at the apartment where the Forts were living in February 1947. Fort's wife and children who were there at the time of the shooting were all safe, but the two black veterans' families decided to leave the Airport Homes after the incident.<sup>46</sup> White neighbors realized that using violence could work well to prevent the penetration of blacks into their community.

Neither the Chicago NAACP nor the Chicago Urban League (CUL), another civil rights organization, was able to help black veterans effectively. Although the CCARD, the ACLU, the UNAVA, and other civic groups tried to suppress the disturbances, the Chicago NAACP and the CUL failed to assert their influence to ease the violence. The biggest challenge to their involvement was geographical distance.<sup>47</sup> Because few African Americans lived in West Lawn, which was far away from other black communities, the two organizations did not understand the area well. In addition to the geographical factor, neither organization knew how to handle the disturbances appropriately. Chicago newspapers had criticized the violence against black veterans, but the CHA and the civic groups asked the media not to report sensationalistically, because they feared this incident would become an uncontrollable riot like the race riot of 1919. After the disturbances, no black veterans wished to live in the Airport Homes and it practically became public housing exclusively for white veterans.<sup>48</sup>

The violence in the Airport Homes disturbances was instigated by community organizations and neighbors, who were mostly white ethnics. Walter White of the NAACP claimed in the newspapers that racist organizations might have been controlling the riots behind the scenes.<sup>49</sup> According to the CCHR report, however, there was no such external organization or community organization and people around the Airport Homes resisted on their own. There were many anti-black rumors circulating during the disturbances and this made the crowd more intense and aggressive. Some of the statements made by the crowd showed that rumors had been circulated to the effect that the whole attempt to bring African Americans into the Airport Homes was orchestrated by Jewish realtors who could buy up the property in the vicinity at knock-down prices and resell at inflated levels to African-American families. Another rumor suggested that Mayor Kelly was forcing African Americans into the project for political capital.<sup>50</sup> Coupled

with violence from people who were hostile to black veterans, these rumors prompted the anti-black crowd gathering to turn into a riot. The mob action was so explosive that Kelly officially urged people not to visit the Airport Homes out of curiosity.<sup>51</sup>

The Airport Homes disturbances had two significant consequences. First, through the turmoil, the antagonism between Chicago authorities and the local community became decisive. From the beginning, the CHA officials antagonized City Council members who represented the district, including areas selected as construction sites for public housing. Because Kelly had clearly expressed his support for the CHA, the West Lawn residents considered him a “threat” who intervened in their community. As a result, many communities formed neighborhood organizations in order to maintain the racial homogeneity of the community. They tried to gain the political power to control their own community.<sup>52</sup> Second, the disturbance helped white ethnics recognize the effectiveness of violence in maintaining the racial homogeneity of the community. Most residents in West Lawn thought of their violence as “democratic acts” to defend their own community.<sup>53</sup> The Airport Homes case laid the model for communal violence in Chicago.

### **Fernwood Park Race Riots**

In 1947, after the Airport Homes disturbances, the CHA once again tried to promote racial integration in public housing for veterans. The Fernwood Park Homes was located at a Board of Education site, which was bound by 104th Place, 106th Street, Halstead, and Fernwood Park. The project had 87 two-bedroom units and was composed of a one-story metal and frame barrack-type building. Lest racial violence should resurge in Fernwood as it did in the Airport Homes, the CHA discussed with the local community in advance about the veterans’ moving in. Most of the residents were concerned about the possibility of black veterans moving into the project. In the discussion with Fernwood residents, Reginald DuBois, a City Council member who represented this ward, rejected black veterans, saying that trouble would surely occur if black veterans moved in.<sup>54</sup>

Because a large number of middle class whites owned a home in their community and feared a decrease in property values, Fernwood residents

strongly refused black veterans. Fernwood was located in a community on the edge of Roseland that was next to Washington Heights. In Roseland, a housing construction boom began at the end of World War II and continued into the 1960s. There was already a community of black wartime workers, and the black population accounted for 4.2 percent of the entire community in 1940 (see figure 1).<sup>55</sup> Washington Heights was historically occupied by Germans, Swedes, and Irish immigrants. Many vacant land plots remained in Washington Heights in the 1940s, but African-American movers gradually increased by the 1960s. Yet the majority of residents near to the Fernwood Park Homes were white middle class. The proportion of non-whites in 1940 was less than 0.5 percent. In addition, the home ownership rate in the Roseland area of the Fernwood Park Homes in 1950 was remarkably high, accounting for 77 percent, while the average home ownership rate of Roseland was 56.9 percent. Similarly, the home ownership rate in the Washington Heights area near the Fernwood Park Homes in 1950 (71 percent) was a little higher than the average home ownership rate of the Washington Heights (70 percent). Both in Roseland and Washington Heights, the area around the Fernwood Park Homes maintained a higher home ownership rate than the entire community (see figure 1).<sup>56</sup> In short, Fernwood was a community of white middle class people who owned their own houses, and this served as the basis of the strong resentment of black veterans moving into the project.

The CHA officials confronted the Fernwood-Bellevue Civic Association (FBCA), a community organization with over 700 family members in Fernwood who fiercely opposed the CHA. In mid-May, Elizabeth Wood lectured at a mass convention of the FBCA. In the meeting where about 350 people gathered, she explained the veterans' temporary housing program in Chicago, the Fernwood Park Homes in particular, and the CHA's policy and procedures. Several participants booed Wood, and the opposition of the FBCA towards the project did not change.<sup>57</sup> Alderman Dubois also participated in the rally and he denounced Wood for putting black veterans into the project. Since the *Calumet Index*, a local community newspaper, reported the events of the day, it was widely known to the neighborhoods and other communities in the southern part of Chicago.<sup>58</sup>

Local community newspapers that maintained an anti-black position played a key role in enhancing the solidarity of the community. While

**Figure 1 Population and Housing Characteristics in Fernwood, 1940-1980**

Community Area / Year	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980
<b>Roseland (%)</b>					
Population of African Americans in the Entire Community	4.2	18.4	22.6	55.1	97.5
Population of African Americans in the Area of Fernwood Park Homes	—	—	0.1	4.1	98.2
Home Ownership Rate in the Entire Community	46.4	56.9	61.3	62.1	62.2
Home Ownership Rate in the Area of Fernwood Park Homes	—	77	82.3	78.3	81
<b>Washington Heights (%)</b>					
Population of African Americans in the Entire Community	0.3	0.2	12.5	74.8	98.2
Population of African Americans in the Area near the Fernwood Park Homes	—	6	—	98.5	99.4
Home Ownership Rate in the Entire Community	54.1	70	74.5	74.8	75.6
Home Ownership Rate in the Area near the Fernwood Park Homes	—	71	—	90.4	92.5

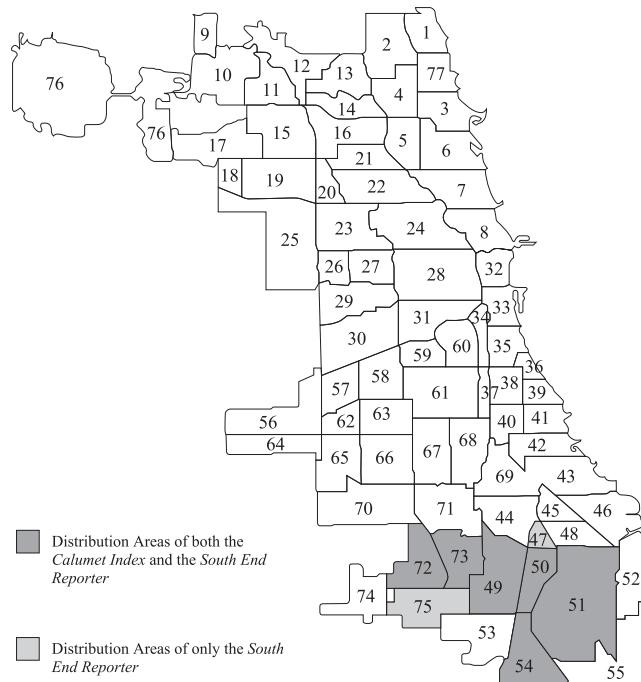
Source: "Population and Housing Characteristics, 1930-1980," and "Selected Characteristics of Census Tracts: 1940-1980," in The Chicago Fact Book Consortium, ed., *Local Community Fact Book Chicago Metropolitan Area: Based on the 1970 and 1980 Censuses* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1984), 130-31, 186; Evelyn M. Kitagawa and Karl E. Taeuber, *Local Community Fact Book Chicago Metropolitan Area, 1960* (Chicago: Chicago Community Inventory, University of Chicago, 1963), 113; Philip M. Hauser and Evelyn M. Kitagawa, eds., *Local Community Fact Book for Chicago, 1950* (Chicago: Chicago Community Inventory, University of Chicago, 1953), 203, 299.

Chicago's major newspapers did not largely feature race issues, smaller community newspapers strenuously reported events in neighborhoods with the support of community organizations, and actively covered race issues that would interest local communities. In order to maintain the living space of whites after World War II, Charles Abrams, an urban housing planner,

pointed out the significance of community organizations and the influence of local newspapers in uniting community residents.<sup>59</sup> The CCHR paid much attention to articles in three newspapers, namely the *Calumet Index*, the *South End Reporter*, and the *Southtown Economist*, all of which had been distributed around the southern part of Chicago, investigating what information about the CHA had been shared in local communities through them. The *Calumet Index* and the *South End Reporter* were distributed in Fernwood and their newspapers' accusations against the CHA amplified the anti-CHA and anti-black sentiment of community residents (see map 2).<sup>60</sup>

In mass meetings, residents exchanged information via local community newspapers, community organizations encouraged them to embrace the anti-black feeling, and white people solidified their group consciousness. The

**Map 2 Distribution Areas of the *Calumet Index* and the *South End Reporter***



Source : CCHR, "Record of Fernwood Park Homes," 9.

FBCA regularly held mass rallies from June to August 1947, and convinced the participants that they endorsed the use of violence and told them what happened in the Airport Homes the previous year.<sup>61</sup> According to the “Letters to the Editor” section in the *Calumet Index*, the residents of Fernwood advocated that it was not a race issue but an issue of property values, claiming that “the fact remains that property values do decrease where mixed races are allowed to live and through no fault of their own are unable to live up to the financial standard set by the community.”<sup>62</sup> This sort of claim, however, usually had racial connotations. Another opinion in the *Calumet Index*, for example, was “let anyone take a look at Chicago and see for himself what a terrible blight has come over every neighborhood that the Negro has settled in.”<sup>63</sup> In sum, community newspapers supported the FBCA’s remarks and had repeated anti-black accusations. They claimed that “it would be a slum if blacks moved in” and that “since the black community was so poor, whites and blacks should live separately.”<sup>64</sup> The community newspapers reported some positive views of the CHA sometimes. Not surprisingly, however, those articles received bitter criticism from readers.

While in the midst of intense tension between the CHA and Fernwood Park Homes’ neighbors, seven black veterans moved into the project on August 13 and riots occurred. Although about 1,000 police officers were mobilized to guard the Fernwood Park Homes residents, they were not able to effectively prevent the upheaval. Police officers patrolled in cars and regulated traffic, but they did not grasp the situation well as the riots took place from midnight to early morning. Although the number of mob participants varied from 50 to 2,000 people, stoning and arson took place everywhere for one week. There were fifty-two adults, nine adolescents, and thirty-three children arrested in the August 15 riots, and most of them were Fernwood residents.<sup>65</sup> These figures seemed to suggest that young people did not actively participate in the riot, but youngsters avoided standing out simply in police officers’ presence, and participated in the riot from midnight till dawn. They knew that police officers would not crack down on them.<sup>66</sup> In order to get media and people’s attention, rioters continued to resist the moving in of black veterans and the FBCA blamed the CHA for the violent situation. The Fernwood Park Homes riot was a more difficult situation to control than the Airport Homes riot. The mobs learned how to use violence effectively from the Airport Homes riots and acted cunningly at this time.

Unlike the Airport Homes disturbance, the Fernwood Park Homes riot caused a complex reaction in the black community. There were already some small African-American communities in Roseland. Before the Fernwood Park Homes was built, the CHA had constructed the West Chesterfield Homes as public housing for African-American war workers. When the CHA's plan for the West Chesterfield Homes came up, middle class African-American homeowners in West Chesterfield strongly opposed the CHA's plan. Black homeowners feared the CHA project would become slum housing eventually and cause a decline in their property values. In these circumstances, some black residents may not have welcomed black veterans in Fernwood Park Homes. Once the disturbances arose, however, they got angry with the white rioters.<sup>67</sup> In both riots, black drivers who did not live in the public housing were also attacked. Since few blacks lived around the Airport Homes, there was no retaliation by the black community. In the Fernwood Park Homes, by contrast, after black pedestrians and taxi drivers had been attacked, anger against the white mobs increased in the black community, provoking the neighboring Morgan Park black community to retaliate violently against whites. Black residents also stoned white passersby when they went through the black community. However, thanks to the CCHR and a black alderman, Archibald Carey, Jr. that prevented further violence, the black reprisals were calmed down before they turned into an uncontrollable riot.<sup>68</sup> Unlike black residents in public housing, the black community around the Fernwood Park Homes did not endure white mob violence, anyway. These black retaliatory action aggravated the white Fernwood neighbors, and the fierce situation got worse in the Fernwood Park Homes.

Fernwood residents thoroughly rejected the presence of black residents based on fears that arose from residential geography. The Fernwood Park Homes was an area of white middle class families who owned their houses, but it was surrounded by several black communities. There was West Chesterfield, the public housing project for black wartime workers, about 1.8 miles to the north, and Morgan Park, a black, middle class community, about 0.6 miles to the southwest. In addition, there was the Altgeld Gardens, a huge public housing site for black wartime workers, to the south.<sup>69</sup> Fernwood neighbors were afraid that if black veterans moved into the project it would invite additional black newcomers. The FBCA president, W. D. Thomas, sent a letter to Mayor Martin H. Kennelly, who took office in 1947, stating that

the Fernwood community was virtually surrounded by black communities and there was a veritable “tinderbox” involving a possible repetition of the Airport Homes riot.<sup>70</sup>

After 700 police officers began guarding black veterans two weeks after the uproar in the Fernwood Park Homes, it took about six months to restore order and stability so that black residents could live a quiet life.<sup>71</sup> In contrast to the Airport Homes, black veterans could live in the Fernwood Homes after the riot. Over the long term, violence represented the Fernwood residents’ fear that their community would become a racially mixed community. Many white residents worried about asset value reduction and miscegenation that might be caused by the further growth of the black population. After African Americans had crossed the color line and the restrictive covenants, which had been defended by the white community until 1948, white community residents relied on violence more than before. As of 1947, restrictive covenants had been contracted with most of southern Chicago, Fernwood included.<sup>72</sup> But restrictive covenants were not applicable to public housing. Therefore, white residents directed their anger toward the CHA. However, the conflict between the CHA and City Council members, who retained a lot of white voters by exploiting anti-black sentiments in their ward, had become decisive. After the Fernwood Park Homes riot, it was mandated that the CHA must get approval from the City Council to assign construction sites for public housing. The City Council invariably rejected requests from CHA officials to construct public housing in the white-majority areas.<sup>73</sup> Thus, the CHA’s initiative in the construction of public housing vanished.

## Conclusion

During the 1940s, the CHA tried to promote racial integration in two public housing projects for veterans, but their efforts caused massive racial disturbances. For white residents who refused the influx of blacks, exercising violence had been recognized as an effective means. The rioters learned the model of violence from the Airport Homes case, and their experiences were shared by the Fernwood residents through community organizations such as the FBBCA and community newspapers. The city authorities who intervened in the community were regarded as “outsiders.” After the Federal

Supreme Court banned restrictive covenants through *Shelley v. Kramer* in 1948, white violence in housing struggles rapidly increased nationwide.<sup>74</sup> This was because white homeowners no longer relied on the covenants which could exclude their undesirable neighbors, usually African Americans and Hispanics, from their neighborhood. Since then, white homeowners depended on racially homogeneous homeowner associations and using more violence to protect their community.<sup>75</sup> White ethnics' racial antagonism intertwined with their notion of property rights and communal violence was rooted in this complex idea. When the civil rights organizations struggled with housing discrimination in the 1960s, they encountered this difficult task and could not overcome it.

The conflict between black veterans and whites over housing was also seen in other cities, but it did not break out as violently as in Chicago.<sup>76</sup> From the beginning of the twentieth century, there were many racial and ethnic conflicts over housing among whites who settled in Chicago, white ethnics, most of whom were new immigrants, and African Americans and other minorities. The housing market in Chicago was tight even before World War II and African Americans' residential areas were essentially limited. The population in Chicago had rapidly increased by returned veterans and southern black migrants. Historical race relations, the increasing population, and lack of housing made the conflict more violent in Chicago. In such circumstances, the CHA tried to provide decent housing for African Americans. Almost two decades before civil rights organizations and activist such as Martin Luther King, Jr., for example, undertook to improve African Americans' poor housing conditions in Chicago, the CHA tried to reform them and provide public housing. Although its efforts did not bear fruit, the CHA helped to create a new type of African-American residential distribution.

In Chicago, the typical pattern of African Americans' residential expansion steadily occurred in white areas block by block. The violent collisions between whites and blacks had usually broken out in residential borders, because middle class African Americans challenged the residential color line to move into better housing in the white community.<sup>77</sup> However, public housing produced a different residential pattern for African Americans in postwar Chicago. Although the CHA did not intend to expand African Americans' residential space, the Airport Homes and the Fernwood Park

Homes were built in white-majority areas across the residential color line. With these public housing projects, African Americans could gradually expand their residential space. As Andrew Wiese has pointed out, a “disproportionate number of war housing units were built near existing black neighborhoods outside the urban core, reinforcing prewar black residence on the suburban fringe and laying a foundation for new migration after the war.”<sup>78</sup> This applied not only to public housing for wartime workers, but also to public housing for veterans after the war.<sup>79</sup> As in the case of Fernwood, public housing that exceeded the geographical color line made it possible for the black community to expand.

After the disturbances, two public housing projects in Chicago showed a different pattern of African-American residential expansion. In West Lawn where the Airport Homes was located, the white majority was over 98.4 percent in 1980. In the mayoral election of 1983, only one percent of the West Lawn constituency voted for the Democratic Party’s African-American candidate Harold Washington, and that was the lowest rate among all districts. West Lawn residents have maintained a conservative white community since then.<sup>80</sup> In contrast, the Washington Heights and the Roseland areas of the Fernwood Park Homes experienced black population growth after 1970. The black population to the total population rate in Washington Heights area was 74.8 percent and in Roseland it was 55.1 percent, and the black population rate of both communities grew to over 90 percent in the 1980s (see figure 1). White workers left Roseland after some factory jobs disappeared and some of them moved to the suburbs because of the influx of African Americans. Although white residents left of their own volition, public housing enabled African Americans to expand their living space in Fernwood. Furthermore, Fernwood was not devastated by blacks who became the majority there. It remained a stable middle-class community until the 1980s.<sup>81</sup>

As recent studies on African-American urban history point out, early American public housing policy provided appropriate numbers of housing for African Americans.<sup>82</sup> In Chicago, the CHA continued its effort to promote racial integration in public housing by the mid-1950s and Elizabeth Wood worked hard to uphold the CHA’s mission. In 1953, however, when she tried to integrate the Trumbull Park Homes, a public housing project in the South Deering where many working-class whites lived, the CHA encountered strong antagonism from community organizations opposed to African Americans

moving in. The Trumbull Park Homes disturbances continued almost a year. Under pressure from community organizations and City Council members, Elizabeth Wood was eventually removed as the CHA's executive director in 1954.<sup>83</sup> Along with the manipulation of racial makeup in public housing, the CHA caused many conflicts with local residents and the City Council. Nevertheless, African-American residential space extended by connecting with nearby black communities and public housing worked as a conjunction among dispersed African-American communities. Thus, public housing for veterans had a great impact on African Americans' residential opportunities after the war.

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